



Carolyne Onkoba

CHAPTER 11: YOURSELF

THE HIDDEN POWER BY THOMAS TROWARD

I want to talk to you about the livingness there is in being yourself. It has at least the merit of simplicity, for it must surely be easier to be oneself than to be something or somebody else. Yet that is what so many are constantly trying to do; the self that is their own is not good enough for them, and so they are always trying to go one better than what God has made them, with endless strain and struggle as the consequence. Of course, they are right to put before them an ideal infinitely grander than anything they have yet attained--the only possible way of progress is by following an ideal that is always a stage ahead of us--but the mistake is in not seeing that its attainment is a matter of growth, and that growth must be the expansion of something that already exists in us, and therefore implies our being what we are and where we are as its starting point. This growth is a continuous process, and we cannot do next month's growth without first doing this month's; but we are always wanting to jump into some ideal of the future, not seeing that we can reach it only by steadily going on from where we are now.

These considerations should make us more confident and more comfortable. We are employing a force which is much greater than we believe ourselves to be, yet it is not separate from us and needing to be persuaded or compelled, or inveigled into doing what we want; it is the substratum of our own being which is continually passing up into manifestation on the visible plane and becoming that personal self to which we often limit our attention without considering whence it proceeds. But in truth the outer self is the surface growth of that individuality which lies concealed far down in the deeps below, and which is none other than the Spirit-of-Life which underlies all forms of manifestation.

Endeavour to realise what this Spirit must be in itself--that is to say, apart from any of the conditions that arise from the various relations which necessarily establish themselves between its various forms of individualisation. In its homogeneous self what else can it be but pure life--Essence-of-Life, if you like so to call it? Then realise that as Essence-of-Life it exists in the innermost of every one of its forms of



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manifestation in as perfect simplicity as any we can attribute to it in our most abstract conceptions. In this light, we see it to be the eternally self-generating power which, to express itself, flows into form.

This universal Essence-of-Life is a continual becoming (into form), and since we are a part of Nature we do not need to go further than ourselves to find the life-giving energy at work with all its powers. Hence all we have to do is to allow it to rise to the surface. We do not have to make it rise any more than the engineer who sinks the bore-pipe for an artesian well has to make the water rise in it; the water does that by its own energy, springing as a fountain a hundred feet into the air. Just so we shall find a fountain of Essence-of-Life ready to spring up in ourselves, inexhaustible and continually increasing in its flow, as One taught long ago to a woman at a wayside well.

This up-springing of Life-Essence is not another's--it is our own. It does not require deep studies, hard labours, weary journeyings to attain it; it is not the monopoly of this teacher or that writer, whose lectures we must attend or whose books we must read to get it. It is the innermost of ourselves, and a little common-sense thought as to how anything comes to be anything will soon convince us that the great inexhaustible life must be the very root and substance of us, permeating every fibre of our being.

Surely to be this vast infinitude of living power must be enough to satisfy all our desires, and yet this wonderful ideal is nothing else but what we already are in principio--it is all there in ourselves now, only awaiting our recognition for its manifestation. It is not the Essence-of-Life which has to grow, for that is eternally perfect in itself; but it is our recognition of it that has to grow, and this growth cannot be forced. It must come by a natural process, the first necessity of which is to abstain from all straining after being something which at the present time we cannot naturally be. The Law of our Evolution has put us in possession of certain powers and opportunities, and our further development depends on our doing just what these powers and opportunities make it possible for us to do, here and now.

If we do what we are able to do to-day, it will open the way for us to do something better to-morrow, and in this manner the growing



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process will proceed healthily and happily in a rapidly increasing ratio. This is so much easier than striving to compel things to be what they are not, and it is also so much more fruitful in good results. It is not sitting still doing nothing, and there is plenty of room for the exercise of all our mental faculties, but these faculties are themselves the outcome of the Essence-of-Life, and are not the creating power, but only that which gives direction to it. Now it is this moving power at the back of the various faculties that is the true innermost self; and if we realise the identity between the innermost and the outermost, we shall see that we therefore have at our present disposal all that is necessary for our unlimited development in the future.

Thus our livingness consists simply in being ourselves, only more so; and in recognising this we get rid of a great burden of unnecessary straining and striving, and the place of the old sturm and drang will be taken, not by inertia, but by a joyous activity which knows that it always has the requisite power to manifest itself in forms of good and beauty. What matters it whither this leads us? If we are following the line of the beautiful and good, then we shall produce the beautiful and good, and thus bring increasing joy into the world, whatever particular form it may assume.

We limit ourselves when we try to fix accurately beforehand the particular form of good that we shall produce. We should aim not so much at having or making some particular thing as at expressing all that we are. The expressing will grow out of realising the treasures that are ours already, and contemplating the beauty, the affirmative side, of all that we are now, apart from the negative conceptions and detractions which veil this positive good from us. When we do this we shall be astonished to see what possibilities reside in ourselves as we are and with our present surroundings, all unlovely as we may deem them: and commencing to work at once upon whatever we find of affirmative in these, and withdrawing our thought from what we have hitherto seen of negative in them, the right road will open up before us, leading us in wonderful ways to the development of powers that we never suspected, and the enjoyment of happiness that we never anticipated.

We have never been out of our right path, only we have been walking in it backwards instead of forwards, and now that we have



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begun to follow the path in the right direction, we find that it is none other than the way of peace, the path of joy, and the road to eternal life. These things we may attain by simply living naturally with ourselves. It is because we are trying to be or do something which is not natural to us that we experience weariness and labour, where we should find all our activities joyously concentrated on objects which lead to their own accomplishment by the force of the love that we have for them. But when we make the grand discovery of how to live naturally, we shall find it to be all, and more than all, that we had ever desired, and our daily life will become a perpetual joy to ourselves, and we shall radiate light and life wherever we go.