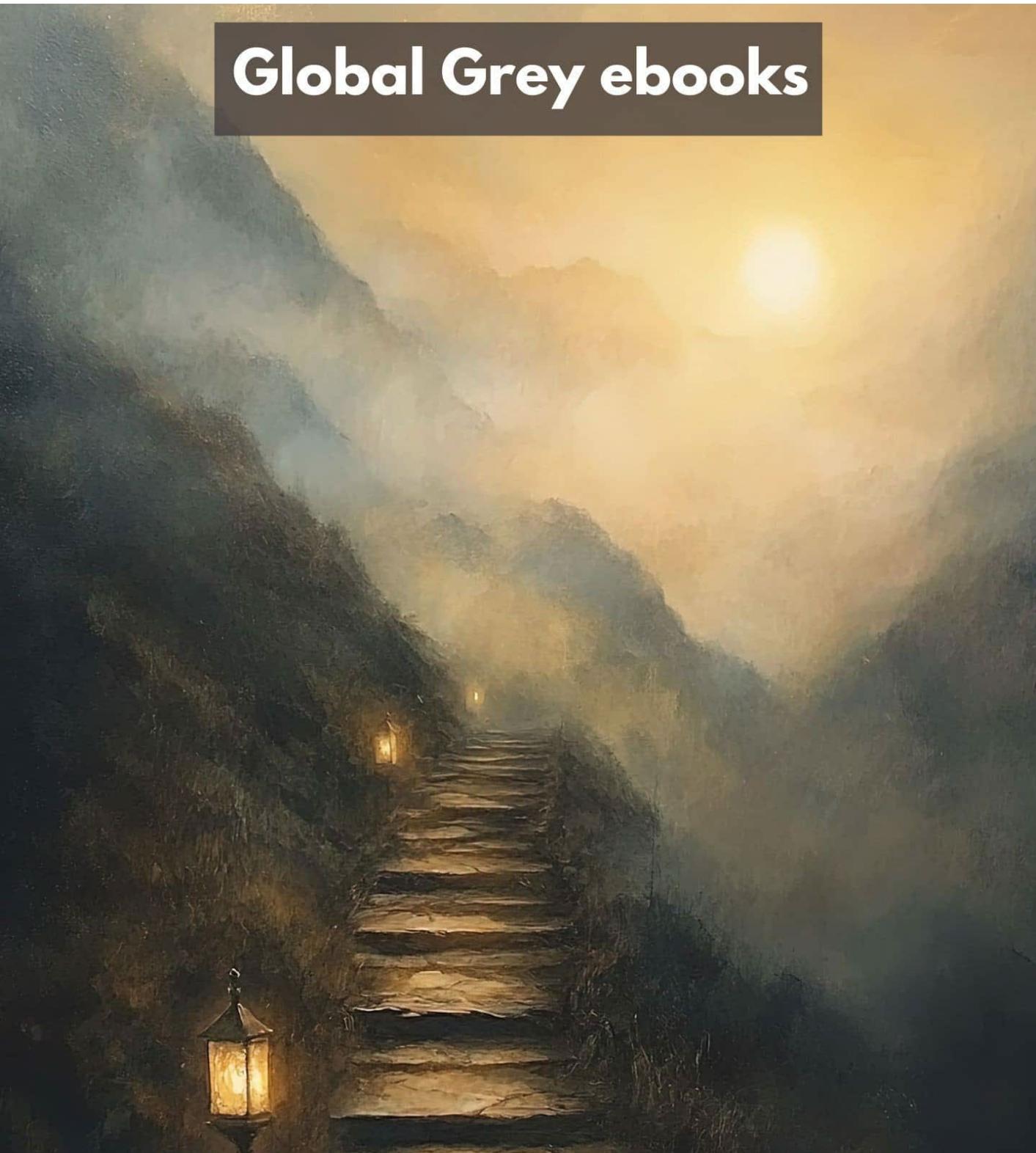


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KNOWLEDGE OF THE HIGHER WORLDS AND ITS ATTAINMENT

Rudolf Steiner

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1. How Is Knowledge Of The Higher Worlds Attained?

Conditions

THERE slumber in every human being faculties by means of which he can acquire for himself a knowledge of higher worlds. Mystics, Gnostics, Theosophists—all speak of a world of soul and spirit which for them is just as real as the world we see with our physical eyes and touch with our physical hands. At every moment the listener may say to himself: that, of which they speak, I too can learn, if I develop within myself certain powers which today still slumber within me. There remains only one question—how to set to work to develop such faculties. For this purpose, they only can give advice who already possess such powers. As long as the human race has existed there has always been a method of training, in the course of which individuals possessing these higher faculties gave instruction to others who were in search of them. Such a training is called occult (esoteric) training, and the instruction received therefrom is called occult (esoteric) teaching, or spiritual science. This designation naturally awakens misunderstanding. The one who hears it may very easily be misled into the belief that this training is the concern of a special, privileged class, withholding its knowledge arbitrarily from its fellow-creatures. He may even think that nothing of real importance lies behind such knowledge, for if it were a true knowledge—he is tempted to think—there would be no need of making a secret of it; it might be publicly imparted and its advantages made accessible to all. Those who have been initiated into the nature of this higher knowledge are not in the least surprised that the uninitiated should so think, for the secret of initiation can only be understood by those who have to a certain degree experienced this initiation into the higher knowledge of existence. The question may be raised: how, then, under these circumstances, are the uninitiated to develop any human interest in this so-called esoteric knowledge? How and why are they to seek for something of whose nature they can form no idea? Such a question is based upon an entirely erroneous conception of the real nature of esoteric knowledge. There is, in truth, no difference between esoteric knowledge and all the rest of man's knowledge and proficiency. This esoteric knowledge is no more of a secret for the average human being than writing is a secret for those who have never learned it. And just as all can learn to write who choose the correct method, so, too, can all who seek the right way become esoteric students and even teachers. In one respect only do the conditions here differ from those that apply to external knowledge and proficiency. The possibility of acquiring the art of writing may be withheld from someone through poverty, or through the conditions of civilization into which he is born; but for the attainment of knowledge and proficiency in the higher worlds, there is no obstacle for those who earnestly seek them.

Many believe that they must seek, at one place or another, the masters of higher knowledge in order to receive enlightenment. Now in the first place, whoever strives earnestly after higher knowledge will shun no exertion and fear no obstacle in his search for an initiate who can lead him to the higher knowledge of the world. On the other hand, everyone may be certain that initiation will find him under all circumstances if he gives proof of an earnest and worthy endeavor to attain this knowledge. It is a natural law among all initiates to withhold from no man the knowledge that is due him but there is an equally natural law which lays down that no word of esoteric knowledge shall be imparted to anyone not qualified to receive it. And the more strictly he observes these laws, the more perfect is an initiate. The bond of union embracing all initiates is spiritual and not external, but the two laws here mentioned form, as

it were, strong clasps by which the component parts of this bond are held together. You may live in intimate friendship with an initiate, and yet a gap severs you from his essential self, so long as you have not become an initiate yourself. You may enjoy in the fullest sense the heart, the love of an initiate, yet he will only confide his knowledge to you when you are ripe for it. You may flatter him; you may torture him; nothing can induce him to betray anything to you as long as you, at the present stage of your evolution, are not competent to receive it into your soul in the right way.

The methods by which a student is prepared for the reception of higher knowledge are minutely prescribed. The direction he is to take is traced with unfading, everlasting letters in the worlds of the spirit where the initiates guard the higher secrets. In ancient times, anterior to our history, the temples of the spirit were also outwardly visible; today, because our life has become so unspiritual, they are not to be found in the world visible to external sight; yet they are present spiritually everywhere, and all who seek may find them.

Only within his own soul can a man find the means to unseal the lips of an initiate. He must develop within himself certain faculties to a definite degree, and then the highest treasures of the spirit can become his own.

He must begin with a certain fundamental attitude of soul. In spiritual science this fundamental attitude is called the *path of veneration*, of devotion to truth and knowledge. Without this attitude no one can become a student. The disposition shown in their childhood by subsequent students of higher knowledge is well known to the experienced in these matters. There are children who look up with religious awe to those whom they venerate. For such people they have a respect which forbids them, even in the deepest recess of their heart, to harbor any thought of criticism or opposition. Such children grow up into young men and women who feel happy when they are able to look up to anything that fills them with veneration. From the ranks of such children are recruited many students of higher knowledge. Have you ever paused outside the door of some venerated person, and have you, on this your first visit, felt a religious awe as you pressed on the handle to enter the room which for you is a holy place? If so, a feeling has been manifested within you which may be the germ of your future adherence to the path of knowledge. It is a blessing for every human being in process of development to have such feelings upon which to build. Only it must not be thought that this disposition leads to submissiveness and slavery. What was once a childlike veneration for persons becomes, later, a veneration for truth and knowledge. Experience teaches that they can best hold their heads erect who have learnt to venerate where veneration is due; and veneration is always fitting when it flows from the depths of the heart.

If we do not develop within ourselves this deeply rooted feeling that there is something higher than ourselves, we shall never find the strength to evolve to something higher. The initiate has only acquired the strength to lift his head to the heights of knowledge by guiding his heart to the depths of veneration and devotion. The heights of the spirit can only be climbed by passing through the portals of humility. You can only acquire right knowledge when you have learnt to esteem it. Man has certainly the right to turn his eyes to the light, but he must first acquire this right. There are laws in the spiritual life, as in the physical life. Rub a glass rod with an appropriate material and it will become electric, that is, it will receive the power of attracting small bodies. This is in keeping with a law of nature. It is known to all who have learnt a little physics. Similarly, acquaintance with the first principles of spiritual science shows that every feeling of true devotion harbored in the soul develops a power which may, sooner or later, lead further on the path of knowledge.

The student who is gifted with this feeling, or who is fortunate enough to have had it inculcated in a suitable education, brings a great deal along with him when, later in life, he

5. Some Results Of Initiation

ONE of the fundamental principles of true spiritual science is that the one who devotes himself to its study should do so with full consciousness; he should attempt nothing and practice nothing without knowledge of the effect produced. A teacher of spiritual science who gives advice or instruction will, at the same time, always explain to those striving for higher knowledge the effects produced on body, soul and spirit, if his advice and instructions be followed.

Some effects produced upon the soul of the student will here be indicated. For only those who know such things as they are here communicated can undertake in full consciousness the exercises that lead to knowledge of the higher worlds. Without the latter no genuine esoteric training is possible, for it must be understood that all groping in the dark is discouraged, and that failure to pursue this training with open eyes may lead to mediumship, but not to exact clairvoyance in the sense of spiritual science.

The exercises described in the preceding chapters, if practiced in the right way, involve certain changes in the organism of the soul (astral body). The latter is only perceptible to the clairvoyant, and may be compared to a cloud, psycho-spiritually luminous to a certain degree, in the center of which the physical body is discernible. (A description will be found in the author's book, *Theosophy*.) In this astral body desires, lusts, passions, and ideas become visible in a spiritual way. Sensual appetites, for instance, create the impression of a dark red radiance with a definite shape; a pure and noble thought finds its expression in a reddish-violet radiance; the clear-cut concept of the logical thinker is experienced as a yellowish figure with sharply defined outline; the confused thought of the muddled head appears as a figure with vague outline. The thoughts of a person with one-sided, queer views appear sharply outlined but immobile, while the thoughts of people accessible to the points of view of others are seen to have mobile, changeable outlines. (In all these and the following descriptions it must be noted that by seeing a color, spiritual seeing is meant. When the clairvoyant speaks of "seeing red," he means: "I have an experience, in a psycho-spiritual way, which is equivalent to the physical experience when an impression of red is received." This mode of expression is here used because it is perfectly natural to the clairvoyant. If this point is over-looked, a mere color-vision may easily be mistaken for a genuine clairvoyant experience.)

The further the student advances in his inner development, the more regular will be the differentiation within his astral body. The latter is confused and undifferentiated in the case of a person of undeveloped inner life; yet the clairvoyant can perceive even the unorganized astral body as a figure standing out distinctly from its environment. It extends from the center of the head to the middle of the physical body, and appears like an independent body possessing certain organs. The organs now to be considered are perceptible to the clairvoyant near the following parts of the physical body: the first between the eyes; the second near the larynx; the third in the region of the heart; the fourth in the so-called pit of the stomach; the fifth and sixth are situated in the abdomen. These organs are technically known as wheels, *chakrams*, or lotus flowers. They are so called on account of their likeness to wheels or flowers, but of course it should be clearly understood that such an expression is not to be applied more literally than is the term "wings" when referring to the two halves of the lungs. Just as there is no question of wings in the case of the lungs, so, too, in the case of the lotus flowers the expression must be taken figuratively. In undeveloped persons these lotus flowers are dark in color, motionless and inert. In the clairvoyant, however, they are luminous,