

B.O.T.A. European Retreat
El Escorial, 29 April to 2 May 2022

The Way to the Heart

The theme of this meeting is “The Way to the Heart”. During these days, the working groups have intensively dealt with the different aspects, especially the terms "way" and "heart". Let us first deal with the concept of way.

What are the ways? According to old tradition, we can identify three ways as the most important ones.

The Way or Path of Knowledge

There is the path of knowledge. This path is not directed towards theoretical erudition and accumulation of individual knowledge. The life of an aspirant is directed towards "the discovery of Reality and the conformation of man's life to that Reality". It is about "To know what really is and to make one's life a daily expression of that knowledge" (Paul Foster Case, *The True and Invisible Rosicrucian Order*, p. 141). It is "a quest for the Inner Light" of the indwelling Higher Self (ibidem p. 152). Underlying this view is the deep conviction that man is capable of awakening to a higher consciousness and becoming enlightened with "the arcana of the heavenly wisdom" that are not “beyond the limits of human knowledge” (ibidem p. 148). It is the knowledge of the Higher Self.

It is a path of wisdom that leads us away from the not-knowing that binds us to illusions. Non-knowledge makes us cling to things that we demand with insistence, as Key 15 shows. But when they are attained, they seem hollow and void to us.

It is only slowly that we can mature into this longed-for wisdom. At first, we believe that we cannot live without the fetters that surround us. Little by little we realise that we only have to throw off the chains. For it is we who are holding on to them.

On this path we are led by something that can be called the clarification of our mind or our thinking. This involves not letting ourselves be terrorised by everything that comes at us, but becoming masters in our own house of thought. A good guide are the scriptures of wisdom. They help us because others have paved the way. For example, in the B.O.T.A. curriculum we learn a lot about the Tarot and the Tree of Life. Their intensive study teaches us inner connections of which we knew nothing. With Dr. Faustus we can say: that I fathom what holds the world together at its innermost core.

In the Indian epic Mahabharata it says: "He who does not know, but has only heard many things, cannot understand the meaning of the scriptures, just as a spoon knows nothing of the taste of soup." Thought can be a guide, a Mercurius or Hermes, leading us to a realisation or an insight. This insight may pass through us like a lightning bolt, making outdated ideas disappear as if in a landslide. It brings us a new understanding.

It is the conviction of our teachers that knowledge and understanding are always present within us. They do not need to be acquired, we only need to bring them into consciousness. All knowledge is recollection, as already Plato said. It lies dormant in our soul. We have to learn how to access these treasures.

The Path of Works

The path of works strives to surrender all human activity to the Divine will. It begins with the renunciation of all merely egoistic purposes of our works, with the renunciation of all actions that are done only out of self-interest or for the sake of a worldly result.

There are three basic approaches to this: the first is serenity. Equanimity, inner peace and calmness of mind should replace in us restlessness, agitation, nervousness and stress. The emotional aspect gives us the magical ability to calm the storm of emotions. But we have to be actively involved. We have to learn which situations particularly bring us into a rage. Drawing conclusions from this self-knowledge works wonders. It is valuable to take a step back during such storms and look at the circumstances with an open mind. It is always helpful to put ourselves in the position of others around us and learn why they act as they do. With so many energies pouring in on us, sometimes it helps to escape from a difficult situation or an irritable atmosphere, to take a walk and learn from nature. What is often hardest is to let go. We catch ourselves at times in endless loops, perpetuating the wrongs that have happened to us. Let's just let things go for once.

We learn a lot from Key 14. Key 14 is also called the Intelligence of Probation, or tests and trials, temptation and experiment. It means verification. We try something to see if it can stand the test of time. Through verification we establish the truth of what we are taught. This insight gives us stability, firmness and foundation.

The Angel works on our lower nature, which is symbolised by the lion. The lion is a fiery creature, and it represents the impulses and urges of the lower nature. The fire of the lion is tempered when the Angel pours water on it. This is meant as purification. The lion also stands for the law of suggestion. Our driving force must become selfless and unselfish. We must get clarity about our will impulses. The Angel teaches us to avoid rash, impulsive, passionate actions, such as revenge, hatred and anger, and to maintain our self-control.

The vase the Angel holds in his right hand is orange, alluding to the sphere Hod, the eighth sphere on the Tree of Life, which is said to represent the intellect of the human being. We learn to build the barrier of reason against the passions. When our minds are purified and guided by spiritual impulses, we calm the troubled sea. Passion must be transformed into compassion. Anger must be transformed into zeal and determination. The waters of thought formed in the vase of the Angel will transform the lower nature into a servant of the Great Work. To pass the tests and trials we must have the power of intense and sustained striving. We have acquired it through the balance between thinking and feeling, so that we can be enthusiastic, but at the same time rational and reasonable.

In his left hand the Angel holds a torch with five flames descending on the eagle. In our tradition the eagle represents a higher level of the scorpion, which is assigned to Key 13. The fire descending on the eagle signifies consecration or dedication of the eagle's power to the unfolding of the Divine in human nature. The fire of the torch confronts us with the unredeemed parts of our subconscious nature. They need to be brought into balance so that they transform from passion into compassion, into love and commiseration. The fire is a purifying fire that removes the dross of outdated forms. The flames burn away inertia and all that keeps us stuck in the lower depths of everyday life when we long for higher realisation, life, light and love. The fire of higher realisation cleanses the dross so that the eagle can soar to regeneration, consciously uniting us with the Higher Self in the heart.

Another approach to the path of works is to renounce all desire for the fruit of our activity. In the Bhagavadgita (II.48), for example, Krishna, for Hindus the incarnate God, teaches: "*Give up attachment, o Arjuna, and, established in yoga, perform your works. Be equanimous to success and failure.*" The 3rd Canto goes on to say, "*For the contemplative there is the path of knowledge, for the active there is the path of selfless deed. No one becomes perfect by renouncing work.*"

No one can renounce doing, everyone is inevitably forced to do so by the gunas. Therefore, you must perform every action as an offering to God and be free from all attachment to the results."

The third approach to the path of works is to offer every action as an offering to the Lord of the universe and all nature. We can learn this from Key 21, called the world or universe. The ascent on the Tree of Life starts in Malchuth with the path of Key 21. It is the first step on our path of light. In contrast, walking along that path on the descent leads to the completion of the Great Work, to cosmic consciousness, to the full and perfect realisation of the Philosopher's Stone or Divine Will, and represents the final step. Our thoughts, words and actions are part of the administration of the cosmic law. With them we build the future. Paul Foster Case says (True and Invisible Rosicrucian Order, on the 32nd Path): Imagination develops a philosophy of life and helps us invent means by which we can better express our relation to the whole. It is a path of service in which we devotedly follow the divine will.

The Path of Love

The third path is the path of loving devotion to Divinity. It uses feelings as a way to come close to Divinity or to unite with him or her.

The starting point of our work is the idea that everything comes from the ONE. Our sensation or experience or realisation of being one with everyone and everything is followed as an emotional reverberation (HOD, the eighth sephirah) within us, which is the deep love for this centre of life and the order it establishes as well as for all living beings.

Sending love out opens doors. The more expressions of love are imprinted on the collective consciousness, the more intense the influence of love becomes. It calls forth love in human hearts, kindles the spark into a flame and the flame into a conflagration that consumes all the hatred, fears and old errors on the lower levels of humanity. Thus the flower of love will unfold for all. This love is essential for the realisation of the goals of the New Age of the Brotherhood of Man.

Love gives enthusiasm and, with it, endurance and constancy. It gives us the energy to persevere through all difficulties and trials.

The Heart as the Goal of the Path

What is the goal of our path? All paths lead to the heart. The heart is a symbolic term here. It does not mean the physical heart that supplies the organism with blood. What is meant is a centre within us that is compared to the sun. "Heart" is one of the names for the Higher Self, which is, as it were, a central presence in the human heart. The Higher Self is the invisible, untouchable life-giver that sustains the existence of all living beings and also gives rise to our personality. It does not know time and space. It is what creates our identity, which we maintain through all changes of body, thoughts and feelings, through waking and dreaming and sleeping. On the Tree of Life it is represented by the sixth Sephirah, called Tiphereth, Beauty. This sephirah is associated with the sun. It is in the centre of the Tree of Life.

The comparison of the Higher Self with the sun is made clear in Key 14 by many details. The Angel, it is the Archangel Michael, the Archangel of the South and of Fire, is a messenger of the sun. He comes out of the sun, as it were, to bring us to it. In all our seeking, we only answer the Angel's call and respond through our longing and our love. The arrangement of the colours of the rainbow shows that it is not the rainbow as we see it on the rain clouds. In this case, the sun is behind the rainbow, shining through clouds and mists to create the spectral colours. The seven colours represent, among other things, the seven inner sacred planets or organs of inner perception. Their unfolding must be done in an orderly and balanced way to lead to true seership. The rainbow also alludes to the vision in Ezekiel 1. Verse 28 says, "As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness around Him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord."

With seven virtues we must purify and consecrate the seven vices in us so that the light of the sun can shine through.

The sun disk on the Angel's forehead shows the awakened higher consciousness. It enables us to receive the influence of the higher Sephiroth through Tiphareth. We receive inspirations that act like a beacon while we are still travelling in darkness.

The Angel has a seven-pointed star on his chest. The heptagon and the seven-pointed star cannot be constructed with a compass and ruler. It requires the skill and understanding of the human being to bring it about. It stands for the ability to guide and direct our lives in thoughts, feelings and actions. This is the prerequisite for entering the path of Key 14. The imperfections of our lower nature are revealed to us during the fiery trials on this path. We must firmly focus on the Higher Self and its control and not be seduced by the glamour of the dark forces and their enticements.

The Angel stands with one foot in the water and the other on land. He is in balance between inner perception and the activities of the outer world. He is well grounded in a healthy and responsible physical existence. Likewise, he has access to the universal world with which we are inwardly connected. So, water and land are witnesses to his mission.

The path in Key 14 leads from the pond to the two mountain peaks surmounted by the crown. Humanity has both a Divine origin and a Divine destination. The Divine capacity of love, love for God, love for our fellow human beings, guides us on the path on which we strive for knowledge and perfection. We are all rays of the one sun.

Closing remark

The path to the heart is always also a path of love. Love transforms everything and gives splendour and fragrance to the seemingly insignificant. In a Persian song it is said:

"The Beloved gave me some dust from his court.
Why do you give off this fragrance, o dust?"

I am only dust on which people tread.
But I was allowed to partake of the fragrance in the courtyard of a saint.
It is not I - for I am only ordinary dust."

In love, we are ready to let go of the shortcomings of the personality, to sacrifice them, as it were, to the Higher Self according to the saying: When the lesser merges with the greater, the Ego will go. The Higher Self sometimes seems distant to us, and yet we are deeply connected to it, as if by a thread. In another song it is said:

"So delicate and fine is the divine thread.
It is not easily seen, it is not easily experienced.
It is not made for everyone.
It is only for those who can sacrifice."

So may we be able to make the sacrifice that in truth is no sacrifice: to let go of what makes us small and darkens us, and make ourselves translucent to the light that calls us. The Angel waits patiently for our willingness to let him lead us to the Sun.