

Spiritual Service and the Inner Meaning of “Temple”

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This paper is a revision of “What it Means to be a World Server” originally presented at the World Brotherhood Union Panel on November 1, 2007 in Istanbul, Turkey

It is a great meet with you as fellow “Spiritual Searchers” and to share with you some of the teachers and teachings who have inspired my search and shaped my thinking. This weekend I hope to share with you about the inner meaning of “Temple” and what it means to be a world-server. To serve the divine plan we must become temples where the divine lives. By temple, I mean any place where the sacred dwells. I offer you my sincere thanks for inviting me to participate in this important workshop series.

I would like to begin by outlining my understanding of spiritual service. I believe that spiritual service occurs naturally as a result of successful spiritual searching. To be connected to the divine within means to be connected to the whole of life, and a consciousness of this connection leads naturally to a desire to serve.

I believe we must accept the following seven assumptions in order to be conscious spiritual servers:

- There is a divine being. Contained within this divine being is a divine plan that guides the evolution of all life within it.
- Each of us has an inner divine nature or soul.

- Through alignment with this soul we can contact and be in alignment with the divine plan.
- The true purpose of life is to be a channel for divinity on earth – to be a “temple of wisdom.” When this happens we can serve the divine plan.
- The universe in which we live is only one of many realities that exist within the divine. The divine plan is transmitted through these levels and through the beings that exist in each of these levels until it reaches us here.
- The solution to any problem does not lie at the level of the problem, but at the next higher level. Thus, to solve the problems of the world or to solve our personal problems requires that we be in contact with the level above us.
- Finally, to be a divine server we must devote ourselves to spiritual development, purification, and transformation.

What does it mean to be a “temple?” I use the word “temple” in its most general sense to indicate a sacred place such as a mosque, synagogue or church. In the ancient world there were many temples. The wise men and women who constructed these temples believed that they were inhabited by divine energies or presences which were aspects of the one reality. These divine presences would inhabit these temples only if a number of conditions were met: if the temples were constructed properly and if the rites and rituals were performed in the correct way and with the correct attitude – with an attitude of reverence, sincerity and love. If these conditions were met, then the divine presences would be drawn into them and dwell there. The great Neo-Platonic

philosopher, Plotinus, said that when the temple is prepared properly, the divinity has no choice but to enter it.

A living temple serves as a bridge between two worlds. It is a place where sacredness may dwell. A modern way to think of this would be to consider two tuning forks. If the second is not tuned correctly it will not vibrate with the first. However, if the second is tuned to the same note as the first, it will vibrate in sympathy with it – first occasionally, then more frequently, and finally, continually. Similarly, if we create the right conditions within ourselves, we can “vibrate” sympathetically with the presence of the divine which is always vibrating within and around us, and in this way receive its message. This metaphor suggests that our task is to transform ourselves into temples of wisdom by creating the right conditions, so that the divine may flow into the world and through us so that we may serve its plan by vibrating the divine song. Spiritual seeking requires that we “temper” or clean the tuning fork to remove the residues that keep it from vibrating purely.

To be a temple means that we draw down sacred energy from above. To do this it is helpful to understand how the divine exists on many levels. In all of the ancient traditions reality was divided into levels or planes of which our manifested universe was considered to be the lowest layer. It was believed that spiritual beings inhabited each of these levels, one within the other, from finer to denser, with the lower levels expressing the energy, ideas and realities contained in the higher levels, but in a more concrete form. These higher invisible worlds do not exist materially but we can contact them and experience them while within the material plane. When we make ourselves sensitive to

and in relationship with the beings at the next higher level we can be led into deeper and deeper layers of reality. One might say that we can encounter truth. All of these levels in their totality constitute the Divine Unity and the beings within each of these levels are spiritual beings. In this way of thinking, serving the divine requires that we attune ourselves to these levels and that we act in harmony with them.

How can we do this? In our current state we are often cut off from these realities and the door is closed to the soul within that can lead us to them. Self-transformation is necessary so that our tuning fork can vibrate in harmony with the divine tuning fork that is transmitting the divine plan that will be manifest on earth. The process of self-transformation has many important elements. I would like to speak of four of these: the practice of silence, unification of the being, contact with sacred teachers and books, neutrality, and imagining ourselves as divine.

- *The practice of silence.* It is only in the silence within that we can contact what we call “soul.” Yet we are often so busy with our practical activities and even our spiritual activities that we forget the practice of silence. Mevlana (Rumi) said “*your old life was a frantic running from silence.*” Therefore, some form of regular practice of silence is necessary. Meister Eckhart, the great Christian mystic, reminds us of the Gospel of Luke when the young Jesus stayed behind in the temple so that Joseph and Mary had to go back there to find him, saying “*if thou wilt find this noble birth, verily thou must quit the multitude and return to the starting point* (i.e., into the temple), *into the ground out of which thou art come... To know God God-fashion, thy knowledge must change into downright unknowing, a forgetting of thyself and every creature.*”

- *Purification and unification.* In addition, we must honestly evaluate ourselves and notice that we are divided beings – that our emotions, thoughts and actions are often in conflict with each other and contradict each other. Only by unifying ourselves can we serve. Thus, we must bring these conflicting elements into harmony by shaping, cleansing and transforming them through a process of inner alchemy or templing. This will result in a human being who has developed all of their capacities to the fullest and who has unified their will in order that they may serve most fully - what one teacher calls “*a soul-infused personality.*” In the words of my teachers’ teacher – Paul Brunton – we must create a “*fully developed, mastered and richly rounded ego acting as a channel for the inspiration and guidance of the Higher Self.*” This process he calls the “Long Path” or “the path of the ant” because it requires sustained effort over the course a lifetime (or, some believe, many lifetimes) in which we develop all aspects of our personality to the fullest.

- *Neutrality and acceptance.* We must also face our life circumstances with neutrality and acceptance. Here I do not mean passivity but rather the understanding that all of our experiences have a lesson for us and are not arbitrary or meaningless. Often we resist and resent the events and persons in our lives and try and push them away from us when they do not meet our expectations. Yet it is only by embracing the present moment and by being fully present in it that we can accept what it has to teach us. In this way we practice in our own lives our belief that life is meaningful and that the circumstances of our lives are our soul’s way of teaching us. The great philosopher-mystic Rumi was referring to this when he said that: “*the grief we welcome turns to joy.*”

An excellent contemporary source of practices for embracing the present moment can be found in the work of Eckhart Tolle.

- *Proximity to realized beings.* Fourth, to remind ourselves of our true nature and purpose in life it is helpful to immerse ourselves in the lives and teachings of those who have been close with God. By studying their writings and lives we absorb their vibration.
- *Short path exercises.* Finally, at the same time as we are transforming ourselves on the long path, we can imagine and believe that the divine is present with us at every moment and act as if we ourselves are saturated with this divinity. We can bring the love and intelligence that exists at the heart of all things into each moment, making them the fabric of our lives, and so becoming beings of “love and light.” Paul Brunton calls this the “short path” or the “path of the bird.

These are the requirements, I believe, for spiritual searchers who want to find the inner temple that will allow us to be spiritual-servers and devote ourselves to the universal plan. Whether or not we frequent temples, mosques or churches, we must find the true temple within. The image of the temple can guide us so that we ourselves may become a bridge or door to the divine. In this condition we can truly serve selflessly.

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We are blessed to be here, in this planetary moment, to receive the messages of the higher beings and to devote ourselves to realizing them here on earth. In my own life I have been blessed with many teachers and teachings that have brought me to this moment with whatever understanding that I have. I would therefore like to give thanks to my teachers and tell you a little bit about the tradition I represent.

My spiritual teacher was named Anthony Damiani, who founded a center called "Wisdom's Goldenrod Center for Philosophic Studies" (www.wisdomsgoldenrod.org).

Anthony's passion was comparative philosophy and he believed that at the heart of all the great spiritual systems was a universal message and a universal understanding of reality. At Wisdom's Goldenrod we study these traditions – Platonism, Sufism, Esoteric Christianity, Kaballah, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc – in order to see the common truth that lives within them. You can say that we are attempting to understand the intellectual form of the truth, as much as it can be understood with the mind, so that we can bring it into our hearts and lives. Anthony's teacher was Paul Brunton (www.paulbrunton.org). In a life-time of spiritual research throughout the globe he was able to encounter these great traditions in person and synthesize them his books. Paul Brunton was in turn a teacher of Reverend Roy Burckhart, who referred to him as a "radar star."

In addition to Anthony Damiani and Paul Brunton I would like to thank my other teachers Jose Neto Triguerinho of Brazil (www.callinghumanity.org), and Raphael of Italy (www.vidya-ashramvidyaorder.org) for their inspiration and guidance. And I would like

to thank all of you for inviting me to be here with you for this weekend of mutual spiritual searching.

Finally, in concluding I would like to return to Meister Eckhart, who said:

"God wants this temple to be cleared of everything but himself..."

My deepest thanks. I wish peace to all of us as we engage in this task of cleaning the inner temple.