

# Psychology of the exoteric: on the specifics of spiritual work at the initial stage of mastering esoteric knowledge and experience

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**Abstract.** The key ideas of esotericism regarding the spiritual transformation of a person in this article are considered in the context of psychological inner work on oneself at the initial (exoteric) stage of mastering esoteric knowledge and experience. It is noted that the external world penetrates into the inner world of a person, "imprinted", becoming an internal reality. This reality has various characteristics, acquires the psychological status of positive and negative emotions. In this regard, esoteric work as a whole is a "guide" for orientation in the space of the inner world and recommendations for changing internal states.

## 1 Introduction

A person's self-knowledge is a complex process in which his consciousness, will, intellect, emotions, sensations, perceptions, and representations are involved. If we consider exoterism in the context of the ideas of G.I. Gurdjieff and B. P. Muravyov, then this phenomenon can be studied as a preparatory and very initial stage of esoteric work, at which a person begins to rebuild his own personality, previously oriented outward and dissolving in the events of the external world, unconsciously floating along the flow of life, "sleeping" a deep sleep in reality in relation to his inner world. At this stage, a person comes into contact with esoteric ideas, assimilates the "Prolegomena" of esotericism, formulates initial concepts, judgments, and forms preliminary knowledge about the object of knowledge, which he himself, first of all, is. This is a period of intense spiritual, internal work on oneself, during which a person faces a number of psychological difficulties and obstacles of a psychological nature.

A person's acute experience of the lack of unity, harmony, calmness and justice in the world can lead to a desire to comprehend the mystery of the "split" of human nature. Alice Anna Bailey (1880–1949), Theosophist, arcanologist, in her work "Esoteric psychology" [1] emphasizes the role of psychology in determining the fate of the modern world. It is psychology that is intended to designate and resolve the fate of humanity, to protect against choices that lead to destructive consequences. Its strength lies in the fact that it studies the relationship of the private to the general (the individual to society), helps to develop mechanisms for adaptation, integration, coordinates human activity in the process of implementing the tasks set for the benefit of himself and society.

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The presence of numerous psychological schools indicates the contradictory views and methodology in this science, the lack of position consistency complicates the process of forming synthetic knowledge, on the one hand, highlighting some aspects of mental life, on the other, deliberately excluding others from their field of view.

Uspensky P.D. subdivides all existing psychological doctrines and systems into two categories: a) systems that study a person in the context of what he appears to be, or what he is; b) systems that study a person in the context of what he could become, based on the possibilities of his spiritual development. According to P.D. Uspensky, psychology is "the study of the principles, laws and facts of human development possibilities" [6, p. 12].

Bailey A. criticizes a purely materialistic approach to science as incapable of taking into account the complexity of the person inner world in need of integration. She also notes that the fanaticism of religion, the cultivation of ideas and feelings of sinfulness, intimidation by heavenly punishment have caused numerous psychological conflicts, internal disorders, despair and denial of the truth.

Education as the science of correct adaptation, religion as the cultivation of the divinity consciousness, science as the correct recognition of the forms of divine life revelation must unite in their striving to cognize human nature. "Then people will be both citizens of the kingdom of souls, and creative members of the great family of mankind, and strong animals with an animal body, the development of which on the outer plane of life will make it an instrument capable of perceiving divine, human and animal revelation" [1]. Problems that should be solved by psychology: the problem of split, the problem of integration, the problem of heredity. Bailey A. identifies three characteristic splits that are important for man and humanity: the split between the intellectual part of a man and the emotional, vital, physical; between the individual and society; between the individual and the soul (essence), which means two ways out of the crisis state (the formation of an egocentric personality or a practical mystic who is aware of the need for unity).

The tragedy of the split psychological situation is mitigated by the "correct" attitudes, among those A. Bailey distinguished the following: understanding of psychological problems as universal; perception and interpretation of psychological shock, suffering, tragedies, psychological crisis as an indicator of opening up opportunities for spiritual growth and opening up the path of spiritual development (change of the minus - a negative assessment of what is happening to a plus, a positive assessment of the situation); awareness of pain as a desire for integration; action in a split situation from the position of "as if" this split has already been overcome (here the role of a person's creative imagination is great).

These attitudes are designed to assist psychology in developing new techniques from the point of view of esoteric knowledge about a person at the exoteric stage of his development, taking into account the understanding of the strict sequence of the process, the stages of which are: internal split; feeling of duality of states (subjective or waking consciousness); frustration, nervous anxiety; establishing the cause of the split; deliberate integration; choosing the optimal rhythm of life using creative imagination; integration.

Bailey A. emphasizes that at this stage of human existence, *the idea of eternal return or the law of reincarnation* has a favorable calming effect on the human psyche. Being in a depressed state, in a critical state, on the verge of suicide, a person can regard this idea as a lifeline in a raging ocean of passions: it (idea), in its "simple" interpretation, allows you to see the situation in the context of time, in the context of its future possibilities resolution, and, thus, relieve tension from the burden of hopelessness, and gradual penetration into the esoteric meaning of the idea increases one's own responsibility for life situations, gives strength to overcome the crisis.

Overcoming the split is recorded by the emergence of a relative calmness feeling, well-being, unity, desire for self-expression. But this temporary feeling is fraught with new dangers for the human psyche, among which egomania as a concern for its own uniqueness

is in the first place. This state, caused by superficial contact with esoteric work, leads to the emergence of obsessive fanatical ideas about the need for every person you meet "to direct on the right path".

Maurice Nicholl [5] points out these obstacles in spiritual work, emphasizing the negative role of the human illusion of one's own unity. A person initially ascribes to himself the presence of individuality, consciousness and a single will. The most difficult moment is to realize *the idea of the lack of unity in a person*, the fact that the idea of oneself, the sense of self-importance, unity and uniqueness is a fantasy, imagination and illusion.

The complexity of work lies in the fact that its beginning is at the point when a person feels completely "rich": with his personality, vanity, pride. It is carried out when vanity is hurt. Resentment, feeling of offense, complete identification with the value of a false personality, emotional attachment to the image of oneself are motives that are a source of disappointment in the absence of a "quick" result and a reason for stopping work.

At this stage, a person comes face to face with what in the Gurdjieff tradition is designated as the mechanistic nature of human existence. "Machine" is a state in which a person automatically reacts to the external circumstances of his life from one of the aggregate of disparate "I" in the inner world, it takes on a different look, changes, depending on the identification with a specific emotion, thought, instinct. A "car" can be loud, quiet, joyful, angry, sad, lazy, etc. States change rapidly. The internal states of a person, his habits of worry, irritation, offense, resentment, enjoyment - on the one hand, are interconnected with the events of external life, but they may also have nothing to do with these events.

*Distinguishing internal States and external events is the key idea* to esoteric work. M. Nicholl, revealing this idea, emphasizes that the "correct" state, the quality of the state helps to experience pleasure and enjoyment of the joyful events of life. However, the emotional center deformation, the tendency to seek out the tragic, negative emotions distort the perception of events, no matter how happy or prosperous they are. In this regard, self-improvement includes self-observation of the relationship and differentiation of the internal state and external events, their non-identification. The practice of training self-observation is neutral fixation, "naming" a certain external event, for example, "this is called irritation", "this is called resentment", etc.

The inner world of a person is initially composed of multiple "egos", contradictory and unstable, without realizing oneself as such it is difficult to advance in this work. Self-observation and fixation of various states, acceptance of the fact of the personality "I multiplicity" is the starting point of self-change. Acting and observing the change of his emotional states, individual thoughts, a person must find the strength in himself to say: "this is not me", to separate himself (the observer in himself) from himself (the face of the small "I"), to move away from illusion and fantasy about oneself as a once given and formed unity. According to Gurdjieff: "Until a person learns to separate himself from himself, he will not achieve anything, and no one can help him" [4, p. 170].

This work requires consistency, hence its complexity. One of the most widespread mental illnesses of mankind (evidenced by G.I. Gurdjieff, PD Uspensky, M. Nicholl) is the disease "tomorrow". However, "tomorrow" never comes, a person remains in the illusion

of "intensified work" on himself. To avoid this, it is necessary to internalize *the idea of the need to work on yourself today*. To live in a sensation, a state *today*, means to change the whole perception of one's own life. A person *sleeps* in a state of identification with his profession, social status and role, "very important and urgent matters", he may not start working on himself, forgetting that this work is primarily of a daily psychological nature in the moment that is designated as "now".

If we imagine a cross, then its horizontal line is a symbol of the passage of time (past – present – future). The vertical line is perpendicular to the horizontal and intersects with it at the point of the present moment (now). As a rule, a person is constantly in a hurry from the

past to the future, dissolving in a flow of events that, not having time to come, disappear in the past. It is felt that time is rapidly rushing, days, weeks, years pass unnoticed. A person is able to overcome identification with all his psychological states, external things, everyday life, and “rise” above time, be on a vertical line, and catch the feeling of “now” only in a state of awareness. According to Nicholl: "This feeling is sometimes called the *feeling of Eternity*" [5]. This is the experience of the true "I" particle, located not in time, which, as a quantitative value, cannot form Eternity. “But Eternity and Time meet in man, at the point called “now”” [5].

Psychological work on oneself is associated with the solution of specific spiritual problems related to the vertical line. Life tasks related to the horizontal line. The formulation of the inner work global goal - the acquisition of the "Kingdom of Heaven" includes the idea that this Kingdom is not in the future tense, but "now", this is an internal state, and therefore "the Kingdom of Heaven is within". /A person can climb a vertical line, a "ladder", change their Being.

If the horizontal line is the time line, the change line, then the vertical line is the transformation line. It is necessary to distinguish between the concepts: change and transformation. Time changes things, but it doesn't transform them. M. Nicholl emphasizes that internal changes in time prepare a person for transformation. The internal structure of a person must be able to perceive "higher" influences. "If these substances are in a suitable state, i.e. if their quality, quantity and structure are in order, then transformation occurs" [5]. The level of Being changes. Human Being is here considered as a combination of what he really is not and “real”, “true” divine nature in a person: “in Him we have our *being*”, the Greek word εἶμεν (“being”) means “we are” - i.e.

“In Him we are” [5]. Everything that a person experiences in time, in the course of his "horizontal" personal life, is an indicator of his level of Being, the essential level (the position occupied on the vertical scale). Everything that exists in the Universe is placed on this scale – the being of minerals, the being of plants, the being of animals, the being of man. The scale of Being, on the one hand, has nothing in common with the scale of Time, but, on the other hand, each of its levels in Time is assigned a certain stage at which its perfection is manifested.

A certain period of life corresponds to a change in a person's being. Human development and evolution are aimed at overcoming misunderstandings about his personal and essential nature. According to Nicholl M.: “The moment of our birth is the point at which the essence enters Time. The moment of death is the point at which the essence leaves Time. Our life in Time is between these two points, where the development of our essence is possible and where, in addition, personality is inevitably formed” [5]. The personality is formed on the horizontal line of Time, and the essence "descends" into Time and then leaves it. Essential being refers to Eternity.

The desire to climb the steps of Being, changing your level of Being is a significant idea of esoteric knowledge, which penetrates into the consciousness of a person at the very beginning of his spiritual path. At the moment of seeing our own artificiality, striving to portray what we are not in reality. "If a person found his real self in himself, which is vertically above him on the scale of being, then he would no longer be *a likeness* of something, but would be himself-who he is" [5].

A person is not only a physical form, but also a psychological form, an emotional and mental form. In addition to the physical fate, a person has a psychological fate, which he can realize (his essential position in the Universe of meaning) only in the process of practical doing.

According to G.I. Gurdjieff: “Man understands by doing” [3, p. 137]. But what does it mean *not to sleep, stay awake and do*? M. Nicholl notes that here you need to start with the attitude to your life as "one day", trying to fix and correct every negative reaction in the "here

and now" state, to dissociate yourself from this reaction, "remember yourself", isolate your inner world, become hermetic, transforming negative impressions.

Observation of *self-justification* reveals the inner capabilities of a person for practical work.

Self-observation allows you to detect the mechanistic nature of words and make an "internal stop", completely cut off the negative emotion at a certain moment, which can later return.

Self-remembering and inner stopping are methods of practical work on the intellectual, emotional, instinctive and motor center. Practical work on the intellectual center is associated with efforts in the process of mental activity: reading and learning new things, writing, working with numbers encourage you to use the part of the brain that is designated "conscious": analyzing what you have heard, focusing on what you have previously read, remembering and pronouncing new information. Practical work on the emotional center includes observing negative emotions, disidentifying, using the intellectual center, analyzing the emotional state caused by specific words from the imagination and own conjectures. Practical work on the motor center is a daily conscious physical activity, which, in contrast to automatic, mechanical activity, is accompanied by positive emotions and desire. Practical work on the instinctive center is not required, it independently regulates the body work, however, when the body signals pain and discomfort about its illness help in its work is required.

M. Nicholl connects the knowledge of internal subjective reality with the need to comprehend what *consciousness and conscience are*. At the stage of "apprenticeship" - *the idea of consciousness and the idea of conscience* are considered in the context of understanding man as a three-centered being. The sphere of consciousness is the intellectual center; the sphere of conscience is the emotional center: "Consciousness is *the knowledge of wholeness*; Conscience is *the sense of wholeness*" [5].

Nicoll M. separates the concepts of false conscience and true conscience, believing that the cause of conflicts within humanity itself is the dominance of the first over the second. A false conscience associated with a false personality is dependent on subjective private truth. Nationality, religion, education, upbringing form a false conscience focused on separating a part from the whole, while a true conscience grows from an inner understanding of unity. *Buffers* prevent a person from awakening to a true conscience - mental mechanisms that protect against such a feeling as integrity. The buffer is a division, a boundary between one small self and another. This is a mechanism that maintains the mechanistic nature of human existence in a state of "sleep", reduces psychological shocks and horrors arising from the understanding of one's own fragmentation. On the one hand, they significantly facilitate the life of a person with whom everything "happens", who is in the illusion of his unity, on the other hand, they resist esoteric work. According to Burton R.:

"BUFFER. A psychological mechanism that prevents the experience of the present moment reality and the vision of one's true state; in particular, the mechanism by which *a false personality* protects an imaginary picture of a person about himself" [2, p. 154]. The buffer helps a person get away from an unpleasant situation.

Thus, the main ideas of esotericism are considered in the context of psychological inner work on oneself at the initial (exoteric) stage of mastering esoteric knowledge. The external world penetrates into the inner world of a person, "imprinted", becoming an internal reality. This reality has various characteristics, acquires the psychological status of positive and negative emotions. In this regard, esoteric work as a whole is a "guide" for orientation in the inner world space and recommendations for changing internal states. In this context, "esoteric" means "internal", i.e. concerning the internal psychological life of a person, his possible spiritual growth (as a quantitative change in the ratio of "positive" and "negative" selves) and evolution (as a qualitative change in the level of awareness and being).

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