

THE TECHNIQUE OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE



**A STUDY COURSE
BY MARIA PARISEN**

**BASED ON THE BOOK
TECHNIQUE OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE
BY CLARA CODD**

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“THE TECHNIQUE OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE”

A Study Course with Commentary by Maria Parisen

—The Inspiration of Clara Codd

CLARA was born in 1876 in England, the oldest of ten daughters. Even as a child, she questioned the meaning of life and felt moved into a search for “something.” As a young woman, a strong sense for freedom and justice moved her to work for the enfranchisement of women. Despite a natural shyness, she spoke passionately for women’s rights from street platforms and in crowded halls, enduring heckling, physical abuse, and imprisonment.



She joined the Theosophical Society at age 27. In her autobiography, *So Rich a Life*, Clara states, “I had come home at last after long wandering. I had found the beginning of the way.” Three years later Clara was appointed the first national lecturer for the English Section, “with only one lecture properly prepared and with my shy disposition and youthful inexperience.” Later she served as National Secretary (president) of the Australian and South African Sections. For over sixty years, she traveled the world as one of our most beloved and inspiring leaders. Clara was honored with the Subba Row gold medal for her wide range of theosophical writings. In addition to *The Technique of the Spiritual Life*, our course will draw upon some of her best-known works, including *The Ageless Wisdom of Life*, *The Way of the Disciple*, *Theosophy as the Masters See It*, *Meditation: Its Practice and Results*, and *Trust Yourself to Life*.

—Course Structure

Clara Codd begins *The Technique of the Spiritual Life* with an overview of human nature and the “field” of becoming. She then explores preparation for the Way, addressing the powers of will, body, emotions, and mind. A lengthy section on the “ancient and eternal Way,” explores elements of spiritual consciousness. Her final sections address method and include meditation instructions.

Each course lesson begins with commentary by Maria Parisen, along with study and practice suggestions. Selections from Clara Codd’s *The Technique of the Spiritual Life* follow Maria’s commentary.

—Meditative Inquiry

The Technique of the Spiritual Life is rich in meanings, unique for you, which are best discovered through meditative or prayerful study. Among the suggestions given to theosophists in 1889 (see *Practical Occultism*. Adyar: Vasanta Press, 1975, pg. 71) were these:

Do not read much. If you read for ten minutes, reflect for as many hours.
Habituate yourself to solitude, and to remaining alone with your thoughts.

The intent is to be open, spacious and attentive, grounding the study in everyday life. Rather than assembling or re-arranging ideas, a meditative approach makes a deeper connection. Desire for understanding, awareness, and effort are balanced by an inner sense of peacefulness. When prior learning and preconceptions are held lightly, fresh insights may arise.

Clara Codd's *THE TECHNIQUE OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE*

Lesson One: "Introductory"¹

Power of all Powers! Oh fill and flood my being;
O Sun Eternal, whelm me in Thy Light;
Vision itself need ask no eyes for seeing,
And boundless Life no wings to mount the height.
I am Thy Light, by mortal lamp enshrouded,
Thy Bliss, beyond all shifting joys and pains;
Above their glooms and gleams is Peace unclouded;
Shatter the lamp; the Light, the Light remains.
Father of Spirits, Love for ever burning,
Burn Thou all forms that hold my life from Thee;
Lost in my selfhood, to Thyself returning,
Find Thou Thine own and my Eternity.

—From *A Hymn to Shiva*

It is a truism that the world stands today at the threshold of an entirely New Age.

Life proceeds in cycles, never in an undeviating straight line. This great principle rules everywhere. There never was an evening that did not turn again to another morning, nor a winter that did not herald the arrival of another spring. The "day" of a man's life follows exactly the same sequence. The first arc of a man's life is comprised of outgoing, growth, and adventure; the second arc consists of returning, of slowly diminishing life-forces, and of the setting-in of the peace of evening.

This is not only true of a day, a year, a life cycle, but is also true of the corporate life of each nation, civilization, planet, and solar system, even of the boundless universe itself. This is the universal cyclic law—eternal motion—the rhythmic ebb and flow of all Nature. Hence, a nation reaches extinction and ceases to be, but the souls who lived within its ranks are born once again in a new setting. For example, we can trace the colonizing, law-abiding traits of the ancient Romans in the people of the British Empire during their heyday. We see the meticulous, artistic sensibilities of the ancient Greeks reflected in the French culture of modern times. The civilizations, which the nations promote and embody, have their great Day and in time pass away; from their ashes arises a newer and a greater concept of life. The whole advancing consciousness of humanity passes through many such cycles. In the process, though forms may be destroyed, the immortal life persists, and eventually expresses itself anew.

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

Idylls of the King, Tennyson

¹ Clara Codd's *Technique of the Spiritual Life* has been edited by the Department of Education.

One such cycle of approximately 2,000 years is closing now [Editor—Circa 1958]. Humanity is “a day’s march nearer home.” The signs of the close of a cycle are: universal break-up, chaos, change, and cataclysms. From these stressful events slowly emerges the outline of the new. For example, it is clear now that the age of isolation, of empires, of the domination of one nation by another, is past. The linking of the whole world by new forms of communication and travel presages a dream of the poet Tennyson: “The parliament of man, the Federation of the world.” The New Age that is dawning now will see the growth of the principle of co-operation between all nations and between all classes, and hence the end of war, and its other side, poverty, for the rest of the life of this planet.

Such mighty changes are really brought about by the growing consciousness of humanity. This is reflected in the world of religious thought even more potently than in the world of social relationships, the latter being the outcome of the former. Humanity is now passing from the idea of God Transcendent to the thought of God Immanent, and particularly, as found in the deepest heart of man. Therefore, we witness the rapid and extraordinary growth of people’s interest in mysticism, occultism, yoga, and the lives of great saints and sages. In 1882 an Adept remarked that a wave of mysticism was sweeping over Europe [Ed.—See Mahatma Letter #92]. It is now flowing over the whole world, and thousands are turning inward, feeling after God, if by chance they may find Him, seeking *within* for the Kingdom of Heaven and enduring happiness.

This is true religion. As Dean Inge [Ed.—British theologian (1860-1954)] has said, mysticism—the direct knowledge of God—is *real* religion, and without its great saints, knowers, and lovers of the Real, no exoteric religious system could endure. More and more souls are seeking inwardly, trying to find the way to divine realization. This leads us to another great principle of Nature: all things *become*. Within the acorn lies the future giant of the forest; within the seed, the lovely flower; and within the soul of man, the future God, the Perfect Man. It is man’s destiny that one day he must learn to plunge into the mysterious depths of his own glorious being, for only there is to be found true wisdom and the real power to help.

This mounting human need is being met today by numerous occult and mystical schools of thought—some of them sincere and well-grounded, others motivated by self-interest and less well-informed. It is to try to do my small part in helping this rising tide of seekers after Reality—wherever they may be, and whether they form part of some religious or mystical body or not—that I have written this book. Reality is the “naked fact” everywhere. It has no name, no label, no partisanship. On the Way to It we dress It in the garments of thought and language to which we are accustomed. But Reality is One, Simple, Lovely. It is the shining peak of the great Mount of God, and we may humbly begin to ascend from anywhere at the foot of the mountain, taking the road that, to us, seems best. But when we reach the Shining Peak, all the roads will have merged, and there will remain but that which the noble Plotinus called “the flight of the alone to the Alone.”

—End of Excerpt—

Lesson One COMMENTARY by Maria Parisen

A few lines from *A Hymn to Shiva* preface the text. More than a simple prayer, the *Hymn* is a visionary recital of great beauty. The seer conveys longing, joyous affirmation, and fearless intention. The goal is union with divine reality, which to the visionary is as the Eternal Sun. Love fuels a profound self-sacrifice—culminating in a mystic death—through which life is renewed. The seer no longer desires earthly or heavenly form, but only absorption in Love.

I am Thy Light, by mortal lamp enshrouded . . .
Shatter the lamp; the Light, the Light remains . . .
Love for ever burning,
Burn Thou all forms that hold my life from Thee . . .

—A Hymn to Shiva



The seer dies to separateness—not for self, but for love of the Eternal. As the lost soul returns, an inborn, divine purpose fulfills itself, and a more radiant life begins in a spiral of infinite unfolding. *A Hymn to Shiva* sets the keynote for the text. It conveys something of the courage, devotion, joy, and enlightened self-sacrifice at the heart of a spiritual life.

The classic image of the dancing Shiva, pictured above, symbolizes elements of a supreme Reality. Clarifying its significance for human consciousness, a Master comments, “. . . the adept sees and feels and lives in the very source of all fundamental truths—the Universal Spiritual Essence of Nature, SHIVA, the Creator, the Destroyer and the Regenerator . . .” He notes further that the Ideal Shiva of the Yoga Sastras is a mendicant, sage and healer, the culmination of Spiritual Wisdom (*The Mahatma Letters, Chronological Sequence*, pg. 55).

Signs of a closing evolutionary cycle—breakdown, chaos, and cataclysm—are familiar. We experience such cyclic changes in our own lives; we recognize the same patterns as communities and nations develop. Certain forms disintegrate to make way for new thought, feeling, and physical patterns. The process is not so stressful when the outcome is personally pleasing or acceptable. But our current transition demands a transformation, which many are resisting.

The threshold to a “New Age” leads to higher consciousness. Safe passage requires unity and harmony, a willingness to journey with and for others. Intention is critical, thus the importance of self-awareness and honesty as the path opens into the wholeness of life. Selfish motives are often hidden or justified by a clever imagination. But self-centered forces, which now perpetuate worldwide suffering, cannot hold sway even before simple kindness. The ancient saying, **LOVE CONQUERS ALL**, embodies cosmic and karmic law.

In communities where unity prevails among diverse families and activities, individuals find fulfillment and joy. When a brotherhood of truth-seekers bands together for a noble purpose, a wisdom community arises. These seekers are not united by race, color, creed, geography, nor even

beliefs. Their bond is a willingness to realize and serve Reality, God, Divine Life—however it may be conceived. Elements of a shared worldview, spiritual ideals and practices support the deeper purpose.

Helena Blavatsky defined Theosophy as “Divine Wisdom,” or “Wisdom of the Gods.”

The word *theos* means a god in Greek, one of the divine beings, certainly not “God” in the sense attached in our day to the term. Therefore, it is not “Wisdom of God,” as translated by some but *Divine Wisdom* such as that possessed by the gods. The term is many thousands of years old.

Blavatsky, H. P., *The Key to Theosophy*, pg. 1

Intelligence is of many kinds. Ways of knowing vary among the different kingdoms of Nature. Beings who are in advance of our common humanity have a more universal and beneficent outlook. Though they may be distinct individuals, there is no longer a sense of separateness. A refined empathy and compassion allows direct insight into the heart of things. Illumination is *knowing through participation*.

A collective of such beings is inspired through devotion to a Supreme Reality, an intuitive sense for harmony, and an unconditional love for those under their care. The self-sacrifice that sustains the hierarchy is joyous. Because the individual *is* the collective intelligence, has *become* the greater whole, wisdom communities are infinitely creative and helpful. The brotherhood of human adepts, and the hierarchies of great angels and devas, are such enlightened collectives. The Theosophical Society is intended to reflect their consciousness and ways, especially to address the “mounting human need” for direct knowledge of Truth.

The following quotes suggest some elements of mysticism, which Clara Codd suggests is the essence of true religion. Consider each one carefully in the light of suggestions made for meditative inquiry, dwelling on meaningful words or phrases.

Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment.

Underhill, Evelyn. *Practical Mysticism*, pg. 23

The central characteristic of the mystical experience—ineffable, noetic, fleeting, timeless—is the enveloping sense of oneness with a universe suddenly known and felt as luminous from within.

Mills, Joy. “The Nature of Mystical Experience,” *The Silent Encounter*, pg.7

. . . the recovery of mystical religion is a vital necessity in our civilization. Religion must once again cease to separate the divine from the human, and point to the promise—nay, the immediate possibility—of man’s intimate union with the divine, the penetration of the divine within the soul and the disappearance of personal selfhood in the divine substance. In short, God must cease to be an object and must become an experience.

Hoeller, Stephan. “The Recovery of Mystical Religion,” in *The Silent Encounter*, pg. 66

. . . there is a root or depth of thee from whence all . . . faculties come forth, as lines from a centre, or as branches from the body of a tree. This depth is called the centre,

the fund or bottom of the soul. This depth is the unity, the eternity—I had almost said the infinity—of thy soul; for it is so infinite that nothing can satisfy it or give it rest but the infinity of God.

Law, William. Quoted in *The Perennial Philosophy*, pg. 2

—Thoughts for Consideration

1. What does the phrase, “the immanence of God,” mean to you? In addition to the several signs mentioned, what other trends suggest that humanity is moving toward greater awareness of divine immanence in everyday life and Nature?
2. What is your understanding of the divine Reality as both *immanent* and *transcendent*?
3. Dwell on the lines from *A Hymn to Shiva* which preface the text. What is conveyed of the power of love? Consider how light and fire are experienced here, as reflections of both mortal and eternal being.
4. Share an experience or other idea you have found helpful in understanding mysticism.
5. Listen to and meditate on the following musical selections:
 - a. “Prelude to Act 1” of *Lohengrin*. [Wagner: Overture and Preludes. Karl Bohm, conductor. Deutsche Grammophon]
 - b. The “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah*. [Handel: *Messiah*. Leonard Bernstein, conductor. 1991, Sony]
 - c. “Laudate Dominum” from *Vesperae solennes de confessore K339*. [Mozart: *Vespers*. Stephen Cleobury, conductor. 1898, EMI Classics]
 - d. “Gratias Agimus Tibi” from *Gloria in D, RV 589*. [Vivaldi: *Gloria*. Robert Shaw, conductor. 1898, Telarc]
 - e. *Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D Major*. [Bach: *Orchestral Suites Nos. 1-4*. Neville Martin, conductor. 1991, Decca]

Did you feel the music conveyed—however briefly—a sense of the sacred? Suggest other pieces of sacred music from Western or Eastern traditions that have brought you a feeling of oneness with the Divine.