

Salvation: St. Peter of Damaskos from the Philokalia



St. Peter of Damaskos, a monastic father from the 11th or 12th century AD. He is known almost exclusively from his extensive, lucid, and very valuable writings in the *Philokalia*, where he provides a wealth of information on the spiritual life in a very readable style.

A Treasury of Divine Knowledge, “Introduction”

by St. Peter of Damaskos

in

G.E.H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K. Ware, editors,

The Philokalia: The Complete Text Compiled by St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, Vol. 3., Faber & Faber, Inc., Winchester, MA, 1984, pp. 74-89.

Because by God’s grace I have been granted many great gifts and yet have never done anything good myself, I became frightened lest in my laziness and sloth I would forget His blessings--as well as my own faults and sins--and not even offer Him thanks or show my gratitude in any way. I have therefore written this treatise as a rebuke to my unhappy soul, putting in it whatever I have come across from the lives and writings of the holy fathers, citing them by name, so that I might have it by me as a reminder of their words, even though it is incomplete.

As I myself neither own nor ever have owned any books, I have borrowed them from devout friends, who also cater for my physical needs; and going through these books with great care out of love for God, I have then given them back to their owners. These books include first of all the Old and New Testaments, that is, the Pentateuch, the Psalter, the Four Books of Kings, the Six Books of Wisdom, the Prophets, the Chronicles, the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Gospels and the commentaries on all these; and then all the writings of the great fathers and teachers--Dionysios, Athanasios, Basil, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Antony, Arsenios, Makarios, Neilos, Ephrem, Isaac, Mark, John of Damaskos, John Klimakos, Maximos, Dorotheos, Philimon, as well as the lives and sayings of all the saints.

I went through all these slowly and diligently, trying to discover the root of man's destruction and salvation, and which of his actions or practices does or does not bring him to salvation. I wanted to find what it is that everyone seeks after, and how people served God in the past, and still serve Him today, in wealth or poverty, living among many sinners or in solitude, married or celibate: how, quite simply in every circumstance and activity we find life or death, salvation or destruction. Even among us monks there are different situations: obedience to a spiritual father in all matters pertaining to body or soul, the stillness that purifies the soul, spiritual counsel in the place of obedience; the offices of abbot and bishop. In each of these situations, some find salvation, and others perish.

This in itself astonished me, but I was astonished also by the fall of that erstwhile angel in heaven, immaterial by nature, clothed with wisdom and every virtue, who suddenly became a devil, darkness and ignorance, the beginning and end of all evil and malice. And then there was Adam, who enjoyed such honour and so many blessings, such familiarity with God, who was adorned with wisdom and virtue, alone in paradise with Eve: he suddenly became an exile, filled with passions, mortal, forced to labour with sweat and affliction. From him sprang the only two brothers in the world, Cain and Abel; and between them jealousy triumphed, and deceit, and these gave rise to murder, cursing, and terror. I was astonished, too, by their descendants, whose sins were so many that they provoked the flood; and then, after God in

His compassion had saved those in the ark, one of them--Canaan--was cursed, although it was his father Ham who had sinned: for in order not to abrogate God's blessing, righteous Noah cursed the son instead of the father (cf. Gen. 9:22-27). Then there were the tower of Babel, the people of Sodom, the Israelites, Solomon, the Ninevites, Gehazi, Judas, and all those who were endowed with blessings and yet turned to sin.

I was astonished who God, who is good beyond all goodness and full of compassion, permits all the many and various trials and afflictions of the world. Some He allows as sufferings conducive to repentance. These include hunger, thirst, grief, privation of life's needs, abstinence from pleasure, the wasting of the body through asceticism, vigils, labours, hardships, prolific bitter tears, anguish, fear of death, of cross-examination, of being called to account, of living in hell with demons, the appalling day of judgment, the ignominy that is to fall on the whole world, the terror, the bitter searching out and assessment of one's acts, words and thoughts, the treats and the wrath; and in addition to these, the various age-long punishments, the useless lamenting and ceaseless tears, the unrelieved darkness, the fear, the pain, the exile, the dismay, the oppression, the throttling of the soul in this world and in the next. And then there are all the dangers facing one in this world: shipwrecks, illnesses of every kind, lightening, thunder, hail, earthquake, famine, tidal waves, untimely deaths--all the painful things that God allows to happen to us against our will.

Other things are willed not by God but by ourselves or by the demons. These include battles, passions, the whole range of sins from folly to despair and final destruction, of which our treatise will speak as it goes on, the attack of demons, wars, the tyranny of the passions, the derelictions, dislocations and vicissitudes of life; the anger, slander, and all the affliction that we of our own will bring upon ourselves and one another against God's will. Again I was astonished how, though beset by such evils, many have been saved, and that nothing has been able to prevent this. On the other hand, many have perished against God's will.

When from my laborious study of the Scriptures I became aware of all these things, and many more, my soul was shattered and often I felt quite helpless,

like spilt water. I did not fully grasp the significance of what I read; indeed, had I done so, I would not have been able to remain in this life, filled as it is with sin and disobedience to God, which produce all the evils of this world and the next. Nevertheless, through God's grace, I came upon the answers I sought for and saw, from my reading of the holy fathers, that we have to make certain distinctions.

First, we must recognize that the starting-point of all our spiritual development is the natural knowledge given us by God, whether this comes through the Scriptures by human agency, or by means of the angel that is given in divine baptism to guard the soul of every believer, to act as his conscience and to remind him of the divine commandments of Christ. If the baptized person keeps these commandments, the grace of the Holy Spirit is preserved in him.

Then, alongside this knowledge, there is our capacity to choose. This is the beginning of our salvation; by our free choice we abandon our own wishes and thought and do what God wishes and thinks. If we succeed in doing this, there is no object, no activity or place in the whole of creation that can prevent us from becoming what God from the beginning has wished us to be: that is to say, according to His image and likeness, gods by adoption through grace, dispassionate, just, good and wise, whether we are rich or poor, married or unmarried, in authority and free or under obedience and in bondage--in short, whatever our time, place or activity. That is why, alike before the Law, under the Law [of Moses] and under grace, there have been many righteous men--men who preferred the knowledge of God and His will to their own thoughts and wishes. Yet there were also many who have perished in these same times and in the same circumstances, because they preferred their own thoughts and wishes to those of God.

This then is the general picture. But situations and pursuits vary, and one needs to acquire discrimination, either through the humility given by God or through questioning those who possess the gifts of discrimination. For without discrimination nothing that comes to pass is good, even if we in our ignorance think that it is. But when through discrimination we learn how it lies in our power to attain what we wish, then what we do begins to conform to

God's will.

Only, as has been said, in all things we ought to renounce our own will so as to attain the goal God has set for us and to pursue whatever He wishes. Unless we do this we can never be saved. For since Adam's transgression we are all subject to the passions because of our constant association with them. We do not gladly pursue goodness nor do we long for the knowledge of God, nor do we do good out of love, as the dispassionate do; instead we cling to our passions and our vices and do not aspire at all to do what is good unless constrained by the fear of punishment. And this is the case with those who receive God's word with firm faith and purpose. The rest of us do not even aspire to this extent, but we regard the afflictions of this life and the punishments to come as of no account and are wholeheartedly enslaved to our passions. Some of us do not even perceive our desperate plight, and only under constraint and reluctantly engage in the struggle for virtue. And in our ignorance we long for what merits our hatred.

Just as sick people need surgery and cautery to recover the health they have lost, so we need trials, and toils of repentance, and fear of death and punishments, so that we may regain our former health of soul and shake off the sickness which our folly has induced. The more the Physician of our souls bestows upon us voluntary and involuntary suffering, the more we should thank Him for His compassion and accept the suffering joyfully. For it is to help us that He increases our tribulation, both through the sufferings we willingly embrace in our repentance and through the trials and punishments not subject to our will. In this way, if we voluntarily accept affliction, we will be freed from our sickness and from the punishments to come, and perhaps even from present punishments as well. Even if we are not grateful, our Physician in His grace will still heal us, although by means of chastisement and manifold trials. But if we cling to our disease and persist in it, we will deservedly bring upon ourselves a long punishment. We will have made ourselves like the demons and so will justly share with them the long punishments prepared for them, for, like them, we will have scorned our Benefactor.

We do not all receive blessings in the same way. Some, on receiving the fire of

the Lord, that is, His word, put it into practice and so become softer of heart, like wax, while others through laziness become harder than clay and altogether stone-like. And no one compels us to receive these blessings in different ways. It is as with the sun whose rays illumine all the world: the person who wants to see it can do so, while the person who does not want to see it is not forced to, so that he alone is to blame for his lightless condition. For God made both the sun and man's eyes, but how man uses them depends on himself. Similarly, then, God irradiates knowledge to all and at the same time He gives us faith as an eye through which we can perceive it.

If we choose to grasp this knowledge firmly by means of faith, we can keep ourselves mindful of it by putting it into practice; and God then gives us greater ardour, knowledge and power. For our pursuit of natural knowledge kindles our ardour, and this ardour increases our capacity to put the knowledge into practice. By putting it into practice we keep ourselves mindful of it, and this in turn induces us to practice it to an even greater extent. Greater practice is rewarded by greater knowledge; and from the understanding thus acquired we gain control of the passions and learn how to endure our sufferings patiently. Sufferings produce devotion to God and a recognition of His gifts and our faults. These give birth to gratitude and gratitude inculcates the fear of God which leads us to the keeping of the commandments, to inward grief, gentleness and humility. These three virtues produce discrimination, which gives us spiritual insight and makes it possible for the intellect in its purity to foresee coming faults and to forestall them through its experience and recollection of what has happened in the past; in this way it can protect itself against stealthy attacks. All this generates hope, and from hope come detachment and perfect love.

Once we have advanced thus far we shall not wish for anything except the will of God; rather we will joyfully abandon this transitory life out of love for God and for our fellowmen. Through the wisdom and indwelling of the Holy Spirit and through adoption to sonship, we are crucified with Christ and buried with Him, and we rise with Him and ascend with Him spiritually by imitating His way of life in the world. To speak simply, we become gods by adoption through grace, receiving the pledge of eternal blessedness, as St. Gregory the Theologian says. In this way, with regard to the eight evil

thoughts, we become dispassionate, just, good and wise, having God within ourselves--as Christ Himself has told us (cf. John 14:21-23). -- through the keeping of the commandments in order, from the first to the last. I will speak below about how the commandments should be practiced.

Since we have spoken of the knowledge of the virtues, we will also speak about the passions. Knowledge comes like light from the sun. The foolish man through lack of faith or laziness deliberately closes his eyes--that is, his faculty of choice--and at once consigns the knowledge to oblivion because in his indolence he fails to put it into practice. For folly leads to indolence, and this in turn begets inertia and hence forgetfulness. Forgetfulness breeds self-love--the love of one's own will and thoughts--which is equivalent to the love of pleasure and praise. From self-love comes avarice, the root of all evils (cf. 1 Tim. 6:10), for it entangles us in worldly concerns and in this way leads to complete unawareness of God's gifts and of our own faults. It is now that the eight ruling passions take up residence: gluttony, which leads to unchastity, which breeds avarice, which gives rise to anger when we fail to attain what we want--that is, fail to have our own way. This produces dejection, and dejection engenders first listlessness and then self-esteem; and self-esteem leads to pride. From these eight passions come every evil, passion and sin. Those consumed by them are led to despair and utter destruction; they fall away from God and become like the demons, as has already been said.

Man stands at the crossroads between righteousness and sin, and chooses whichever path he wishes. But after that the path which he has chosen to follow, and the guides assigned to it, whether angels and saints or demons and sinners, will lead him to the end of it, even if he has no wish to go there. The good guides lead him toward God and the kingdom of heaven, the evil guides toward the devil and a long punishment. But nothing and no one is to blame for his destruction except his own free will. For God is the God of salvation bestowing on us, along with being and well-being, the knowledge and strength that we cannot waive without the grace of God. Not even the devil can destroy a man, compelling him to choose wrongly, or reducing him to impotence or enforced ignorance, or anything else; he can only suggest evil to him.

Thus he who acts rightly should ascribe the grace of so doing to God, for along with our being He has given us everything else. But the person who has opted for the path of evil, and actually commits evil, should blame only himself, for no one can force him to commit it, since God created him with free will. Hence he will merit God's praise when he chooses the path of goodness; for he does so, not from any necessity of his nature, as is the case with animals and inanimate things that participate passively in goodness, but as befits a being that God has honoured with the gift of intelligence. We ourselves deliberately and willfully choose to do evil, being coached in it by its discoverer. God, who is good beyond goodness, does not force us, lest being forced and still disobeying we should be even more culpable. Nor does He take from us the freedom that in His goodness He has bestowed upon us.

Let him who wants to act rightly entreat God in prayer, and at once knowledge and power will be given him. In this way it will be evident that the grace bestowed by God was justly given; for it was given after prayer, although it could have been given without prayer. No praise, however, is due to the man who accepts the air by means of which he lives, knowing that without it life is impossible; rather he himself owes thanks to his Creator, who has given him a nose and health to breathe and live. Similarly, we also should rather thank God because in His grace He has created our prayer, our knowledge, our strength, our virtue, all our circumstances and our very selves. And not only has He done all this, but He ceaselessly does whatever He can to overcome our wickedness and that of our enemies, the demons.

Even the devil, having lost the knowledge of God, and so inevitably becoming ignorant in his ingratitude and pride, cannot of himself know what to do. On the contrary, he sees what God does to save us and maliciously learns from this and contrives similar things for our destruction. For he hates God and, being unable to fight Him directly, he fights against us who are in God's image thinking to avenge himself on God in this way; and, as St. John Chrysostom says, he finds us obedient to his will. For instance, he sees how God created Eve as a helpmate for Adam, and so he enlists her co-operation to bring about disobedience and transgression. Or, again, God gave a commandment so that by keeping it Adam might be mindful of the great gifts he had received and thank his Benefactor for them; but the devil made of this commandment the

starting-point for disobedience and death. Instead of prophets, he promotes false prophets; instead of apostles, false apostles, instead of law, lawlessness; instead of virtues, vice; instead of commandments, transgressions; instead of righteousness foul heresies.

In addition, when the devil saw Christ descending in His extreme goodness to the holy martyrs and revered fathers, appearing either in Himself or through angels or in some other ineffable form, he began to fabricate numerous delusions in order to destroy people. It is on account of this that the fathers, in their discrimination, wrote that one should not pay any attention to such diabolic manifestations whether they come through images, or light, or fire, or some other deceptive form. For the devil can deceive even in sleep or through the senses. If we accept such delusions, he makes the intellect, in its utter ignorance and self-conceit, depict various shapes or colours so that we think that this is a manifestation of God or of an angel. Often in sleep, or to our senses when awake, he shows us demons that are apparently defeated. In short, he does all he can to destroy us by making us succumb to these delusions.

In spite of all this, the devil will fail in his purpose if we apply the counsel of the holy fathers: that during the time of prayer we should keep our intellect free from form shape, and colour, and not give access to anything at all, whether light, fire or anything else, and that we should do all we can to confine our mind solely to the words we are saying, since he who prays only with his mouth prays to the wind and not to God. For unlike men, God is attentive to the intellect and not to the words spoken. We must worship, it is said, 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24); and again, 'I had rather speak five words whose meaning I understand than ten thousand words in a strange tongue' (1 Cor. 14:19).

It is now that the devil, having failed in all his other schemes, tempts us with thoughts of despair: he tries to persuade us that in the past things were different and that the men though whom God performed wonders for the strengthening of the faith were not like us. He also tells us that there is now no need for such exertion. For are we not now all of us Christians and all baptized? 'He who believes and is baptized shall be saved' (Mark 16:15).

What more do we need? But if we succumb to this temptation and remain as we are, we will be completely barren. We will be Christians only in name, not realizing that he who has believed and has been baptized must keep all Christ's commandments; and even when he has succeeded in doing this, he should say, 'I am a useless servant' (Luke 17:10), as the Lord told His apostles when He instructed them to carry out all He had laid down for them.

Everyone who is baptized renounces the devil, saying, 'I renounce Satan and all his works, and I join myself to Christ and all His works.' But where is our renunciation, if we do not abandon every passion and desist from every sinful act that the devil promotes? Rather, let us hate such things with all our soul and show our love for Christ through the keeping of His commandments. And how shall we keep His commandments unless we relinquish our own will and thought--the will and thought, that is to say, which are opposed to the commandments of God?

There are often people who because of personal temperament or out of habit do in fact choose what is good in certain situations and hate what is evil. And there are also good thoughts, as the Scriptures attest, although they require the discrimination of those who possess experience; for without discrimination even those thoughts that seem good are not in fact good, either because they come at the wrong time, or are unnecessary, or unworthy, or are not properly understood. For unless both the questioner and he who is questioned are attentive not only to the Scriptures but also to the question raised, they will miss the meaning of what has been said, and the resulting damage will be serious. I myself have often found this, both when asking and when being asked, and when afterwards I have understood the true sense of the passage under discussion, I have been amazed to learn how the words can be the same, but the meaning very different.

Thus we need discrimination in all things if we are to know how to act so as to do the will of God. For God, as the creator of all things, knows our nature thoroughly, and has ordered all things for our benefit; and He has laid down laws that accord with our nature and are not alien to it, even though they are not capable of leading to perfection those who voluntarily aspire to attain God in a way that transcends nature. For that requires the more than natural

qualities of virginity, deliberate poverty, humility--not of gratitude, for this is natural. Humility is more than natural, since the humble man pursues every virtue and, though not a debtor, he regards himself as the greatest debtor of all. The grateful person, on the other hand, will simply acknowledge the debt he owes. Similarly, the merciful man who performs his acts of charity by drawing on his possessions remains within the bonds of nature is saved if he abandons his own will and fulfills that of God; but to the person who transcends these bounds God will give the crown of endurance and glory, because he has renounced not only what is forbidden by the law but also, with God's help, his own nature. He loves the supranatural God with all his soul and imitates His dispassion with all his strength.

Yet since we are ignorant not merely of ourselves and of what we do, but also of the purpose of what is done and of the true goal of everything, the divine Scriptures and the words of the saints, whether prophets and righteous men of old or more recent holy fathers, appear to us to be contradictory. Those who wish to be saved appear to disagree with one another. But in reality this is not the case.

Briefly, we may say that in the nature of things, if someone wants to be saved, no person and no time, place or occupation can prevent him. He must not, however, act contrary to the objective that he has in view, but must with discrimination refer every thought to the divine purpose. These do not happen out of necessity: they depend upon the person through whom they happen. We do not sin against our will, but we first assent to an evil thought and so fall into captivity. Then the thought itself carries the captive forcibly and against his wishes into sin. The same is true of sins that occur through ignorance: they arise from sins consciously committed. For unless a man is drunk with either wine or desire, he is not unaware of what he is doing; but such drunkenness obscures the intellect and so it falls, and dies as a result. Yet that death has not come about inexplicably: it has been unwittingly induced by the drunkenness to which we consciously assented. We will find many instances, especially in our thoughts, where we fall from what is within our control to what is outside it., and from what we are consciously aware of to what is unwitting. But because the first appears unimportant and attractive, we slip unintentionally and unawares into the second. Yet if from the start we

had wanted to keep the commandments and to remain as we were when baptized, we would not have fallen into so many sins or have needed the trials and tribulations of repentance.

If we so wish, God's second gift of grace--repentance--can lead us back to our former beauty. But if we fail to repent, inevitably we will depart with the unrepentant demons into a long punishment, more by our own free choice than against our will. Yet, God did not create us for wrath but for salvation (cf. Thess. 5:9), so that we might enjoy His blessings; and we should therefore be thankful and grateful towards our Benefactor. But our failure to get to know His gifts has made us indolent, and indolence has made us forgetful, with the result that ignorance lords it over us.

We have to make strenuous efforts when we first try to return to where we fell from. For we resent abandoning our own desires, and we think that we can carry out both God's wishes and our own which is impossible. Our Lord Himself said, 'I have come to do, not My own will, but the will of the Father who sent Me' (cf. John 6:38), even though the will of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one, since they constitute a single inseparable nature. But He said this on our account and with respect to the will of the flesh. For if the flesh is not consumed and if a man is not wholly led by the Spirit of God, he will not do the will of God unless he is forced to. But when the grace of the Spirit rules within him, then he no longer has a will of his own, but whatever he does is according to God's will. Then he is at peace. Men like that will be called sons of God (cf. Matt. 5:9), because they will the will of their Father, as did the Son of God who is also God.

Yet it is impossible to discover the will of God unless we keep the commandments, thereby cutting off all pleasure or personal will, and unless we endure all the pain that this involves. As has been said, pleasure and pain are born of folly, and they give rise to all evil. For the foolish man loves himself and cannot love his brother or God; he can neither refrain from pleasure or from the desires that give him satisfaction, nor can he endure pain. Sometimes he gets what he wants, and then he is filled with pleasure and elation; sometimes he does not get it and, completely dominated by the pain which this engenders, he is cast down and dejected, experiencing a foretaste of

hell.

From knowledge, or understanding, is born self-control and patient endurance. For the man of understanding restrains his own will and endures the resulting pain; and, regarding himself as unworthy of anything pleasant, he is grateful and thankful to his Benefactor, fearing lest because of the many blessings that God has given him in this world he should suffer punishment in the world to come. Thus through self-control he practices the other virtues as well. He looks on himself as in God's debt for everything, finding nothing whatsoever with which to repay to his Benefactor, and even thinking that his virtues simply increase his debt. For he receives and has nothing to give. He only asks that he may be allowed to offer thanks to God. Yet even the fact that God accepts his thanks puts him, so he thinks, into still greater debt. But he continues to give thanks, ever doing what is good and reckoning himself an ever greater debtor, in his humility considering himself lower than all men, delighting in God his Benefactor and trembling even as he rejoices (cf. Ps. 2:11).

As he advances through this humility towards divine and unfailing love, he accepts sufferings as though he deserved them. Indeed, he things he deserves more suffering than he encounters; and he is glad that he has been granted some affliction in this world, since through it he may be spared a portion of the punishments which he has prepared for himself in the world to be. And because in all this he knows his own weakness, and that he should not exult, and because he has been found worthy of knowing and enduring these things by the grace of God, he is filled with a strong longing for God.

Humility is born of spiritual knowledge, and such knowledge is born of trials and temptations. To the person who knows himself is given knowledge of all things, and he who subjects himself to God brings every material thought under his control; and then all things are subject to him, for he is completely humble. According to St. Basil and St. Gregory, he who knows himself—who knows, that is to say, that he stands midway between nobility and baseness, in that he has a soul capable of spiritual knowledge and a mortal, earthly body—never exults or despairs. Rather, with a feeling of shame before his noetic soul he rejects everything shameful and, knowing his weakness, he shrinks

from all sense of elation.

Thus he who knows his own weakness as a result of the many temptations and trials that he undergoes through the passions of soul and body, understands the measureless power of God and how he redeems the humble who cry out to Him through persistent prayer from the depths of their hearts. For such a person prayer becomes a delight. For such a person prayer becomes a delight. He knows that without God he can do nothing (cf. John 15:5), and in his fear lest he fall he strives to cleave to God and is amazed as he considers how God has rescued him from so many temptations and passions. He gives thanks to his Saviour, and to his temptations and passions. He gives thanks to his Saviour, and to his thanksgiving he adds humility and love; and he does not dare to judge anyone, knowing that as God has helped him, so He can help all men when He wishes, as St. Maximos says. He knows, too, that if a person realizes his weakness he may be able to fight and conquer many passions; for in such a case God swiftly comes to his assistance, lest his soul be utterly destroyed. And for many other reasons as well the person who recognizes his own weakness does not fall. No one can attain this recognition unless he first suffers many temptations of soul and body, and gains experience by enduring them patiently and so overcoming them with God's strength.

Such a man does not dare to act according to his own volition or to depend on his own ideas without first questioning those with experience. For what does a person gain by choosing to do or to think something that does not contribute to his bodily life or to the salvation of his soul? And if he does not know what wish he should abandon and what thought he should put aside, let him test every action and every thought by holding back from it with self-control and by seeing how that affects him. If its realization brings pleasure, but resisting it brings pain, then it is something bad and he should reject it before it takes root; otherwise he will find it hard to overcome it later, when he sees what damage it does. This applies to every action or thought which does not help us to keep ourselves alive and to conform to God's will. For a long-standing habit assumes the strength of nature; but if you do not give way to it, it loses strength and is gradually destroyed. Whether a habit is good or bad, time nourishes it, just as wood feeds a fire. Thus, so far as we can, we should cultivate and practice what is good, so that it becomes an established habit

operating automatically and effortlessly when required. It was through victories in small things that the fathers won their great battles.

For if a man refuses to satisfy even the basic needs of the body, but rejects them in order to travel along the strait and narrow road, how can he ever fall victim to the love of possessions? Love of possessions consists not merely in owning many things, but also in attachment to them, or in their misuse or excessive use. For many of the saints of old, such as Abraham, Job, David and many others, had extensive possessions, but they were not attached to them: they held them as a gift from God and sought to please Him all the more through their use of them. nevertheless the Lord, being beyond perfection and being wisdom itself, strikes at the root: for He urges those who would follow Him through the imitation of supreme virtue to renounce not only material goods or possessions, but even their own soul (cf. Luke 14:26), that is to say, their own thoughts and will.

Because they knew this, the fathers fled from the world as a hindrance to perfection; and not only from the world but also from their own will for the same reason. No one of them ever did what he himself every wanted. Some lived in bodily obedience, so that in the place of Christ they would have a spiritual father guiding their every thought. Others, fleeing totally from human society, lived in the desert and had God himself as their teacher, for whose sake they chose to undergo a voluntary death. Others pursued the 'royal way', leading a life of silence with one or two companions: these had one another a counsellors in doing God's will. And those who, after being subject to a spiritual father, were then appointed by him to take charge of other brethren, carried out the task as if they were themselves still under obedience, keeping the traditions of their own spiritual fathers. Thus all their efforts were blessed by God.

Nowadays, however, whether we are under obedience or in authority, we are not willing to abandon our own will, and so none of us makes any progress. None the less, it is still possible to escape from human society and from worldly affairs, and to take the 'royal way' through living the life of stillness with one or two others, studying the commandments of Christ and all the Scriptures day and night. By this means, through being tested in all things by

our conscience and application, by reading and by prayer, we may perhaps attain the first commandment, the fear of God, which comes through faith and the study of the Holy Scriptures; and through this we may achieve inward grief, and so arrive at the commandments of which St. Paul spoke: faith, hope and love (cf. 1 Cor. 13:13). For he who has faith in the Lord fears chastisement: and this fear prompts him to keep the commandments. The keeping of the commandments leads him to endure affliction; and the enduring of affliction produces hope in God. Such hope separates the intellect from all material attachment and the person freed from such attachment possesses love for God. Whoever follows this sequence will be saved.

Stillness, which is the basis of the soul's purification, makes the observance of the commandments relatively painless. 'Flee,' it has been said, 'keep silence, be still, for herein lie the roots of sinlessness.' Again it has been said: 'Flee men and you will be saved.' For human society does not permit the intellect to perceive either its own faults or the wiles of the demons, so as to guard itself against them. Nor, on the other hand, does it allow the intellect to perceive God's providence and bounty, so as to acquire in this way knowledge of God and humility.

That is why whoever wishes to travel the shortest road to Christ--the road of dispassion and spiritual knowledge--and joyfully to attain perfection, should not turn either to the right or to the left, but in his whole way of life should journey diligently along the royal way. He should steer a middle course between excess and insufficiency, as both engender pleasure. He should not obscure the intellect with excessive food and conviviality, making himself blind through such distractions; but neither should he cloud his mind through prolonged fasts and vigils. Rather, he should carefully and patiently practice the seven forms of bodily discipline as though climbing a ladder, mastering them once and for all and advancing towards that moral state in which, as the Lord has said (cf. Matt. 13:11-12), by God's grace the different stages of spiritual contemplation are given to the believer.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16), and no one can thwart someone who wishes to be saved. Only God who made us has power over us, and He is ready to help and protect from every temptation those who

cry out to Him and want to do His holy will. Without Him we can do nothing (cf. John 15:5): we cannot even suffer evil against our own will unless God permits it in order to chastise us and save our souls. But the evil that we commit ourselves is our own responsibility and arises from our own laziness with the help of the demons. On the other hand, all knowledge, strength and virtue are the grace of God as are all other things. And through grace He has given all men the power to become sons of God, since without His grace we cannot keep them. We have nothing to offer Him except our faith, our resolution, and in brief, all the true dogmas that we hold with firm faith through the teaching we have heard (cf. Rom. 10:17). With all this in mind, let us set to work undistractedly, as though beginning lessons at school, and in this way carefully learn about the seven forms of discipline to which we have referred.

[Note: this treatise continues on pages 89-281 of the **Philokalia, Vol. 3**, discussing these and other concepts in much greater detail.]