

LOVE AND ITS MEANING IN THE WORLD

A lecture by Rudolf Steiner in 1912

WHEN we say that at the present point of time in his evolution man must learn to understand the Christ Impulse, the thought may well occur: What, then, is the position of one who has never heard of the Christ Impulse, may perhaps never even have heard the name of Christ? Will such a man be deprived of the Christ Impulse because he has not heard the name of Christ? Is it necessary to have some theoretical knowledge of the Christ Impulse in order that Christ's power may flow into the soul? We will clarify our minds about these questions by the following thoughts concerning human life from birth until death.

The human being comes into the world and lives through early childhood in a half-sleeping state. He has gradually to learn to feel himself as an "I", to find his bearings as an "I", and his life of soul is constantly enriched by what is received through the "I". By the time death is approaching, this life of soul is at its richest and ripest. Hence the vital question arises: What of our life of soul when the body falls away? It is a peculiarity of our physical life and of our life of soul that the wealth of our experience and knowledge increases in significance the nearer we approach death; but at the same time certain attributes are lost and replaced by others of an entirely different character. In youth we gather knowledge, pass through experiences, and cherish hopes which as a rule can only later be fulfilled. The older we grow, the more do we begin to love the wisdom revealed by life. Love of wisdom is not egoistic, for this love increases in the measure in which we draw near to death; it increases in the measure in which the expectation of gaining something from our wisdom decreases. Our love for this content of our soul steadily increases. In this respect Spiritual Science may actually become a source of temptation, inasmuch as a man may be led to believe that his next life will depend upon the acquisition of wisdom in this present life. The effect of Spiritual Science may be an extension of egoism beyond the bounds of this present life, and therein lies danger. Thus if wrongly understood, Spiritual Science may act as a tempter — this lies in its very nature.

Love of the wisdom acquired from life may be compared with the flowering of a plant when the necessary stage of maturity has been reached. Love arises for something that is contained within ourselves. Men have often made the attempt to sublimate the impulse of love for what is within themselves. In the Mystics, for example, we find evidence of how they strove to transmute the urge of self-love into love of wisdom, and to let this love ray out in beauty. By sinking in contemplation into the depths of their own soul-life they strove to become aware of the Divine Spark within them. But the truth is that the wisdom which man acquires in life is only the means whereby the seed of his next life is unfolded. When a plant has completed its growth through the year, the seed remains. So it is with the wisdom acquired from life. Man passes through the Gate of Death and the spiritual core of being in its process of ripening is the seed of the next life. A man who feels this may become a Mystic and mistake what is only the seed of the next life to be the Divine Spark, the Absolute. This is his interpretation of it because it goes against the grain for a man to acknowledge that this spirit-seed is nothing but his own self. Meister Eckhart, John Tauler, and others, spoke of it as the "God within", because they knew nothing of reincarnation. If we grasp the meaning of the law of reincarnation we recognize the significance of love in the world, both in a particular and in a general sense. When we speak of karma, we mean that which as cause in the one life has its effect in the next. In terms of cause and effect we

cannot, however, speak truly of love; we cannot speak of a deed of love and its eventual compensation. True, if there is a deed, there will be compensation, but this has nothing to do with love. Deeds of love do not look for compensation in the next life.

Suppose, for example, that we work and our work brings gain. It may also be that our work gives us no joy because we do it simply in order to pay off debts, not for actual reward. We can imagine that in this way a man has already spent what he is now earning through his work. He would prefer to have no debts, but as things are, he is obliged to work in order to pay them. Now let us apply this example to our actions in general. By everything we do out of love we pay off debts. From an occult point of view, what is done out of love brings no reward but makes amends for profit already expended. The only actions from which we have nothing in the future are those we perform out of true, genuine love. This truth may well be disquieting and men are lucky in that they know nothing of it in their upper consciousness. But in their sub-consciousness all of them know it, and that is why deeds of love are done so unwillingly, why there is so little love in the world. Men feel instinctively that they may expect nothing for their "I" in the future from deeds of love. An advanced stage of development must have been reached before the soul can experience joy in performing deeds of love from which there is nothing to be gained for itself. The impulse for this is not strong in humanity. But occultism can be a source of powerful incentives to deeds of love.

Our egoism gains nothing from deeds of love — but the world all the more. Occultism says: Love is for the world what the sun is for external life. No soul could thrive if love departed from the world. Love is the "moral" sun of the world. Would it not be absurd if a man who delights in the flowers growing in a meadow were to wish that the sun would vanish from the world? Translated into terms of the moral life, this means: Our deep concern must be that an impulse for sound, healthy development shall find its way into the affairs of humanity. To disseminate love over the earth in the greatest measure possible, to promote love on the earth — that and that alone is wisdom.

What do we learn from Spiritual Science? We learn facts concerning the evolution of the earth, we hear of the Spirit of the earth, of the earth's surface and its changing conditions, of the development of the human body and so forth; we learn to understand the nature of the forces working and weaving in the evolutionary process. What does this mean? What does it mean when people do not want to know anything about Spiritual Science? It means that they have no interest for what is reality. For if a man has no desire to know anything about the nature of Old Saturn, Old Sun, Old Moon, then he can know nothing about the Earth. Lack of interest in the world is egoism in its grossest form. Interest in all existence is man's bounden duty. Let us therefore long for and love the sun with its creative power, its love for the well-being of the earth and the souls of men! This interest in the earth's evolution should be the spiritual seed of love for the world. A Spiritual Science without love would be a danger to mankind. But love should not be a matter for preaching; love must and indeed will come into the world through the spreading of knowledge of spiritual truths. Deeds of love and Spiritual Science should be inseparably united.

Love mediated by way of the senses is the wellspring of creative power, of that which is coming into being. Without sense-born love, nothing material would exist in the world; without spiritual love, nothing spiritual can arise in evolution. When we practice love, cultivate love, creative forces pour into the world. Can the intellect be expected to offer reasons for this? The creative forces poured into the

world before we ourselves and our intellect came into being. True, as egoists, we can deprive the future of creative forces; but we cannot obliterate the deeds of love and the creative forces of the past. We owe our existence to deeds of love wrought in the past. The strength with which we have been endowed by these deeds of love is the measure of our deep debt to the past, and whatever love we may at any time be able to bring forth is payment of debts owed for our existence. In the light of this knowledge we shall be able to understand the deeds of a man who has reached a high stage of development, for he has still greater debts to pay to the past. He pays his debts through deeds of love, and herein lies his wisdom. The higher the stage of development reached by a man, the more does the impulse of love in him increase in strength; wisdom alone does not suffice.

Let us think of the meaning and effect of love in the world in the following way. Love is always a reminder of debts owed to life in the past, and because we gain nothing for the future by paying off these debts, no profit for ourselves accrues from our deeds of love. We have to leave our deeds of love behind in the world; but they are then a spiritual factor in the how of world-happenings. It is not through our deeds of love but through deeds of a different character that we perfect ourselves; yet the world is richer for our deeds of love. Love is the creative force in the world.

Besides love there are two other powers in the world. How do they compare with love? The one is strength, might; the second is wisdom. In regard to strength or might we can speak of degrees: weaker, stronger, or absolute might — omnipotence. The same applies to wisdom, for there are stages on the path to omniscience. It will not do to speak in the same way of degrees of love. What is universal love, love for all beings? In the case of love we cannot speak of enhancement as we can speak of enhancement of knowledge into omniscience or of might into omnipotence, by virtue of which we attain greater perfection of our own being. Love for a few or for many beings has nothing to do with our own perfecting. Love for everything that lives cannot be compared with omnipotence; the concept of magnitude, or of enhancement, cannot rightly be applied to love. Can the attribute of omnipotence be ascribed to the Divine Being who lives and weaves through the world? Contentions born of feeling must here be silent: were God omnipotent, he would be responsible for everything that happens and there could be no human freedom. If man can be free, then certainly there can be no Divine omnipotence.

Is the Godhead omniscient? As man's highest goal is likeness to God, our striving must be in the direction of omniscience. Is omniscience, then, the supreme treasure? If it is, a vast chasm must forever yawn between man and God. At every moment man would have to be aware of this chasm if God possessed the supreme treasure of omniscience for himself and withheld it from man. The all-encompassing attribute of the Godhead is not omnipotence, neither is omniscience, but it is love — the attribute in respect of which no enhancement is possible. God is uttermost love, unalloyed love, is born as it were out of love, is the very substance and essence of love. God is pure love, not supreme wisdom, not supreme might. God has retained love for himself but has shared wisdom and might with Lucifer and Ahriman. He has shared wisdom with Lucifer and might with Ahriman, in order that man may become free, in order that under the influence of wisdom he may make progress.

If we try to discover the source of whatever is creative we come to love; love is the ground, the foundation of everything that lives. It is by a different impulse in evolution that beings are led to become wiser and more powerful. Progress is attained through wisdom and strength. Study of the

course taken by the evolution of humanity shows us how the development of wisdom and strength is subject to change: there is progressive evolution and then the Christ Impulse which once poured into mankind through the Mystery of Golgotha. Love did not, therefore, come into the world by degrees; love streamed into mankind as a gift of the Godhead, in complete, perfect wholeness. But man can receive the Impulse into himself gradually. The Divine Impulse of love as we need it in earthly life is an Impulse that came once and forever.

True love is not capable of diminution or amplification. Its nature is quite different from that of wisdom and might. Love wakens no expectations for the future; it is payment of debts incurred in the past. And such was the Mystery of Golgotha in the world's evolution. Did the Godhead, then, owe any debt to humanity?

Lucifer's influence brought into humanity a certain element in consequence of which something that man had previously possessed was withdrawn from him. This new element led to a descent, a descent countered by the Mystery of Golgotha which made possible the payment of all debts. The Impulse of Golgotha was not given in order that the sins we have committed in evolution may be removed from us, but in order that what crept into humanity through Lucifer should be given its counterweight.

Let us imagine that there is a man who knows nothing of the name of Christ Jesus, nothing of what is communicated in the Gospels, but that he understands the radical difference between the nature of wisdom and might and that of love. Such a man, even though he knows nothing of the Mystery of Golgotha, is a Christian in the truest sense. A man who knows that love is there for the paying of debts and brings no profit for the future, is a true Christian. To understand the nature of love — that is to be a Christian! Theosophy (see Note 1) alone, Spiritual Science alone, with its teachings of Karma and reincarnation, can make us into great egoists unless the impulse of love, the Christ Impulse, is added; only so can we acquire the power to overcome the egoism that may be generated by Spiritual Science. The balance is established by an understanding of the Christ Impulse. Spiritual Science is given to the world today because it is a necessity for humanity; but in it lies the great danger that — if it is cultivated without the Christ Impulse, without the Impulse of love — men will only increase their egoism, will actually breed egoism that lasts even beyond death. From this the conclusion must not be drawn that we should not cultivate Spiritual Science; rather we must learn to realize that understanding of the essential nature of love is an integral part of it.

What actually came to pass at the Mystery of Golgotha? Jesus of Nazareth was born, lived on as related by the Gospels, and when He was thirty years old the Baptism in the Jordan took place. Thereafter the Christ lived for three years in the body of Jesus of Nazareth and fulfilled the Mystery of Golgotha. Many people think that the Mystery of Golgotha should be regarded in an entirely human aspect, believing as they do that it was an earthly deed, a deed belonging to the realm of the earth. But that is not so. Only from the vantage-point of the higher worlds is it possible to see the Mystery of Golgotha in its true light and how it came to pass on the earth.

Let us think again of the beginning of the evolution of the earth and of man. Man was endowed with certain spiritual powers — and then Lucifer approached him. At this point we can say: The Gods who further the progress of evolution surrendered their omnipotence to Lucifer in order that man might become free. But man sank into matter more deeply than was intended; he slipped away from the Gods

of progress, fell more deeply than had been wished. How, then, can the Gods of progress draw man to themselves again? To understand this we must think, not of the earth, but of Gods taking counsel together. It is for the Gods that Christ performs the Deed by which men are drawn back to the Gods. Lucifer's deed was enacted in the supersensible world; Christ's Deed, too, was enacted in the supersensible but also in the physical world. This was an achievement beyond the power of any human being. Lucifer's deed was a deed belonging to the supersensible world. But Christ came down to the earth to perform His Deed here, and men are the onlookers at this Deed. The Mystery of Golgotha is a Deed of the Gods, a concern of the Gods at which men are the onlookers. The door of heaven opens and a Deed of the Gods shines through. This is the one and only Deed on earth that is entirely supersensible. No wonder, therefore, that those who do not believe in the supersensible have no belief in the Deed of Christ. The Deed of Christ is a Deed of the Gods, a Deed which they themselves enact. Herein lies the glory and the unique significance of the Mystery of Golgotha and men are invited to be its witnesses. Historical evidence is not to be found. Men have seen the event in its external aspect only; but the Gospels were written from vision of the supersensible and are therefore easily disavowed by those who have no feeling for supersensible reality.

The Mystery of Golgotha as an accomplished fact is one of the most sublime of all experiences in the spiritual world. Lucifer's deed belongs to a time when man was still aware of his own participation in the supersensible world; Christ's Deed was performed in material existence itself — it is both a physical and a spiritual Deed. We can understand the deed of Lucifer through wisdom; understanding of the Mystery of Golgotha is beyond the reach of wisdom alone. Even if all the wisdom of this world is ours, the Deed of Christ may still be beyond our comprehension. Love is essential for any understanding of the Mystery of Golgotha. Only when love streams into wisdom and then again wisdom flows into love will it be possible to grasp the nature and meaning of the Mystery of Golgotha — only when, as he lives on towards death, man unfolds love of wisdom. Love united with wisdom — that is what we need when we pass through the Gate of Death, because without wisdom that is united with love we die in very truth. Philo-sophía, philosophy, is love of wisdom. The ancient wisdom was not philosophy for it was not born through love but through revelation. There is not such a thing as philosophy of the East — but wisdom of the East, yes. Philosophy as love of wisdom came into the world with Christ; there we have the entry of wisdom emanating from the impulse of love which came into the world as the Christ Impulse. The impulse of love must now be carried into effect in wisdom itself.

The ancient wisdom, acquired by the seer through revelation, comes to expression in the sublime words from the original prayer of mankind: *Ex Deo Nascimur* — Out of God we are born. That is ancient wisdom. Christ who came forth from the realms of spirit has united wisdom with love and this love will overcome egoism. Such is its aim. But it must be offered independently and freely from one being to the other. Hence the beginning of the era of love coincided with that of the era of egoism. The cosmos has its source and origin in love; egoism was the natural and inevitable offshoot of love. Yet with time the Christ Impulse, the impulse of love, will overcome the element of separation that has crept into the world, and man can gradually become a participant in this force of love. In monumental words of Christ we feel love pouring into the hearts of men:

“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

In like manner does the ancient Rosicrucian saying resound into the love that is wedded with wisdom: In Christo Morimur — In Christ we die.

Through Jehovah, man was predestined for a group-soul existence; love was to penetrate into him gradually by way of blood-relationship; it is through Lucifer that he lives as a personality. Originally, therefore, men were in a state of union, then of separateness as a consequence of the Luciferic principle which promotes selfishness, independence. Together with selfishness, evil came into the world. It had to be so, because without the evil man could not lay hold of the good. When a man gains victory over himself, the unfolding of love is possible. To man in the clutches of increasing egoism, Christ brought the impulse for this victory over himself and thereby the power to conquer the evil. The Deeds of Christ bring together again those human beings who were separated through egoism and selfishness. True in the very deepest sense are the words of Christ concerning deeds of love:

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

The Divine Deed of Love flowed back upon the earthly world; as time goes on, in spite of the forces of physical decay and death, the evolution of mankind will be permeated and imbued with new spiritual life through this Deed — a Deed performed, not out of egoism but solely out of the spirit of love. Per Spiritum Sanctum Reviviscimus — Through the Holy Spirit we live again.

Yet the future of humanity will consist of something besides love. Spiritual perfecting will be for earthly man the goal most worthy of aspiration — (this is described at the beginning of my second Mystery Play, *The Soul's Probation*) — but nobody who understands what deeds of love truly are will say that his own striving for perfection is selfless. Striving for perfection imparts strength to our being and to our personality. But our value for the world must be seen to lie wholly in deeds of love, not in deeds done for the sake of self-perfecting. Let us be under no illusion about this. When a man is endeavoring to follow Christ by way of love of wisdom, of the wisdom he dedicates to the service of the world only so much takes real effect as is filled with love.

Wisdom steeped in love, which at once furthers the world and leads the world to Christ — this love of wisdom also excludes the lie. For the lie is the direct opposite of the actual facts and those who yield themselves lovingly to the facts are incapable of lying. The lie has its roots in egoism — always and without exception. When, through love, we have found the path to wisdom, we reach wisdom through the increasing power of self-conquest, through selfless love. Thus does man become a free personality. The evil was the sub-soil into which the light of love was able to shine; but it is love that enables us to grasp the meaning and place of evil in the world. The darkness has enabled the light to come into our ken. Only a man who is free in the real sense can become a true Christian.