

The Ministry of Pain, The Meaning of Sorrow, and the Hope of the World

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THE idea of the eternal and universal reign of law has hardly yet dawned on the average understanding of man. Law may indeed be called the slogan of modern physical science, yet the great majority of so-called scientists no sooner predicate the universality of law, than they limit the universe to matter and its phenomenal display. The idea of Being without phenomenal display is not only denied, but it is regarded in many places as an impossible concept, born only of the wildest fancy. It thus transpires that what is gained in one direction by the recognition of law and its display outwardly as effects, is lost in another direction by limiting the universal display to sense and time. This is equivalent to saying, "lop off one half the universe and we will admit the reign of law in the balance". Theology, on the other hand, postulates the absolute, and at once proceeds to limit and define it! The result of all this intellectual juggling, is the bewildering of man and the discouragement and despair of human life. Between the vagaries of blind faith, and the blasting negations of materialism, dense darkness reigns.

It thus transpires that pain and sorrow are borne by the great majority of mankind with piteous complaint, with mute stolidity, or with impatient resentment. The meaning of life is thus far from comprehension, and the evils keep pace with the progress of civilization.

Even where it is vaguely apprehended that ignorance is the cause of misery, education seldom mitigates the misery because of misdirected efforts equally based on ignorance. Man is thus involved in sorrow as in the meshes of a net, unable to extricate himself or to materially help his fellow-men.

The result of all this bewilderment is the almost universal determination to get rid of pain and sorrow at any cost, and this dread of pain and fear of sorrow, more than anything else, ministers to the selfishness of man.

It is true that a charitable impulse born of common suffering and common sympathy, builds hospitals and asylums for the more unfortunate of earth's benighted millions. This, however, commendable as it is under the circumstances, is, after all, an effort to save individuals from the consequences of sin and ignorance, while these very consequences steadily increase. We thus neither prevent nor cure the misery of man. [Page 2]

Strange to say, our religion has fallen into the same slough of despond. Powerless to prevent sin or materially to benefit the masses of human beings, it undertakes to atone for evils which it is powerless to

prevent, and to remove consequences otherwise accruing in another world, which it regards hopelessly in this as due to the sin of Adam or to innate depravity. It would indeed be difficult to imagine human beings as more hopelessly bewildered.

There is no use in calling this a pessimistic view of things, and in trying to deceive ourselves by "whistling to keep our courage up". The fortunate few may thus amuse themselves while the great hungry, discontented masses mourn and lament, or growl with ominous portent at the evident injustice and inequalities of life. The records of the daily press consist largely of murders, suicides, and of crimes and casualties in every form.

Pessimism does not consist in a truthful statement of facts, nor does optimism consist in a disregard or falsification of the existing state of society. All true philosophy undertakes first, to apprehend facts, from which it seeks to comprehend both causes and results. After this, the view we take may be pessimistic or optimistic, discouraging or hopeful, according to the apparent possibility of change and improvement.

Whether or not people yet believe or apprehend the fact, the present Theosophical Society is the World's Educator. This function in no wise pertains to individuals or to the organization, as such, but to those eternal principles of truth and justice, which it is the delegated office of the Society to bear to the world. It does not in the least militate against this fact that but comparatively few persons yet apprehend it, or that it is misrepresented and reviled. No one in the society, who has intelligently apprehended and loyally laboured for its declared objects, will be in the slightest degree influenced by such considerations. Theosophists have conceived it as their mission to preach, and by all timely and just methods to promulgate these transcendent truths, whether people will hear or forbear. With results they have nothing whatever to do. The duty of another concerns them not. The first law relating to all action and involving the whole question of pain and sorrow, begins just here in the reform of individual life, by elevating human motive, and purifying all our ideals.

The task set the society is easy, owing to the desperate needs of man, the fullness of time, and the all-sufficient remedy.

The task undertaken by the individual is indeed tremendous and appalling; for he must relinquish all his selfishness, and flee from the outer darkness that encompasses him, to the inner light that redeems and soars.

It is difficult to realize to what depths of degradation the religions of the world have descended. For centuries their spiritual life waned, and thick excrescences gathered in creeds till superstition like a grinning [Page 3] mask concealed the skeleton or the corpse whence all spirit and life had departed. Descending step by step into materialism, religion is being slowly but surely devoured by the very genius it has invoked. To doubt the existence of the devil was considered to be as wicked as to deny the existence of God. The "scheme of salvation" being once broken, only disjointed fragments of the former superstructure remain, and though the blind or superstitious devotees fight valiantly for these fragments, as over the body and sepulchre of its dead Lord, they make no effort to recover or to reconstruct a religious philosophy or a philosophy of religion and of life.

The ideal divinity of a great majority of Christians is a being half angel half fiend, to be propitiated by flattery, burnt-offerings or the shedding of blood. The motive for right conduct is held to be the desire to avoid pain and secure happiness. The ruler of the universe is thus an Infinite Caprice, capable of both revenge and favoritism. The god of the populace is bound to "get even" with the sinner, *i.e.*, those who neglect or refuse to praise him, and to show favour "to those who worship him".

Of what avail is the concept of law in the presence of universal caprice ?

The idea of Karma cannot be engrafted on this old stock of ignorance and superstition. Such a hybrid would be for ever barren of good results. The idea that the forgiveness of sin is in any way beneficent, and that unearned blessings are really blessings at all, will never fit in with the law of Karma. Both these ideas equally subvert the idea of exact and equal justice. That which is to be received, be it good or bad, pleasure or pain, must first be earned by conscious effort and deliberate choice; and being thus earned, it is beyond caprice, revenge, or favour. It is more the law of just compensation that leaves no room for anything else.

The result of these false conceptions, so far as they influence human action, is but to increase the sum of human misery, and still further the bewilderment of the soul of man.

The crying need of man everywhere is a knowledge of his own nature, and of the real meaning of human life. This knowledge must be based on the correct apprehension of the unalterable laws governing the universe, and followed by strict obedience to these laws in order to avoid pain and sorrow.

All speculations regarding the nature of deity and the origin of the laws of nature are worse than useless. The finite cannot comprehend the infinite, and yet the human mind reasoning logically from analogy, may conceive of a First Cause destitute of qualities, yet containing, upholding and governing all things. What we designate as law may be conceived as the "*method*" of creation; the relation of hearts; the orderly sequence of [Page 4] nature. The human mind may reason back from the phenomena of nature and the facts of consciousness to the First Cause, and the laws by which it operates. Beyond this all speculation is useless; nay, it is pernicious. While we can know nothing of the *nature* of Deity, or the origin of the laws of nature, the *relations* of Deity and law to phenomenal nature and to individual consciousness may be known.

It would indeed be instructive to consider the absurdities and the real evils that have resulted from the idea of a personal God, from trying to endow the Infinite Cause with finite attributes. If the nature of the First Cause be forever to us unknowable, and if the *relations* of this Cause to phenomenal Nature may be known, then it follows that to assign qualities and definite personalities to Deity prevents a knowledge of true relations that may be known, and at the same time involves us in the meshes of ignorance from the assumption of qualities, limitations, and attributes, concerning which we neither know nor can know anything. This is the meaning of man's idea of a Personal God. It is not only an absurdity, it is positively pernicious, and more than anything else the cause of bewilderment. If we add to this man's ignorance of nature and of his own being we have at once the cause of pain and sorrow. Ignorance of the true and the assumption of the false have thus bewildered the soul of man, and nothing but a knowledge of the true, getting rid of the false, and obedience to law, can lead to enlightenment and real happiness.

The reasoning mind need have no difficulty whatever in discerning an orderly sequence in Nature. Nothing comes by chance; all is under the dominion of law. Confusion reigns in man alone, and hence he suffers and mourns. Man's capricious will is at war with the beneficent reign of law and the orderly sequence of Nature; hence he suffers pain and sorrow. But even here man's confusion and caprice are powerless to take him from under the dominion of law. Soon or late, man must obey the law or *cease to be*. Nature never compromises, never forgets, never forgives. Everywhere the solemn mandate has gone forth, — "Not one jot or tittle shall pass away till all be fulfilled".

Those who entertain the idea of a personal God, are often heard to say that God is just. We might, indeed say that God is justice; that is, that justice is the method of law in relation to the universe. Justice as a universal relation of parts, as the invariable law of action, including the act, the actor, and the result of action, is far removed from the idea of justice as an attribute of a personal Deity, who could also be capricious.

Again, it is said — God is merciful; but mercy, as a personal attribute, pre-supposes also the opposite attribute of revenge. If ye forgive not your brother his trespasses, how shall your Heavenly Father forgive you? In other words, he who is forgiving and merciful needs himself neither forgiveness [Page 5] nor mercy. It is because we are *unforgiving* and *unmerciful*, that we seek forgiveness and mercy, and no true religion has ever promised forgiveness and mercy except to those who exhibit both in their lives. Their "forgiveness" consists in ceasing to do evil. The theological "scheme", however, has led man to expect reward without merit, and to escape punishment justly deserved. This is the height of injustice.

It may thus be seen how both ignorant and designing men have juggled with the concept of law and the principle of justice.

It is said that order or harmony is heaven's first law. Order is impossible without inflexible and eternal justice, and yet it is this very justice that has been conceived as capable of being bribed or cajoled on the one hand, to allow the unjust sinner to escape punishment; and on the other, to mete out the direst hatred and the diabolism of "eternal damnation" for the most trivial offences. What indeed is this but diabolical caprice? Justice it certainly is not.

The idea that Justice is blind, that her eyes must be put out to prevent her from cheating, is worthy of the same "*theologia*". Justice is rather open-eyed, vigilant, exact to the last poor scruple. Justice never sleeps, never tires, and is the most exact bookkeeper in the universe. To her belong both time and eternity; past, present, and future. Justice is not really a law, she is the executor of all law, and without her cosmos would instantly become chaos.

Justice is no more a human or a divine attribute than it is an attribute of nature. Nothing but the densest ignorance could have involved man in such misconceptions of Justice. Justice is the natural and orderly relation of things. This Divine messenger, this executor of law follows all processes, leads all motions from the dawn of creation to the crack of doom. It leads creation forth to the outermost verge, and leads it back to the sleep of Brahm; never missing an atom, never disturbing the harmony of the "morning stars". It seems indeed strange that man can look at Nature in any of her moods and fail to discern this Charioteer of Cosmos. It is seen in every atom that clasps hands with its fellow atoms: in every element

that enters into a compound: in every crystal that reflects the light and glistens in the sun. Without justice determining law and proportion, there could be no form, no colour, no weight, no measure, no motion, no action, no rhythm, no harmony, no life.

I have dwelt thus on this principle of justice, because it is so generally over-looked, so universally misconceived, and so all-potent.

Now, does it stand to reason that so important a principle everywhere manifest in Nature, should be absent in the life of man, or be displaced by chance or caprice, either finite or infinite ?

This principle, without variableness or shadow of turning applied to man [Page 6] as an *acting* being reveals the *Law of Karma*. Karma is the law of action; action implies change; change involves relations, and all relations change and action follow the principle of justice. Justice is neither moral, ethical, physical, intellectual, material or spiritual; for it lies above, beneath, around, and permeates all of these at once.

Justice is everywhere, at all times, and under all circumstances. Justice applied to man in every phase of his being, and in every act of his life; in past, present and future, involving the act, the actor, the cause and the consequence of action is KARMA.

In the light of these considerations, what is the ministry of pain and the meaning of sorrow ? The cause of pain and sorrow may be found, first, in ignorance; second, in the will of man *acting* in ignorance of law. From such action arises apparent injustice, pain and misery. It is, however, rather *un-justice*, for there can be no real injustice. That which appears to be such is but fragmentary Karma, or incomplete Justice. We see only in part and yet imagine that it is the whole.

The conscious centre in man, that is, the Ego, or incarnating monad, enters the school of experience called earth-life. It sends its tentacles out through every avenue of the body in order that it may touch, taste, assimilate, and know the world. The fluidic body thus flows into the mould of things; Proteus like it *becomes them*, and the result of this temporary taking-on, or moulding-to, is sensation or feeling. If this temporary moulding tends to become permanent, so as to destroy Proteus (*i.e.*, prevent rebound or return to itself) or if influences arise tending to disintegrate the fluidic body, the result is pain. If changes are rapid and the element of novelty is constantly present, so that sensation like a honey-bee flits from flower to flower, the result is pleasure. Pain and pleasure are therefore a transitory condition derived through the two poles of feeling. Pain is really man's best friend on this sensory plane. Pain protects the body, pleasure destroys it. Moreover these two poles, so apparently opposite, are convertible. Pleasure often reaches a point where it becomes painful, or indistinguishable from pain; and pain leads often to insensibility and syncope, that is but one remove from ecstasy, or, as in the case of martyrs, merges into it.

Pain and pleasure thus having one common root in feeling, cannot be divorced from consciousness. If the external conditions of pain or pleasure exist and the individual is "unconscious" no sensation is experienced. We must, therefore, broaden our concept of pain and pleasure, and enlarge our definition.

Pain and pleasure are the two poles of sensation or feeling *in relation to consciousness*. Now comes the inquiry, what is that condition of the individual that is designated as "unconscious"?

Without going into details and offering proof from large groups of [Page 7] experience and from analogy, we may say in brief that the ego is *always* conscious, and that this consciousness may be latent or manifest. It may, and often does, manifest on three distinct planes and the gap between these three planes may be more or less distinct, or it may be bridged. Syncope, anaesthetics, and hypnotism may render one insensible to either pain or pleasure. All these and many other similar processes may be shown to have one common root.

They all concern the relations of the ego to the channels of feeling in the physical body. In other words, they shift the plane of active experience. They also show the real nature of that which we call Time, the phenomena of events in relation to sensation and consciousness; the panorama of experience.

It may thus be seen that a mere modification of the conditions of consciousness renders us capable of ignoring or annulling all that we designate as pain or pleasure. We have only to recall our experience in dreams to find how void of all *feeling* our conscious existence, while yet active, may become. This condition comes involuntarily, but may it not also be determined by volition? Put in another form the question stands thus, can we get rid of pain? and if so, how? Can we get rid of all the pains of life, and at the same time retain all its pleasures? The answer is evident, both philosophy and universal experience answer, no. This is equivalent to asking if a clock cannot be kept running by a pendulum that swings in one direction only.

If pain is the penalty of pleasure, the account is balanced by the fact that pleasure is the compensation of pain. If we annul one we must also dispense with the other. This law of compensation is thus another form of the principle of justice. The meaning and ministry of pain are thus philosophically discerned.

The meaning of sorrow is to be logically deduced from the same principles.

As pain is the monitor of sensation and the check to pleasure, so is sorrow the harbinger of joy. A paralysed bodily organ is incapable of conveying either painful or pleasurable sensations to consciousness. If the channels of sensation are traversed by waves of feeling, pain and pleasure are the opposite or contrasted effects in the realm of consciousness. Every time this wave passes along the channel there arises the possibility of more intense sensation. It is thus that the channels are broadened and deepened by each added experience, and we learn by this experience that if we would avoid the extremes of pain we must preclude the extremes of pleasure. The wisdom of moderation is thus deduced from both philosophy and experience.

These fluctuating conditions are also transitory. In dreams, however, [Page 8] we find experiences void of all feeling. Even if we find exceptions to this, the rule is as herein stated. Conscious existence void of anything that may be called either painful or pleasurable is thus within our range of experience. Joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain may, and often do, supervene so directly on waking from dreamful sleep, that we may overlook the fact that these sensations and feelings belong solely to the waking state, when

consciousness becomes again related to and involved in the physical body and its sensory channels. Just as pain results from disobedience of the laws pertaining to the physical life of man, and as a check or admonition of danger, leading to discomfort, to disease and death, so is sorrow the result in a larger sense of disobedience to the higher law relating the consciousness of man to the universe about him, to his fellow man, and to the powers above him. That which leads in man to both pain and sorrow is *desire* for pleasure and joy. Determined to enjoy these to excess man is continually cheated by the hope that he can escape the just compensation, regardless of the fact that neither group is possible without the other.

Nature is, however, more just to man, than man is to himself, and just here is the origin of both the idea and the fact of injustice. It is born of the ignorance of law, and the innate selfishness of man, and elsewhere has no existence in all this boundless universe; in all the broad expanse of space. If in the working out of law, pain is a check upon pleasure, and sorrow the check on excessive joy, it likewise follows under the principle of justice, that for every wave of sorrow there is a returning wave of joy. Shallow lives neither suffer nor enjoy, but with exquisite natures the channels are worn deep and the waves run high.

If the range of man's experience is to be complete; if he is to know and to become the highest and best, he must touch continually these two poles of being. If he understands the law and its essential justice and beneficence, he will continually moderate his pleasures and joys, in order to limit his pain and sorrow. In other words, he will control *desire*. This control of desire is the very exercise that most develops the will, and expands consciousness through repeated experience. Man thus becomes a centre of power, killing out desire he becomes master of himself, conscious of the universe about him, and finally a minister of justice or an agent of beneficence, an abode of peace.

The waves of feeling surging up from the body to consciousness till the soul becomes drunk with desire as with wine no longer master the Ego. Man's personal and selfish pleasures and narrow joys, disappear and with them every vestige of pain and sorrow. Man's conscious existence has moved to a higher plane, where larger joys await him. Man thus *gets out of himself*, and begins to live in the eternal. New powers unfold, and grander vistas open on his entranced vision. [Page 9]

It is thus that man is educated through experience. It is thus that his consciousness expands from the personal to the universal. It is thus that the pilgrim of passion, the slave of desire, the victim of pain and sorrow becomes a minister of justice and a co-worker with God.

The reign of law, the supremacy of justice, the triumph of right, and the meaning of life are thus revealed.

Karma is the golden thread that runs through this entire philosophy of life. It is the principle of justice, of exact and impartial compensation that lies back of all action in the life of man, and which under other names equally obtains throughout nature.

If instead of fearing it, or foolishly and vainly striving to upset or avoid it, man would learn to rely upon it, and to obey it, it would speedily endow him with power and knowledge, with wisdom and beneficence such as he little dreams of.

With the average individual the Ego is involved in the sensory plane, the bodily appetites, passions and feelings, and hopelessly bewildered. We are exquisitely conscious of every touch of pain or pleasure, and dwell with morbid pertinacity on every uncomfortable sensation as though fearing we should be unmindful of all we have suffered. We gloat over our pleasures and hug our very selves for joy over the orgies that are perpetuated in imagination.

It is true that in time many persons learn to moderate self-indulgence in order to mitigate pain, sorrow, or repentance, but this is due far less to choice or to self-conquest than to encroaching age and dulled appetite.

If you say to one who is in pain, "ignore it, cease to dwell upon it, and it will disappear", they look at you in blank amazement, and think you are joking or simply heartless; and yet recent methods of direct or indirect hypnosis under many names have often demonstrated, that many so-called diseases may be thus made to disappear.

The channels of bodily sensation are deepened by oft-repeated experience, no matter whether such experience be virtuous or vicious. So also groups of sensations constituting the pictures upon which the mind dwells may be fixed till they recur automatically; till the mind is moulded into these forms, as water takes the form of the vessel containing it.

There is nothing so fickle and so changeable as the sensory life of man, and nothing can be imagined as more miserable and more hopeless than the old age of one who has lived but to gratify the senses. Not only do the pains of age more than atone for the pleasures of youth, but with the craving for change and for new sensation still unsatisfied, Tantalus becomes no longer a fable, but a living, horrible reality; and yet this is a picture of the old age of millions of human beings.

Man is not bewildered and miserable because he *cannot* find the light [Page 10] but because he will not try. He has been led by his "teachers" and blind guides not only to believe that the quest is hopeless and that the light does not exist, but he has been assured that blindness and bewilderment are his normal condition, and that it is not only useless to seek but wicked to be dissatisfied or complain. From this point he becomes either a willing or an unwilling victim of theological jugglery, or of "schemes of salvation" that belie his reason, outrage justice, and promise peace for penance and penance. It really seems incredible that reasoning beings could be so imposed upon.

Modern pathology has little difficulty in discovering the cause, the meaning, and often the beneficent ministry of pain. A life devoid of excesses with attention to a few simple rules of hygiene, has been found to reduce disease and pain to the minimum at least. While the body has thus received ample attention, mental habits and moral hygiene have been largely ignored. The indulgence of passion, lust, envy and greed, together with the fret and worry of life; rebellion and complaint where such protests are worse than useless because the results complained of belong to the administration of justice, from which there is no escape — these are the causes of pain and sorrow, and of the continual bewilderment of man. Even where these conditions are removed, and pain and sorrow are no longer traceable to disobedience of law, man is still far from entering his birthright. Man must not only cease to do evil, he must learn to do good. In his present evil condition man by disobedience and injustice invites pain, sorrow, disease, and

death. If we imagine all these conditions removed from the average man of the world, we must also imagine him left without occupation and without motive in life. Living no longer to indulge his appetites, to accumulate wealth, to gain power, or to achieve fame, the motive of life seems to have altogether disappeared.

It seems seldom to have dawned on the average intellect that there is possible to man a life on earth that is entirely above this ordinary plane, and which if it does not at once rid its votaries of all pain and sorrow, it nevertheless immensely increases the courage and fortitude of the individual, and enables him to bear cheerfully and hopefully the evils that inevitably fall to his lot in life. Such an individual is entirely satisfied that nothing can come to him that is not guided and determined by law and absolute justice, and that he has earned by his own acts all the good and all the evil that enter into his daily life. The vicissitudes of life present themselves to him, therefore, *with all sufficient reason*. If life thus becomes to him a very serious matter, not to be trifled with, never to be lightly assumed or frittered foolishly away, on the other hand all bewilderment disappears and he knows exactly what it all means. This, however, is rather the negative side of the problem, and only the beginning of real life. Discerning the inevitable tendency of the evolutionary war everywhere manifest in nature, [Page 11] he no longer drifts with the tide, a laggard to be continually pushed on by blind force, goaded by pains and penalties, and reduced to submission by many sorrows; but he strikes out boldly like a brave swimmer to reach his inevitable goal. Following thus the line of least resistance he works with nature and is rewarded accordingly. The carbon that resists the vibratory electric wave bursts into flame and is consumed. Analogy everywhere in nature reveals to the thoughtful and earnest student the laws that underly all phenomena. He therefore no longer wars against the inevitable but begins to conquer through obedience. Knowing well that if he resists, he too will be consumed, he becomes no longer an interrupter of the evolutionary wave, but finds himself a centre of power and an agent of beneficence beyond anything he had ever dreamed or imagined as possible for man. He finds that joy and sorrow, like pleasure and pain, are inseparable; and that all these are the transitory conditions of sense and time; he finds that they belong to the bodily life, and not to the soul except as it is enchained to the body by desire. He finds and enters a super-sensory world that is devoid of feeling, because it is ruled by justice, light, wisdom, and beneficence.

Theosophy teaches that this is the road over which the soul of man is designed to travel in the evolution of the human race. It is for each to determine voluntarily for himself, whether he will resist justice and universal law, multiply his evil Karma, and be goaded continually by pain and sorrow, or whether he will drop into line, and working out his own salvation, at the same time help to lift the heavy Karma of the world. Those who have listened to the voice of Atman — the God within them, and have voluntarily entered the "small old Path" are but the advance guard of that sorrowing multitude that we designate Humanity. Humble as may be their lot, it is theirs to point out the way, the truth, and the life. Brothers of Compassion, working for the help and redemption of those even poorer than themselves, they in turn are helped and inspired by those Sons of Light, those Sentinels on the towers of time, whose transcendent powers and divine beneficence represent the highest evolution of the human race the Divinity which is the goal of our common humanity.