

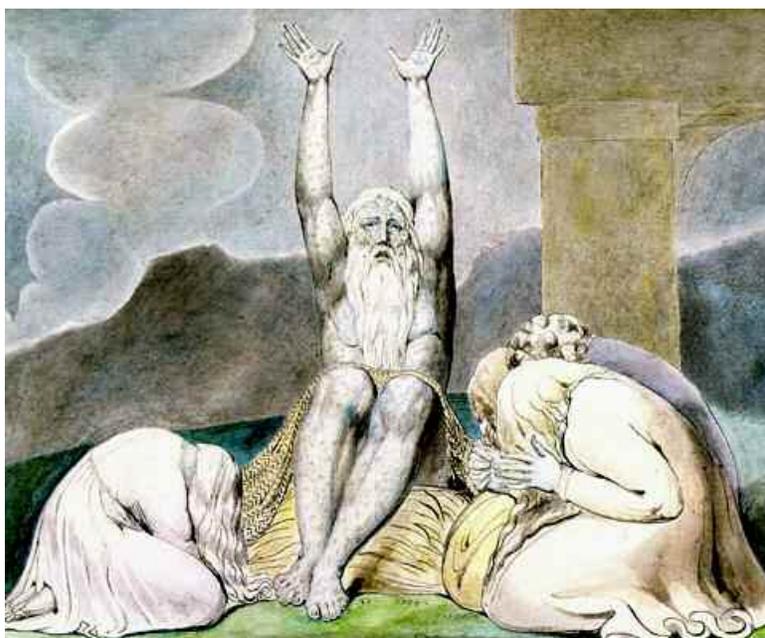
The Fetter of Sorrow

CHRIST SAID, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” and we know that these words have a very deep and profound meaning. Christ, the great Sun-Spirit, is a Ray from the Cosmic Christ, or Wisdom aspect of the triune God in manifestation. Hence in a very emphatic and mystical sense He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Only as we walk in His light, in His Spirit, can we reach the goal.

Long, long ago in the distant past—the past, counted by aeons and millennia—our present humanity started on its long pilgrimage through matter. The differentiated Spirits, each wrapped in its sheath of attenuated substance, whirled through vast cycles—pausing upon each plane to gather about themselves another veil of the materials composing that plane. At length, after innumerable periods, these Spirits found themselves at the nadir of materiality, possessed of all their vehicles in an undeveloped state.

We had responded to countless impacts designed to awaken our latent potentialities. We had been aided by Hierarchies who sought to impart something which we lacked, and which they through their experiences in a previous evolution, could bestow. The Lords of Flame, the Lords of Wisdom, the Lords of Individuality, the Lords of Form, the Lords of Mind, and others all in turn assisted us to build our vehicles and to unfold the life and express it through these forms.

After the link of mind was given we began our long upward climb—back unto the Father. We began



Watercolor from *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, William Blake (1757-1827), Morgan Museum, New York City

Job Bewailing His Misfortunes

Dover Publications, Inc.

to develop in our separate ways, to gain experience, to grow a soul that later would serve as a vehicle for the fully awakened Spirit. Then came the Atlantea days, the entrance of the Lucifer Spirits into the brain, the intense selfishness and desire for sense gratification, the separateness and material interests. Then the Tabernacle in the Wilderness was set up and the way was marked out for us to travel on our homeward journey back to God. By sign and symbol we were shown the Path.

The coming of Christ, the great Sun Spirit, was foreshown by ceremonial and ritual. He was foretold by prophecy and revealed by signs and portents. Angels proclaimed His birth and seers read the message in the stars. All the ages breathlessly awaited His advent and a thrill of expectancy stirred the ethers, for He was the One who had undertaken to do a unique and wonderful work for our planet Earth and its sorrowful and bewildered humanity. As when the morning stars sang together at Creation's dawn—the first matins of a jubilant cosmos—so the glorious paean was echoed by angel choirs when the Star of Bethlehem appeared.

It was a great, a wonderful, and a mighty event when the great Sun-Spirit Christ descended to redeem our planet Earth and infuse into it His radiant life. It is not possible for us at our present stage to estimate the importance and the scope of His work for us, but we know that He proclaimed Himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Let us take the first simile and consider a few of its stages in their practical bearing upon our lives—the Way back to the Father.

We speak of it as the Path, and we in the esoteric school are quite familiar with the idea. Some of us have walked with bleeding feet over the first stony stretches of the illimitable trail. It is possible that the first experience may have been a dull emptiness of the heart, an appalling solitude, a silence as still and awful as an arctic night. To let go the old self with which we have been associated so many years is a fearful ordeal. It is especially so if the Spirit is thoroughly entangled in its sense life and persists in clinging to its illusions. To fight the way alone through the terror which surrounds it when it starts on its higher quest is indeed a task requiring the utmost heroism.

The Way winds over rocky precipices, through lonely deserts and terrific storms, yet it must be held to without wavering. The Way is the same for all, yet not the same—a paradox which only the mystic can understand. Christ is the Way, but the process through which we reach that Way and the particular experiences on the Path differ according to type and temperament, and the responses made to the ensouling life.

For some it is necessary to be chained to the tribulum—to be tortured all the way if the self dies hard or there is special work to be done. Others can walk in the sunshine of a great love and light and know no selfish personal desire in the gladness and glory. It is the desires of self that kill the soul or maim it so that it becomes a hideous object instead of a thing of beauty. Between the starting point and the glorious consummation there are many stages, but each step must be taken over the renounced self and its clamoring emotions.

In the evolution of the soul intrepidity, courage, daring of a lofty type must develop and come to full fruition. There is no place on the Path for a weakling or a coward. The Spirit must develop a clear, fine,

discriminating sense of values and be able to face all the malevolent evil that defies its progress. The aspirant must be able to walk unflinchingly into the very realm of Apollyon and to dare all things when right and justice are threatened—never to know fear or cowardice, yet never to use this power for self.

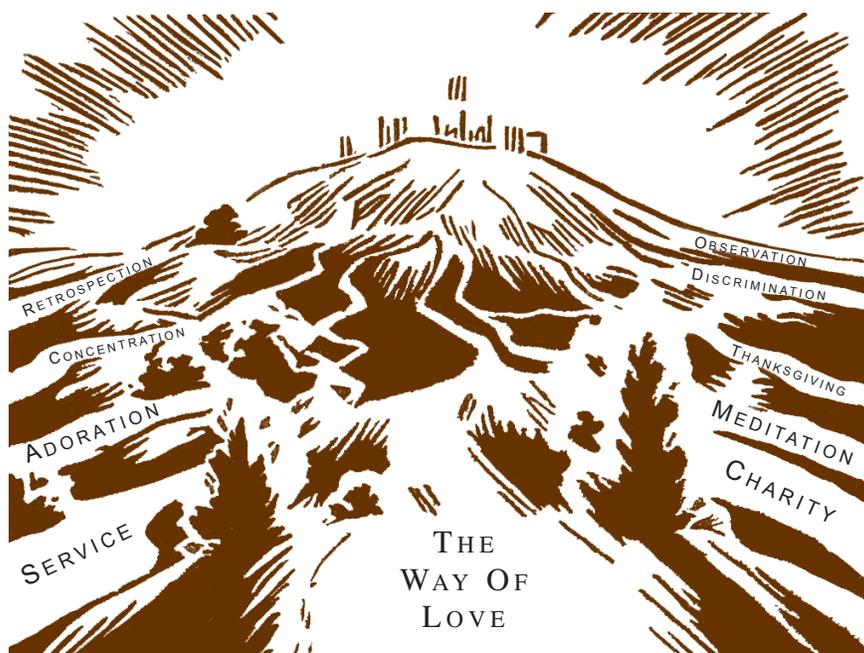
Here is the line of demarcation. The coward fights for self. He is unrelenting in his onslaughts against whatever force opposes his personal self, with its petty interests and feelings. His is the ugly antithesis to that noble courage which wills to suffer that others may escape—the courage that knows its power yet would never use it in its own defense.

The aspirant must acquire the mastery, the force, the dominating will, the wide vision which sees the full scope and meaning of his experiences and those of others; yet they must be held in leash to the Spirit that wills only with and for the Christ. This is true power. To acquire it is the object of the experiences along the Way, for while these powers are developing the Spirit passes through bitter waters.

Through the very profundity of sorrow, through the denial and pain it must grow strong. Through the deeps of agonizing human experience it must develop power and mastery. The coward who fights for self, and thus simulates courage, does not acquire it. They alone win it who renounce purely personal aims and suffer silently for high ends. These, the true heroes and conquerors, go on through the night of bitter experiences, of cruel losses, of shattered dreams, until the hour strikes for their liberation, for the crowning victory.

It may be in some crucial test when the malignant foe seems utterly to triumph that the lesson of the tribulum is fully learned. Then when he feels and knows his full power he turns toward the Christ—and renounces. He lays his powers upon the altar, trophies won but never to be used for himself. He renounces even the right to defend himself and thus becomes as a little child.

Many a milestone must have been passed before this high altitude is reached, and the Christ must have become more than a mere name in the life. The beginnings, however, lie within the valley of humiliation, where the cruel wrongs are left unredressed for the sake of others, or for a high principle. Each victory over the personal self and its claims leaves



the Spirit stronger. By renouncing the right of self-defense it becomes an act of sacrifice and thus helps in the work of evolution.

After many stages are passed there comes a point where a sudden silence falls, a silence not of peace, but pain. The Ego inquires of the inner Voice: "Why this form of misery? Have I not renounced, conquered the old self, the personal will that pride crowned? Have I not relinquished all that the heart clings to? Have I not watched one bright dream after another dissolve into thin air? Am I not entirely, profoundly alone? Why then must I suffer longer?"

And the Voice replies: "True thou hast given up all desires for the self; thou hast renounced all forms of self-interest and standest almost a freed soul in purity and power. Still thou art fettered—not by pleasure, but by sorrow. The old miseries still cling to memory. The old wrongs arise as phantoms in the holiest hours and clamor for redress. The old pain, the Saturn lash, still bruises the heart. Thou hast renounced the right of self-defense, the privilege of retaliation, yet thou hast not renounced the right to feel and suffer. The scars of battle yet attest the wounds. Their sensitiveness is not wholly destroyed."

"But, Master, how can one cease to remember—cease to suffer at the memory!"

"Child, thy question is answered—thou hast need of the pain. Thou art but a child-Spirit still and hast not yet won strength and mastery. Thou hast cut down

the flowers of earthly pleasure, but hast not courage to pull out the thorn of bitter memory. Thou still clingest, not to human joy, but to human misery, the misery of thy renounced self. The shadow of it overspreads thy path even now. Thou canst not forget. Thou art still weak."

Through the twilight stillness the Voice spoke and ceased. The after-gloom was profound and in the encompassing darkness the tired Spirit looked back down the vista of its weary stony path. Then a sudden beam of light from the Face of the Christ shone through a rift in the clouds—and the Spirit saw and knew.

It saw that its old sorrows were but phantoms—creations of its own imagination, delusions of thought forms, as were its joys. All belonged to the old sense plane where it had lived and moved, where its interests were centered. Above that plane there were no joys and sorrows as such, but all was one rich, full, glowing life. On the plane of discord and conflict grew the thorns of life and the Spirit had foolishly let them remain within to sting at every step. It had left this sense plane far behind. Life had opened out in noble vistas, deep truths had dawned on the awakening intelligence, the light was growing clearer, new powers were unfolding. Yet it still blindly carried the thorns in its quivering consciousness. Then one of the last lessons was learned by the momentary rift-gleam. Like its divine Master, *the Spirit must suffer only for others—never for self.*

So the Path winds on and at last we see with the Light that never was on sea or land—the Christ as the Way and our journey over the Path but an ever-widening expansion of consciousness, until the full glory bursts upon the freed Spirit and all limitations drop away.

The goal is reached and we see Him—the Christ of the ages—ourselves in Him—and we know Him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Then it is no longer a path but a sea of illimitable light and bliss in the bosom of the Father. □

—Vita