

READERS' QUESTIONS

Are Children Responsible for Their Actions? Removing Diseased Organs; Suicide

QUESTION: The Rosicrucian Philosophy teaches that the birth of the desire body takes place about the fourteenth year and that, before that time, the child is not responsible for his or her actions. If this is so, how do we explain the behavior

of some of the child soldiers whose atrocities during the civil wars in Sierra Leone and in Liberia (West Africa) and in other parts of the world defy imagination? These boys and girls, most of whom are drug addicts, tortured, maimed and killed thousands of their compatriots, including their own parents, brothers and sisters. Can we say that they did not know what they were doing and are therefore not responsible for their actions? How about girls as young as 12 years who become pregnant or prostitutes? What prompts them to engage in such immoral practices? One might say that it is due to the influence of the adults, but is that enough justification? In this part of the world, especially in villages, girls are given away in marriage at a very tender age. Some of them even become mothers at the age of 11 or 12. How do we reconcile all these with the teaching of the Fellowship?

Answer: While the Rosicrucian philosophy does teach that the birth of the individual desire body takes place between the ages of twelve and fourteen, it is naive and contrary to healthy common sense to conclude that a child under fourteen is not responsible for its actions, meaning that it does not have an innate sense of right and wrong.

Remember that Egos seeking rebirth have previously gone through Purgatory many times relating to the negative thoughts and desires they entertained and the harmful deeds they committed in

former lives. The hallmark of these purgations is suffering, the memory of which, as Max Heindel makes clear in 2 *Q&A* p 28, is indelibly etched into the seed atom of the dense body, the “book of the Recording Angel,” which is a permanent record the soul keeps with it from life to life.

The essence of this intelligence-generating and morals-forming suffering is known as *conscience*, which begins to operate relatively soon after the Ego reembodies, because it is stored both in the dense body’s seed atom and in the Ego’s life spirit, whose promptings inform the soul as intuition (coming from superconscious memory—*Cosmo*, p. 92), bypassing the mediation of the individual intellect, which awakens around the twenty-first year, and before the birth of the desire body and the temptations it poses. As Heindel also says in the above-cited source, “Surely observation confirms that a child in its tender years knows when it has acted counter to parental expectations and training.”

Elsewhere Heindel writes that “a little child who has committed a wrong feels conscience-smitten and sorry” (*1 Q&A*, p. 231). That is, even the *little* child feels responsible, because it *is* responsible: It already knows how to respond to many of life’s circumstances that could involve hurting another or one’s self. With the essence of “right feeling,” known as conscience, an Ego “gradually develops a spiritual consciousness which is above and beyond human reason” (*Message of the Stars*, p. 46), and does not require the birth of either the individual desire body or mind to inform and properly direct its actions; that is, while it is yet a child.

It may be countered that positive childhood

training is, lamentably, not always forthcoming, that some children have only bad examples set before them. They may have been orphaned at an early age and subjected to a variety of negative influences. Notwithstanding, a basic sense of the difference between right and wrong is part of its natal inheritance, the fruit of its hard-won prior lives' experience.

While young children do bear responsibility for their actions, we may add two qualifications to this assertion. One, the parents, mentors, and community in which the children perform antisocial and harmful acts are also responsible for this behavior, because they have the power to eliminate, at least reduce or buffer, the conditions fostering it, such as resorting to prostitution for livelihood. Children are easily impressed by their associates, and even more swayed by the actions and examples of their elders. In the case of coercion, as conscription into an army, there is little a child can do. Therefore there is a collective destiny to pay for this negative turn taken by the young human.

Secondly, while the child needs to be reprimanded and impressed with the wrongness of its behavior, its youthfulness and dependent status warrant that the punishment called forth by that behavior be mitigated from the standard to which adults are held accountable, since the child's actions are more easily and more directly influenced by environmental factors and, typically, it has less ability and will power to effectively oppose them. Also, the object of punishing the child is to teach it to abstain from wrongdoing, not simply to hurt it or get revenge. Children can more readily be rehabilitated than adults, being more educable and malleable—if firm love and enlightened methods of correction are used.

It is clear that children who are involved in the vicious and degrading practices you mention will have debts to pay, for they know better. The law of consequence applies to them also.

REMOVING DISEASED ORGANS

Question: When we are afflicted in this life and have a surgical operation performed and the diseased organ is removed, does that heal us permanently or do we return in a future body with a similar ailment?

If a person has not been through the fires of sorrow, he is apt to be contemptuous, having no respect or time for you. If we receive ourselves in our depths in the fires of sorrow, God will make us nourishment for other people.

—Oswald Chambers

Answer: When we enter the invisible realms after death and during the postmortem state undergo the purgatorial and First Heaven experiences, all our vehicles are gradually dissolved and we enter the Second Heaven where we commence to create the environment of our new existence. When that task has been completed, we enter the Third Heaven, where only a very, very few have consciousness as yet. Hence forgetfulness of all that has gone before wipes the slate clean and we take with us only the quintessence of our past experiences as faculties when we reenter the Second Heaven on our way toward rebirth and mold the archetype of our coming physical body with the help of the Recording Angels and their agents. To make the point clear, let us remember that during the years of childhood we go through the most dreadful contortions in learning to write. The letters we form are grotesque in the extreme, but in the course of time, with persistent effort, we acquire the faculty of writing a legible hand. As the years pass by we forget our difficulties in learning to write, but the faculty remains with us. Similarly, the embodied spirit forgets all that has gone before, but the faculty of doing certain things remains with it. Therefore if it has formed a weak body in a certain place in one life and has suffered the pain incident to that weakness and disease, even to the removal of an organ, we may be very sure that though the event will be forgotten in a coming existence, the spirit will remember the fact when it is molding the archetype coming to rebirth. It will then endeavor to build a better organ so that it may save itself the pain which it endured in a previous life, and thus, instead of perpetuating the diseased organ, it is very safe to say that an organ that was diseased in one life will be sound in the next. Gradually mankind is thus learning by past mistakes to build a better and a more sound body.

SUICIDE

Question and Answer: If I ask, "Is it right, or at least permissible to take one's own life?" I must also ask, "Right according to what or whom?" Right implies reference to a code of conduct, a moral standard. Is there a moral standard not devised by culture but objective, universal, built into the fabric of the cosmos? Christianity says yes. Do people today, at the breaking crest of the twenty-first century, suffer more than their predecessors? Do they have more of a right to suicide than their forbears? Do our ancestors have anything to say on the matter, without having recourse to the occult fact that a suicide suffers greatly after death for the duration that his physical body would have lived? An action which is based solely on that occult disclosure approaches the subject negatively, by appealing to fear: Don't do it or you will suffer for it. Isn't there something to be said about suicide as intrinsically wrong? Let us ask St. Augustine what he thought. Here is text from chapter 20 of *The City of God*:

It is not without significance, that in no passage of the holy canonical books there can be found either divine precept or permission to take away our own life, whether for the sake of entering on the enjoyment of immortality, or of shunning, or ridding ourselves of anything whatever. Nay, the law, rightly interpreted, even prohibits suicide, where it says, "Thou shalt not kill." This is proved especially by the omission of the words "thy neighbor," which are inserted when false witness is forbidden: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." Nor yet should any one on this account suppose he has not broken this commandment if he has borne false witness only against himself. For the love of our neighbor is regulated by the love of ourselves, as it is written, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." If, then, he who makes false statements about himself is not less guilty of bearing false witness than if he had made them to the injury of his neighbor; although in the commandment prohibiting false witness only his neighbor is mentioned, and persons taking no pains to understand it might suppose that a man was allowed to be a false witness to his own hurt; how much greater reason have we to understand

that a man may not kill himself, since in the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," there is no limitation added nor any exception made in favor of any one, and least of all in favor of him on whom the command is laid! And so some attempt to extend this command even to beasts and cattle, as if it forbade us to take life from any creature. But if so, why not extend it also to the plants, and all that is rooted in and nourished by the earth? For though this class of creatures have no sensation, yet they also are said to live, and consequently they can die; and therefore, if violence be done them, can be killed. So, too, the apostle, when speaking of the seeds of such things as these, says, "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die;" and in the Psalm it is said, "He killed their vines with hail." Must we therefore reckon it a breaking of this commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," to pull a flower? Are we thus insanely to countenance the foolish error of the Manichaeans? Putting aside, then, these ravings, if, when we say, Thou shalt not kill, we do not understand this of the plants, since they have no sensation, nor of the irrational animals that fly, swim, walk, or creep, since they are dissociated from us by their want of reason, and are therefore by the just appointment of the Creator subjected to us to kill or keep alive for our own uses; if so, then it remains that we understand that commandment simply of man. The commandment is, "Thou shalt not kill man;" therefore neither another nor yourself, for he who kills himself still kills nothing else than man....

In Chapter 22 one reads the following:

But they who have laid violent hands on themselves [suicides] are perhaps to be admired for their greatness of soul, though they cannot be applauded for the soundness of their judgment. However, if you look at the matter more closely, you will scarcely call it greatness of soul which prompts a man to kill himself rather than bear up against some hardships of fortune, or sins in which he is not implicated. Is it not rather proof of a feeble mind, to be unable to bear either the pains of bodily servitude or the foolish opinion of the vulgar? And is not that to be pronounced the greater

mind, which rather faces than flees the ills of life, and which, in comparison of the light and purity of conscience, holds in small esteem the judgment of men, and specially of the vulgar, which is frequently involved in a mist of error? And, therefore, if suicide is to be esteemed a magnanimous act, none can take higher rank for magnanimity than that Cleombrotus, who (as the story goes), when he had read Plato's book in which he treats of the immortality of the soul, threw himself from a wall, and so passed from this life to that which he believed to be better. For he was not hard pressed by calamity, nor by any accusation, false or true, which he could not very well have lived down; there was, in short, no motive but only magnanimity urging him to seek death, and break away from the sweet detention of this life. And yet that this was a magnanimous rather than a justifiable action, Plato himself, whom he had read, would have told him; for he would certainly have been forward to commit, or at least to recommend, suicide, had not the same bright intellect which saw that the soul was immortal, discerned also that to seek immortality by suicide was to be prohibited rather than encouraged.

Again, it is said many have killed themselves to prevent an enemy doing so. But we are not inquiring whether it has been done, but whether it ought to have been done. Sound judgment is to be preferred even to examples, and indeed examples harmonize with the voice of reason; but not all examples, but those only which are distinguished by their piety, and are proportionately worthy of imitation. For suicide we cannot cite the example of patriarchs, prophets, or apostles; though our Lord Jesus Christ, when He admonished them to flee from city to city if they were persecuted, might very well have taken that occasion to advise them to lay violent hands on themselves, and so escape their persecutors. But seeing He did not do this, nor proposed this mode of departing this life, though He were addressing His own friends for whom He had promised to prepare everlasting mansions, it is obvious that such examples as are produced from the "nations that forget God," give no warrant of imitation to the worshippers of the one true God. □

DIVINE DEDICATION

When I was about 13 years old, I made a promise to my elderly Sunday school leader. The incident happened this way.

I attended Sunday school regularly at my local Methodist Church during my Primary school years in Ghana. One Sunday, the leader and I waited for about half an hour but nobody came. The old man was even dozing. When I woke him up for us to begin, knowing nobody would join us, he said to me after a deep breath, "I will always come here until God calls me, 'Thomas,' 'Thomas,' 'Thomas,' as He called Samuel." This old Methodist leader was called Thomas.

With strong conviction, I also solemnly pledged that I will always come to Sunday school until God calls me, "Abraham," "Abraham," "Abraham." I did not at that time know what the real nature of Samuel's calling was. I thought God lived in the material building (Church). The old man also told me, "Never forget God throughout your studies and through all your earthly life."

At the age of 27, I found the Rosicrucian Fellowship and Max Heindel's wonderful Western Wisdom Philosophy. With some of my National Service income, I bought *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception* and decided there and then to become a vegetarian. The only problem I was pondering about was how my aged parents would react to the news. I was the only one among 8 children to break tradition. My chagrin turned to delight when they said after I had told them, "We would have joined you had we been younger." How encouraging! At that moment this thought came to me, "What! Are they also students?" By their fruits we may know them.

The Fellowship has been with me during the difficult but spiritually rewarding journey thus far on the path. Truly, "Wisdom is crystallized pain."

Now I'm nearly 45, and still trying. I am very grateful to the Fellowship and its Teachings. Love, faith, and selfless service will always lead us on the true WAY. God also helps those who persevere under all circumstances. He is no respecter of persons. Please let us spread the Teachings in our own special way with humility. The old man passed away a long time ago, but what transpired on that day will be in my consciousness forever.

"Loving Self-forgetting Service to others is the shortest, the safest and the most joyful road to GOD."

—A Probationer