



WITHIN THE CIRCLE

Neither personal pain nor personal pleasure can be really expressed in words. It is never possible to communicate them in their original form. It is only possible, by vivid portrayal of the circumstances or conditions causing them, to awaken in sympathetic minds some kindred qualities of feeling. But if the circumstances causing the pain or the pleasure be totally foreign to common human experience, then no representation of them can make fully known the sensations which they evoked. Hopeless, therefore, any attempt to tell the real pain of seeing my former births. I can say only that no combination of suffering possible to *individual* being could be likened to such pain — the pain of countless lives interwoven. It seemed as if every nerve of me had been prolonged into some monstrous web of sentiency spun back through a million years — and as if the whole of that measureless woof and warp, over all its shivering threads, were pouring into my consciousness, out of the abysmal past, some ghastliness without name — some horror too vast for human brain to hold. For, as I looked backward, I became double, quadruple, octuple; — I multiplied by arithmetical progression; — I became hundreds and thousands — and feared with the terror of thousands — and despaired with the anguish of thousands — and shuddered with the agony of thousands; yet knew the pleasure of none. All joys, all delights appeared but mists or mockeries: only the pain and the fear were real — and always, always growing. Then in the moment when sentiency itself seemed bursting into dissolution, one divine touch ended the frightful vision, and brought again to me the simple consciousness of the single present. Oh! how unspeakably delicious that sudden shrinking back out of multiplicity into unity! — that immense, immeasurable collapse of Self into the blind oblivious numbness of individuality!

“To others also,” said the voice of the divine one who had thus saved me — “to others in the like state it has been permitted to see something of their preexistence. But no one of them ever could

endure to look far. Power to see all former births belongs only to those eternally released from the bonds of Self. Such exist outside of illusion — outside of form and name; and pain cannot come nigh them.

“But to you, remaining in illusion, not even the Buddha could give power to look back more than a little way.

“Still you are bewitched by the follies of art and of poetry and of music — the delusions of color and form, the delusions of sensuous sound.

“Still that apparition called Nature — which is but another name for emptiness and shadow — deceives and charms you, and fills you with dreams of longing for the things of sense.

“But he who truly wishes to know, must not love this phantom Nature — must not find delight in the radiance of a clear sky — nor in the sight of the sea — nor in the sound of the flowing of rivers — nor in the forms of peaks and woods and valleys — nor in the colors of them.

“He who truly wishes to know must not find delight in contemplating the works and the deeds of men, nor in hearing their converse, nor in observing the puppet-play of their passions and of their emotions. All this is but a weaving of smoke — a shimmering of vapors — an impermanency — a phantasmagory.

“For the pleasures that men term lofty or noble or sublime are but larger sensualisms, subtler falsities: venomous fair-seeming flowerings of selfishness — all rooted in the elder slime of appetites and desires. To joy in the radiance of a cloudless day — to see the mountains shift their tintings to the wheeling of the sun — to watch the passing of waves, the fading of sunsets — to find charm in the blossoming of plants or trees: all this is of the senses. Not less truly of the senses is the pleasure of observing actions called great or beautiful or heroic — since it is one with the pleasure of imagining those things for which men miserably strive in this miserable world: brief love and fame and honor — all of which are empty as passing foam.

“Sky, sun, and sea; — the peaks, the woods, the plains; — all splendors and forms and colors — are spectres. The feelings and the thoughts and the acts of men — whether deemed high or low, noble or ignoble — all things imagined or done for any save the eternal purpose, are but dreams born of dreams and begetting

hollowness. To the clear of sight, all feelings of self — all love and hate, joy and pain, hope and regret, are alike shadows; — youth and age, beauty and horror, sweetness and foulness, are not different; — death and life are one and the same; and Space and Time exist but as the stage and the order of the perpetual Shadow-play.

“All that exist in Time must perish. To the Awakened there is no Time or Space or Change — no night or day — no heat or cold — no moon or season — no present, past, or future. Form and the names of form are alike nothingness: Knowledge only is real; and unto whomsoever gains it, the universe becomes a ghost. But it is written: ‘He who hath overcome Time in the past and the future must be of exceedingly pure understanding.’

“Such understanding is not yours. Still to your eyes the shadow seems the substance — and darkness, light — and voidness, beauty. And therefore to see your former births could give you only pain.”

I asked:

“Had I found strength to look back to the beginning — back to the verge of Time — could I have read the Secret of the universe?”

“Nay,” was the answer made. “Only by Infinite Vision can the Secret be read. Could you have looked back incomparably further than your power permitted, then the Past would have become for you the Future. And could you have endured even yet more, the Future would have orbed back for you into the Present.”

“Yet why?” I murmured, marveling. . . . “What is the Circle?”

“Circle there is none,” was the response; — “Circle there is none but the great phantom-whirl of birth and death to which, by their own thoughts and deeds, the ignorant remain condemned. But this has being only in Time; and Time itself is illusion.”

LAFCADIO HEARN





BONDAGE AND DELIVERANCE

The treasure of the bliss of the Eternal is guarded by the very powerful and terrible serpent, the lower self, whose three heads are the formidable potencies of substance, passion and darkness, who lies coiled over the true Self; but when the three heads are cut off with a mighty sword called understanding, inspired by the holy Scriptures, uprooting the great serpent utterly, the wise man may enter into the fruition of the treasure which brings true happiness.

So long as there remains even a vestige of virulent poison in the body, how can there be perfect health? So the lower self holds the seeker of union back from liberation.

By destroying the lower self completely, by putting an end to the many delusive forms it creates, and by discerning the true hidden Self, realizing, 'That am I,' the seeker finds the Real.

Utterly reject the thought that 'This am I,' regarding the active lower self, unstable in essence, the cause of the love of reward, which robs thee of rest in thy true Self; through the lower self, set up by delusion, comes the recurring cycle of birth and death, endlessly inflicting birth, death, decay and sorrow on thee, who art in reality the true hidden Self, whose form is joy.

Thou art the true Self, ever one, pure consciousness, all-pervading, formed of bliss, of irreproachable glory, unchanging; there is no cause of thy bondage to birth and death except the domination of the 'I.'

The lower self is the enemy of the true Self, like a sharp thorn in the throat of him who eats; therefore, slaying it with the mighty sword of understanding, enter into the sovereignty of the true Self, the joy of thy heart's desire.

Therefore, ending the acts of the 'I' and the other evil powers, casting away desire, gaining the transcendent good, dwell in silence, seeking to enter into the bliss of the true Self, putting away all sense of separateness in the universal Self, the Eternal.

Even when the potent 'I' has been uprooted, if it be evoked again by dwelling on it even for a moment in the imagination,

it will come to life and cause a hundred distractions, like a storm-driven cloud in the season of the rains.

Holding down the enemy, the 'I,' let no opportunity at all be given to the imagination to dwell on sensuous things; for this gives new life to the 'I' as water to a parched lemon tree.

The personality subject to desire is formed by identifying the self with the body; that which causes desire is distinct from this. Going beyond oneself to seek union with sensuous things, through attachment to something apart from the Self, is the cause of bondage to the world.

From the maturing of the act comes the maturing of the seed of future bondage; from the destruction of the act comes the destruction of the seed; therefore, let the act be stopped.

From the maturing of the dynamic mind-image comes the act, and from the maturing of the act comes the dynamic mind-image; thus man's cycle of birth and death continues and ceases not.

In order to cut the bonds of recurring birth and death, let him who seeks for control burn up these two; the maturing of the dynamic mind-image comes from these two, imagination and outer act.

Waxing great through these two, it brings to birth the cycle of birth and death for the Self; and there is a way to destroy these three in all conditions, always.

In all places, in all ways, in all things fixing the vision only on the Eternal, through the strengthening of the dynamic impress of true Being, these three melt into nothingness.

Through the destruction of the act comes the destruction of the imagining, and from this the withering of the dynamic mind-image. When the dynamic mind-image has withered away, this is liberation, this is called deliverance even in life.

When the dynamic impress of the Real breaks through and reveals itself, the mind-image of the 'I' and the other powers melts away, as before the brightness of the radiant sun the darkness melts away utterly.

Darkness and the works of darkness which ensnare unto evil disappear when the lord of day ascends; therefore, when the essence of that partless bliss is known, there is no longer any bondage, no longer the savour of pain.

Rejecting all allurements of things seen, entering into the One, the Real, the sphere of blessedness, intent and alert without and

within, let him endure until the bonds of former works pass away.

Standing firm in the Eternal, let no negligent loss of recollection be permitted at any time, for negligence is death: thus spoke the Master Sanat Kumara.

For him who seeks to know the true Self, there is no evil like negligence; from it comes delusion, from this comes the false 'I,' from this comes bondage, from this destruction.

Loss of recollection overthrows even him who has attained to knowledge, if he turn toward sensuous allurements, even as an evil woman brings her paramour to destruction.

As the green scum on a pond, when pushed aside, does not so remain even for a moment, so Glamour wraps itself about even the wise man who looks back.

If the imagination, falling back from its goal, be enmeshed even a little in external things, it continues to descend through negligent loss of recollection, like a playball fallen on a flight of stairs.

When the imagination enters into sensuous things, it builds up images of their qualities; from this building up comes desire; because of desire the man moves toward them.

He thus loses hold of his true nature; and he who loses hold, falls downward. For him who has fallen, there is no rising again without great loss. Let him, therefore, put an end to this building up of images, which is a cause of every evil.

Therefore, for him who has discerned, who knows the Eternal in soul vision, there is no death other than negligent loss of recollection. But he who is intently concentrated attains complete success; therefore, be thou intently centred in the true Self, with heedfulness.

He who has reached liberation in life is liberated when he puts off the body; but he who makes a division between himself and the true Self, falls under fear: thus saith the Scripture of the Yajur Veda.

Whenever the seeker after wisdom makes a division, even no greater than an atom, in the infinite Eternal, what he beholds through negligent loss of recollection as separate from the Eternal, becomes for him a source of danger.

He who identifies himself with sensuous things, forbidden by a hundred texts of Scripture and sacred tradition and by reason, falls into a host of sorrows upon sorrows; he who thus does what is forbidden, is a robber.

He who sets his heart on the search for the Real, liberated, enters into the mighty power of the true Self, everlasting; but he who sets his heart on the unreal, falls; this is seen even in the honest man and the thief.

The saint, rejecting pursuit of the unreal, the cause of bondage, should stand firm in the vision of the true Self, saying: 'That Self am I'; this steadfast resting in the Eternal brings joy through realization of the true Self, and drives away the great pain caused by unwisdom.

The fixing of the heart on sensuous things causes the increase of evil mind-images progressively as its fruit; knowing this through discernment, and rejecting sensuous things, let him ever fix the heart on the true Self.

From putting an end to sensuous allurements comes quietude of heart; in quietude of heart there is the vision of the Supreme Self; when the Supreme Self is seen clearly, there follows destruction of bondage to the world; therefore the ending of sensuous allurements is the path of deliverance.

Who, being learned, able to discern between the Real and the unreal, holding the proofs of Scripture, seeing the supreme goal, possessing knowledge, would, like a child, set up his rest on the unreal, the cause of his falling from the true Self?

For him who is attached to the body and its pleasures there is no liberation; he who is liberated has put away the service of the body and its allurements. He who is asleep is not awake, and he who is awake is not asleep, since these two are of opposite natures.

He who, through the Self discerning the Self within and without, in things moving and unmoving, firmly resting in the vision of the true Self, putting aside vesture after vesture, stands in undivided Being through the universal Self, he indeed has reached a deliverance.

