

# CONNECTING HEAVEN WITH EARTH

## Markus van Alphen

*One of the foundations upon which our church is built is theosophy. This does not mean that all are expected to be members of The Theosophical Society, but that we bring to expression in our lives the theosophical precepts. Some of the important characteristics of the theosophical doctrine in this regard are the exercising of free will and the state of freedom. Each sacrifice brought in anything less than complete freedom is reduced to obligation. Each sacrifice, no matter how simple, done entirely of one's own free will is raised to a sublime deed. So too, each action forcing another to comply robs them of their freedom.*

With actions are included feelings and thoughts, which we know to be at least -if not more- causal than action or inaction. Without trying to explain this statement fully, we do note that this precept is related to the concepts of karma and dharma (the meaning of the latter word will be dealt with in due course). Even though the word karma, borrowed from the eastern tradition, is not mentioned literally in the Bible, there are several references to it. The most pertinent example is "*As one sows, so shall one reap*". The principle of karma is intrinsically interwoven with the principle of reincarnation, which is accepted as a certainty by most of our church members. Reincarnation is also referred to using veiled terminology in the Bible. The most obvious example is probably found in the description of the Transfiguration in Matthew 17. The disciples point out that Elijah should appear first, upon which the answer follows that Elijah has already come as John the Baptist. Seen without reincarnation, this portion of the scripture would be rather difficult to explain.

A more veiled yet beautiful image is the interpretation, given to us by H.P. Blavatsky in her book *The Key to Theosophy*, of the parable described in John 15. The husbandman, the true vine and the branches represent the Spark of God (often called the Monad), the soul, and the personalities of man respectively. In the parable, there is but one husbandman: On the monadic plane no separateness exists because there is but One Spirit. This plane could be described as the meeting point of God-immanent and God-transcendent, God-immanent being the Monad or Highest Self or Spark of God. "*Ye are Gods, ye are children of the Most High*" indicates the concept of God-immanent very clearly, as does the passage from the gradual for Whitsunday: "*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God: and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*"

The vine in the parable is the soul -or individuality- in which the Christ Principle resides. Again, only one vine is mentioned. When Christ says in John 14: "*I am the Way the Truth and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*", this does not imply that there is only one valid religion and that this religion is Christianity. Again, reference is being made

to the true vine. Irrespective what religion one holds, the only way to the Father -the husbandman- is by treading the Way, finding the Truth and living the Life that is the Christ-in-us. Discovering the reality of the soul life is discovering the one principle that will lead us to the Spark of God we truly are.

The branches are the several lives we live by periodically coming into incarnation. Those lives we waste -by not listening to the call of the soul- are the branches that bear no fruit -do not make a contribution- and are therefore cast into the fire. This is not an eternal fire of hell and damnation, but the refining fire that reduces the gold from the gold-carrying ore.

The husbandman obviously has more than one vine; otherwise he would not be called a husbandman. In his vineyard are innumerable vines: In this symbolism we are no longer speaking of the husbandman as being the Monad, but as the Divinity in which we live and move and have our being, in which exists the unity of all life. It is interesting also to bring the symbolism of wine into the picture. Whether fermented or not, wine is made by pressing grapes. In the Eucharist, wine is consecrated and becomes the blood of Christ. The wine is the essence and being of the fruit. Just as blood is a symbol of the life pulsating through our arteries, wine is the sweet result of the fruit that is itself also sweet, but which needs to be freed from its flesh.

The many branches, which cannot grow apart from the vine, have as aim to bear fruit for the husbandman. This is the image of dharma, a word loosely translated as work or duty. Each life we live serves to create the conditions in which the possibility exists to resolve an apportionment of karma and the dharma, or life task, that we -as soul- attempt to fulfil. The more meaningful lives we have lived previously, the greater the result. Put differently, the more we follow the path of development, the more the emphasis is placed on the dharma to be fulfilled and the less we are busy with the resolution of karma.

Karma is seen by many as something heavy, a debt resulting from sin - an equally loaded word. If we were to consider sin as an act done in ignorance, we would be able to take the word in a somewhat lighter context. If we do not have knowledge -and are therefore ignorant- and thereby make a mistake, the opportunity is granted us to obtain this knowledge by experiencing the results of our thoughts, feelings and actions. Actually, karma has nothing to do with good or bad. It is nothing more -nor less- than a law that governs the restoration of harmony. Until we have reached a certain level of development, our dharma is primarily *the dispelling of ignorance* - not accidentally the intention for the Sunday before Advent.

Our dharma during the period of development symbolised by the four Sundays of Advent, described by Annie Besant in her book *In the Outer Court*, and handled succinctly and

pertinently by Krishnamurti in *At the Feet of the Master*, is the development of Discrimination, Self-forgetfulness, Love and Right Action.

Just as the individual develops, so the dharma that can be fulfilled by this individual develops. For those who tread the Path of Initiation, the symbolism of the higher dharma lies hidden in the stories of Christmas, the Baptism of Our Lord, the Transfiguration, the Crucifixion & Resurrection and the Ascension, which collectively describe the last part on the earthly road of development of every individual.

Stated in biblical terminology (Eph 4:13), this path results in the individual's transformation "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ". Several images in varying traditions attempt to describe this process, but in essence one could say that the aim of becoming a perfected human being is to connect heaven and earth.

Now of what practical meaning is this to us? Will we let these ideas merely echo around in our heads, or do we transform them into experience? And what of the experience? Will we lock them up in the depth of our hearts and keep them for our own edification and joy, or will we bring them to light in the world? The old principle of head - heart - hands is applicable here. First understand, subsequently experience, and eventually apply in our daily life.

As much as we might like to, we know we are unable to change the past, even though we are able to change **our experience** of the past in the present. This means that we need to accept the karma that meets us along our way and deal with it in the most cheerful manner possible - not only in its less pleasurable aspects, but also in its more pleasurable aspects! We make our karma for our future lives during every moment of the day and we can influence it in a positive sense by sowing causes that will bring forth pleasant crops. Inactivity -out of fear to sow causes- is no answer. By doing nothing, we avoid our dharma and bring forth a branch devoid of fruit.

By seeking our task in the world - not under pressure from an insatiable dictator who promises an eternal hellfire to those who do not appease him, but from our own free will - being in incarnation becomes a privilege!

Take a moment to bring into your remembrance the joy you felt while receiving a friendly, unasked-for deed of assistance and grant that joy to each of your fellow human beings. Thereby, one gradually comes to stand where one can connect heaven and earth in freedom, equality, and brotherhood.