

FESTIVAL OF PISCES
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Good evening, friends, and welcome to the Festival of Pisces. The actual moment of the full moon occurs tomorrow morning at 4:41 am. This is the final festival of the spiritual year—the “omega” to the “alpha” of Easter, the Aries Festival. The element of finality, of conclusion, of the soul’s completed mission for which it came into incarnation countless lifetimes ago, is hinted at in the keynote for Pisces: I leave the Father’s home and turning back, I save. From the initial first step of the soul towards incarnation in Aries, the sign of beginnings, until the final liberation in Pisces, the journey of the soul is a descent into matter for the purpose not of attaining perfection, for the soul on its own high plane is already perfect, but for service and the gaining of experience, ultimately leading to the redemption of matter.

There are several key words of vital importance which describe the experience of the soul in Pisces: service, sacrifice, bondage, and renunciation. This last word, Renunciation, comes over a period of twelve lives, Alice Bailey says, “wherein the final stage of Renunciation is experienced and the disciple or initiate renounces all for the love of humanity...and lays himself upon the alter of sacrifice. He achieves, as a result, the final liberation.” This liberation occurs not in just one “ta-da” moment, but in reality is twelvefold in nature, for liberation, victory and triumph have to be experienced in every sign, just as captivity, defeat and failure have been experienced in all the signs of the zodiac.

From earliest times, man has sensed that life on Earth is a journey – a spiritual quest. One of the oldest prayers we have recorded is the Gayatri, which sums up the aspiration of the journey through what is called manifestation to the unmanifest, but still more real, Life behind the veils of the form world. Let’s say it together:

GAYATRI

O Thou Who givest sustenance to the universe,
From Whom all things proceed,
To Whom all things return,
Unveil to us the face of the true Spiritual Sun
Hidden by a disc of golden Light
That we may know the Truth And do our whole duty
As we journey to Thy sacred feet.

The keynote of Pisces – I leave the Father’s home and turning back, I save – sums up the path of the soul who willingly chooses to leave the perfect Light and Love of the Father’s Home in order to turn back to Earth for purposes of redeeming, salvaging it. This theme of sacrifice and salvage eclipses all other themes that qualify life on our planet because it governs all levels of consciousness right up to that of the planetary Logos Himself: Sanat Kumara, who is known as “the Great Sacrifice”. “Under the Law of Sacrifice, Sanat Kumara must turn His back upon the Central Spiritual Sun and with the light of His Countenance irradiate the path of the prisoners of the planet”, we’re told. “He sentences Himself to stay for as long as may be needed, acting as the Sun and light of the planet until the Day be with us and the night of pralaya descends upon His finished task. Thus only can the light of the Central Spiritual Sun begin to penetrate the dark places of the Earth; when this happens all ‘shadows disappear’”, an ancient text says.

So it shouldn’t come as a surprise, after 2000 years of experience gained in the Age of Pisces, that the theme of Pisces is bondage, sacrifice, renunciation, as they manifest in attachment. Perhaps the Buddha

with his message of detachment was a forerunner of the Age of Pisces, coming as he did some 500 years before Christ. Nothing holds us in bondage, the Buddha said, more than our habits of thought and desire. We think the forces that hold us captive lie outside ourselves and outside our control, and this may be the greatest illusion of all. Much of the human quest for understanding, for liberation, for freedom from limitation, lies in awakening to the realisation that we are our own jailors. We locked the door ourselves, through ignorance, self-centredness and materialism, and we hold the keys, through the renewing of our minds and the release of our desires.

The Law of Sacrifice is said to be the first law to be grasped by human intelligence, and therefore the easiest to understand. We might not have thought of it this way, but we are all highly experienced in the practice of sacrifice. Whether we are experts at it depends on how much we've learned through the ages of sacrifice that lie behind us. "The urge to sacrifice, to choose one way or line of conduct and thus sacrifice another, to lose in order eventually to gain – such is the underlying story of evolution", Alice Bailey said.

In fact, sacrifice permeates all life on Earth, not just human experience. The Law of Sacrifice can be traced even down to the densest level of existence, the mineral kingdom, which gives of its substance to other forms of life through the vegetable kingdom and through the element of water. But what interests us most, being human, is how sacrifice applies to us. Sacrifice most typically is thought of as thwarted desire, but this equating of sacrifice with emotional pain is a profound misunderstanding. Most accurately and most spiritually, sacrifice is in fact complete conformity with the Will of God as it can be recognised in the divine Plan. And that is bliss.

This recognition also has several levels or degrees of spiritual significance. The theme of all religions has been sacrifice, ranging in expression from the sacrifice of animals to appease God or the gods, the sacrifice of newborn babies, of young girls, of a vast array of designated "sacrificial lambs" according to the ways different cultures seek to demonstrate their willingness to placate forces deemed beyond their control by sacrificing either a defenseless and vulnerable or a precious life, animal or human, to appease an infinitely more powerful and awesome divine being.

Thus, it's no wonder that the usual human understanding of sacrifice is one of pain and sorrow, of loss and suffering, but this is because the human being identifies himself with the world of form, and not with the soul, and because he doesn't understand the power of the will: his own will. "The only true sacrifice is that which is self-initiated", Alice Bailey said. Much of religious teaching concerns the submission of the human will to divine Will, but there is little or no teaching about the joyous expression of the will of Christ, immanent in every form as the expression of the soul's intention and capable of becoming a powerful directing force in the life of a disciple. The very word "submission" makes some people's hair stand on end, yet submission is a deeply spiritual attribute and a powerful creative force. True submission, we're told, is not negative acceptance but, rather, a positive attitude of spiritual expectancy which, in time, produces a state of positive acquiescence.

Passive acceptance of one's fate, in the belief that one's suffering is the "will of God", is not submission as it's intended to be. Even esoteric and new age groups can be victims of a kind of fatalism, Alice Bailey points out. Whenever the authority for decisions about one's life is turned over to a group or a leader who is supposed to be speaking from a higher level than one's own innermost self, that renders one negative and submissive. It's perhaps understandable that, in the midst of a crisis or personal distress, one wants to hear a guiding voice, but the true guidance which comes when prayer and meditation are properly practiced, puts one in touch with the inner guide, the soul, manifesting first as the conscience. And we all have a stronger sense of this inner voice than we probably recognise or are willing to trust.

We learn to sacrifice, we learn to submit, through the choices, decisions and values we select. This is an age-long process that steadily refines itself through practice and experience. An understanding of the Law of Cause and Effect as it's working out in one's life can be immensely liberating of any attitude of fatalism. Another important way to learn it is through forgiveness, which literally means "to give for" – to choose the greater good of the larger group over the self-interest of the unit. The ability to say "I'm sorry" even when you think the greater error lies in another, is both humbling and immensely liberating, for it overrides the impulse of the separated personality to stand on its own imaginary moral highground. Whenever we are convinced we're in the right, we are perilously close to this illusory and utterly isolating place in consciousness. That's why the initiate in Capricorn makes his way up to the mountain top of initiation on his knees – in humility, which is most accurately defined as "an adjusted sense of right proportion". To forgive is to realise that it's not all about you – to put it in the perspective of the greater whole, and that's the spiritual essence of submission.

Group work of any sort is wonderful training in sacrifice, for inevitably it involves periodically doing that which might not be the preferred or easiest way. This doesn't mean one should violate one's true spiritual principles, but too often that excuse is thrown up to avoid committing one's will to the support of the group initiative. If one has chosen one's group affiliations with care and integrity, very rarely would that group relationship require or seem to imply that one should sacrifice one's deepest principles. Far more likely, what's asked is the relinquishment or suspension of one's preferences, which is quite another matter.

The Masters watch their disciples for this capacity, we're told. "The willingness to sacrifice the lesser when the greater is sensed is that for which They search", Alice Bailey said. "The spontaneous relinquishing of long-held ideals when a greater and more inclusive presents itself is Their guide. The sacrifice of pride and the sacrifice of personality when the vastness of the work and the urgency of the need are realised, sway Them to cooperation. It is essential that the disciples shall learn to sacrifice the non-essential in order that the work may go forward. Little as one may realise it, the many techniques and methods and ways are secondary to the major world need. There are many ways and many points of view, and many experiments and many efforts—abortive or successful, and all of them come and go. But humanity remains. All of them are in evidence of the multiplicity of minds, and of experiences, but the goal remains. Difference is ever of the personality."

Sacrifice for disciples also includes relinquishment of the tendency (age-old, we're told) to criticise or adjust another's work, the sense of responsibility for the actions of others or for work that rightfully belongs to them, not to oneself; and the mental pride which sees its own way, its own view and interpretation as the right one, and those of others as wrong or misguided. We are all looking at the same thing, each of us from our own perspective, which is inevitably limited and cannot possibly be comprehensive.

Still another aspect of sacrifice for which the Masters look is what could be called the cost of the sacrifice. "Sacrifice must touch the depths of giving and not call for that which upon the surface lies. The unseen sacrifice must go with that which can be seen", Alice Bailey said. If we are feeling rather overwhelmed by the depth and breadth of the sacrifice required on the path to Liberation, that's because the theme, as I said, touches or qualifies the very motivation that drove the planetary Logos Himself to limit His Life and Consciousness to that of our little blue planet, for the duration of a cycle necessary for the Earth to become as sacred planet.

Sacrifice in this high sense is closely linked with mediatorship, another theme intrinsic to Pisces. Mediatorship is the highest aspect of Pisces which humanity can comprehend - the energy of mediation, of right relationship. Mediatorship can be about establishing relationship between differences, but it can also be a fusion of that which is already related. And this latter mediation is what lies ahead at the

Festivals of Taurus and Gemini. Alice Bailey tells us, “At Wesak and at the June full moon, Christ – in closest cooperation with the Buddha, links Hierarchy with Humanity. When humanity awakens to this fact of this mediatorship and can then avail itself of the straight line of ascent and descent through the doors held open by the Buddha and the Christ, some stupendous happening may be imminent. Certain ‘great Potencies’, effecting great changes, may take place, for which all the past has only been preparatory and through which the Age of Brotherhood and understanding may make itself felt.”

The present times have much to teach humanity in preparation for this “stupendous happening”. The intolerable inequality in the distribution of resources is fostering a widening cleavage between individuals and between nations, separating them into the “haves” and the “have nots” and fostering resentment, mistrust and injustice. At the same time there is a growing recognition, by countless people of goodwill, of the need to sacrifice, which will turn out to be the saving force, I think. Let’s give Alice Bailey the last word on this:

“It is the sacrifice, day by day, in the process of daily living which can save the world of men—the sacrifice of selfish personal interests for the good of the whole and the giving up of one's practical life to the salvage of the world...When the mode of sacrifice enters into the realm of the subtler and subjective values and the true meaning of forgiveness is intellectually, practically and spiritually comprehended, the New Age will be abundantly realised with its truly human civilisation and a culture which will embody the realities of the esoteric teaching...Then and only then will the new esotericism be revealed to a race of men who have made aspiration a fact in their outer experience.”

Let us work now in meditation with our seed thought, I leave the Father’s Home and turning back, I save.”