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Aquarius is a sign in which the energy of universality is contacted. As we enter into the Age of Aquarius, this potent energy is gradually becoming more available for humanity to express and experience in differing ways. Tonight, we will be exploring some of these expressions.

One of the reasons that the energy of universality has only become available recently is its close connection with the first aspect of Will. This is true for the individual, where it manifests as the result of contact with the Monad; and true for humanity as a whole, where contact with Shamballa is the key condition. As we know, the direct inflow of Shamballa force into the human kingdom has only been operative since the middle of last century, with major impacts during World War 2, 1975 and 2000. Each one of these impacts will have given added impetus to the expression of universality. Because of its inherently synthetic nature, universality is only expressed through major groupings and wholes. This may also lead us to think about the Avatar of Synthesis, a great being Who may be said to be acting as a kind of lens focusing the synthetic impact of Shamballa on such entities as the General Assembly of the United Nations. This Avatar is said to be standing behind the Christ as He prepares for His destined role as the Aquarian World Teacher. In *The Reappearance of the Christ*, we read:

“His relationship and planned help date from the time of the pronouncing of the great Invocation and its use... everywhere. Owing to the stupendous task confronting Christ, the Avatar of Synthesis will fortify Him, and He will be buttressed by this ‘Silent Avatar’ Who (to speak symbolically) will ‘keep His eye upon Him, His hand beneath Him and His heart in unison with His.’

This Being is closely related to the Will Aspect of divinity, and His cooperation has been made possible through Christ's Own attainment along the line of the highest, spiritual will. He works under the great natural Law of Synthesis, producing at-onement, unification and fusion. His function (in unison with the energy of Christ) is to generate spiritual will in humanity, the will-to-good; His potency works in three fields of activity at this time:

- a. Within the spiritual Hierarchy itself, revealing the nature of the divine will-to-good which the Kingdom of God must express, and the nature also of divine Purpose.
- b. Within the Assembly of the United Nations, though not within the Security Council; He is there generating a slowly growing will-to-unity.
- c. Within the masses of men everywhere, fostering the urge to a general betterment.

His activity is necessarily a mass activity, for He can only channel His energies through the mass consciousness or through a group conscious entity, such as the Hierarchy, the United Nations or Humanity.” *The Reappearance of the Christ* pp.76-

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Note the remark that the Avatar of Synthesis can only channel His energies through mass consciousness or through a group conscious entity. It is said that the sense of synthesis has a mass effect earlier than it has an individual effect, and that when the dynamism inherent in the will is wielded by world servers, disciples and initiates, they can turn this instinctive response into factual experience. This process produces the appearance on Earth of the quality of universality. However, as with all energies, synthesis can be misapplied. Thus, we are also warned that:

“There is, at this time, an emergence of certain powerful and dominating first ray personalities into the theatre of world activity. These people are in direct contact with this Shamballa force and are sensitive to the impact of the will energy of Deity. According to their type of personality and their point in evolution will be their reaction to this force and their consequent usefulness to the Lord of the World as He works out His plans of world unfoldment. The energy of the will of God works through them, though stepped down and often misused and misapplied, by their differing and limited personalities, and interpreted unsatisfactorily by their undeveloped consciousness. These people are found in every field of human affairs. They are the dominant persons, and the dictators in every aspect of human living — political, social, religious and educational. Who shall say (until at least a century has gone by) whether their influence and their efforts have been good or bad. Where they flagrantly infringe the Law of Love, their influence may be powerful, but it is passing and undesirable, at least where that phase of their activities is concerned. Where they meet human emergency and need, and work along lines of basic restoration and the preservation of ‘units of synthesis,’ their influence is good and constructive.” *Destiny of the Nations* pp. 14-15

Now it seems undeniable that in the current era, autocratic leaders are on the rise. We may wonder if this is partly the result of the Shamballa impact in 2000. While there are examples in Turkey, Russia, Syria, Rwanda, North Korea, and elsewhere, it is perhaps the rise of Donald Trump in the USA that has caused the most alarm. While his autocratic tendencies have so far been at least partially held in check by the U.S. Constitution, the constant negative pressure which he places on democratic norms, such as freedom of the press and international diplomatic relations, is still cause for concern. One of his peculiar, almost paradoxical abilities, is being able to persuade the masses that he is ‘one of them’ while at the same time truly benefiting only his chosen associates. One way in which this identification is expressed is his well-known appetite for the food of the common people – hamburgers and soda. And while it is always possible to make tendentious readings from the personal horoscope, it is a curious fact that Trump’s Part of Fortune, which is connected with career and prosperity, can be found in Aquarius. He seems to have made a career out of catering to mass tastes, with his presidential position being a kind of logical end-point. Unfortunately, because he is pursuing this process for selfish ends, it is unlikely that his impact will be evocative of the universality latent in the masses, a universality that would allow them to identify with all other beings. Instead, what we are seeing is a public rise in separative thinking, whether in race, religion or gender. Now perhaps this dramatic surfacing of intensified polarisation is necessary. But it is hard to escape the conclusion that those who deliberately stoke this process are building up for themselves a heavy karmic burden. Let’s pause for a moment, and then say together the Mantram of the Will.

In the centre of the Will of God I stand.
Naught shall deflect my will from His.
I implement that will by love.
I turn towards the field of service.
I, the Triangle divine, work out that will
Within the square and serve my fellowmen.

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In *The Destiny of the Nations*, the Tibetan sheds further light on the tension between autocracy and democracy. He remarks: "I would like to suggest that the ideology which is embodied in the vision of the totalitarian states is an erroneous but clear-cut response to the Shamballa influence of *will*; that the ideology behind the democratic ideal constitutes a similar response to the universality which the *love* of the Hierarchy prompts it to express, and that communism is of human origin, embodying that ideology which humanity has formulated in its own right. Thus the three aspects of God's nature are beginning to take form as three major ideas and what we see upon the planet at this time are the distorted human reactions to spiritual impulses, emanating from three different centres, but all equally divine in their essential natures, and in their essences." *The Destiny of the Nations* p.22

So humanity is faced with a difficult situation – learning to cope with more direct Shamballic impacts, without losing the gains which the influence of the Hierarchy has undoubtedly created, in the growth of democratic norms and institutions. And there is also the matter of finding a more workable form of the communistic impulse. The United Nations itself, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are surely manifestations of Hierarchical influence; and it comes as no surprise that the UN is viewed with a sceptical eye by the Trump administration.

Universality expresses itself in fields beyond politics of course. One of the more recent expressions is in economics, where the topic of the Universal Basic Income is slowly moving into the mainstream. The idea that every single adult, regardless of age, gender, race or other difference, is owed enough to live on, might have seemed an impossible socialistic dream even twenty years ago. Yet it is both a natural consequence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and an increasingly practical solution to the complexities that modern social security systems have fallen into.

There are also continuing experiments towards a more universal expression of the religious impulse. The Tibetan comments: "Astronomically, we are not yet functioning fully within the influence of Aquarius; we are only just emerging from the Piscean influence, and the full impact of the energies which Aquarius will set loose has not yet been felt. Nevertheless, each year carries us closer to the centre of power, the major effect of which will be to induce recognition of man's essential unity, of the processes of sharing and of cooperation and of the emergence of that new world religion whose keynote will be universality and initiation." *The Reappearance of the Christ* pp.81-2 One example of such work is the Parliament of the World's Religions. The first took place in 1893. Then, after a long hiatus, the idea was revived for the centenary in 1993, and since then, there have been four more meetings, with a fifth scheduled for this year, November 1-7.

Another area where we may have cause for some optimism that universality is emerging with more clarity is one where Trump and other powerful figures are once again implicated: gender, or more precisely, biological sex. The balance between the masculine and feminine poles of existence, as it is expressed through the human kingdom, is shifting again in a dramatic and public way as the #MeToo movement gathers momentum. For those who are not familiar with Twitter, a hashtag is basically a way of tagging your posts to the service, so that anyone searching for them can see them in one place. The simplicity and universal nature of this hashtag is notable – ‘me’, the individual, ‘too’, together with other individuals. The tag was actually first created in 2006 on the MySpace network by the social activist and community organizer Tarana Burke. Yet it has been the public revelations concerning abuse and harassment by powerful figures in the entertainment industry and in other industries, coupled with a re-invigoration of the hashtag on Twitter by the actress, activist and producer Alyssa Milano, which have propelled it since last October into public awareness. In so doing, it has opened up a space for a more nuanced and extensive discussion about the imbalances of power which continue to exist between the sexes. The concepts of ‘emotional labour’ and ‘male privilege’, previously somewhat abstract ideas, have been grounded in many practical examples and articles. Feminism, which since the late nineteenth century has been seeking to redress the imbalance created by at least two millennia of patriarchal structures, is once more animating public debate.

Given how long patriarchal structures have been in place, it is not surprising that the process of correcting their deficiencies should take some time. Feminism has already gone through three ‘waves’, since the nineteenth century, and now in the era of social media it is gaining new expression. What is particularly notable about the current focus is that, as well as re-visiting and highlighting the persistent economic and social inequalities, there is now a brighter light being shone on the subtle structures in consciousness that underpin them. Questions about the masculine relationship to power and to non-verbal communication, or, as esotericists might put it, to the first ray and to the subtler auric emanations, are being raised and debated, under the identifying label of ‘toxic masculinity’. The issue of whether gender is in some sense essential, or is a social construct, while it might sound like a dry academic debate, necessarily has its esoteric dimension in the distinction between the dense physical and the emotional and mental vehicles, and the degree of conscious control which the indwelling soul is able to exert over them. Ultimately, gender is a process of identification, an idea familiar to any esotericist; and the increasing fluidity emerging in this area, while it may create some initial difficulties and confusion, is a clear sign of evolving consciousness.

The Tibetan explores some aspects of this theme in *Esoteric Psychology* Vol.I, in a section entitled ‘The Problem of Sex’. He indicates that the solving of the sexual problem, particularly as it relates to the wrong emphasis on the physical aspects of sex, will lead to an era when there will be true equality between the sexes. This will allow a more correct education of youth, giving them scope for healthy emotional and mental development, so that they may serve the whole more effectively. And it will also produce a mental freedom that will lead to the inflow of new ideas and concepts. Interestingly, one of the most popular creations of mass culture, the most recent instalment of the *Star Wars* saga, touches on both of these themes: female leadership and agency is emphasised, and there is also a reflection on the need for old, crystallised institutions to die and be re-born.

Aquarius is a sign that connects air and water, for it is an air sign, yet its keynote focuses on the water of life. The water cycle gives us an interesting analogy for the universal processes of incarnation. Consider a water drop in a cloud. It precipitates out of the cloud, and falls to the ground – incarnation. Then, unless it falls straight into a lake or river, it will sink into the ground. As it does so, it dissolves minerals from the particular soil of the region, acquiring a specific set of qualities. It might then eventually find its way into an aquifer, deep below the ground – perhaps we could say that this phase marks the phase of mass consciousness – deep in the earth, surrounded by other drops, all with a more or less identical set of qualities. Then, at some point, maybe when the geology of the region shifts, the aquifer water reaches the surface in a spring, and the water starts to flow over the surface again in a stream, and as it does so, it may dissolve new minerals, acquiring new qualities, eventually becoming quite different from its original composition. We could link this to the gradual emergence of the individual from the mass. At some point, the little stream may join a larger river, and commingle its qualities with that of the river. We can link this with the emergence of group consciousness. And finally, the river joins the ocean, and the drop surrenders all its qualities to the vasty deep – incarnation is ended, consciousness reaches the synthetic divine level. Now of course, this analogy, like any analogy, is not 100% accurate. Apart from anything else, the hydrologists among you are probably squirming at the over-simplified picture I've drawn. And let's also not forget that it is a cycle. The next phase is that of evaporation, where the water rises again into the clouds. Does this removal of all qualities correspond to the stage of pralaya or rest at the end of all incarnations, before the cycle inevitably begins again?

The emerging Age of Aquarius is an era where universality can become a more definite part of the human experience, and each year, this Festival gives us the opportunity to help make this emerging Age more vibrant and alive in the public consciousness. Let's now turn to our work in meditation, using the keynote, "Water of Life am I, poured forth for thirsty men."