

## Journey 25 - THE WAY OF THE DESERT

Jesus said:

"I am the Light that is above them all,  
I am the All,  
The All came from me  
The All attained to me.  
Cleave a piece of wood  
And I am there;  
Lift up the stone  
And you will find me there."

This saying (#77) may sound utterly egotistical. It is quite contrary to all Jewish tradition. Consider it in the context of the mystic's view of divinity:

"When you come to know yourselves  
Then you will become known,  
And you will realize that is you  
Who are the sons of the living Father."

Any of the disciples or any enlightened person could say the same thing as saying #77, for they know that all of us partake of divinity (consciousness) of all things. If there is only ONE that is ALL, then you are divine, I am divine, and the stick of wood and the stone are divine.

Nonetheless, this is a teaching that is easily perverted. For instance, it can be taken to mean that we are each responsible for our own illness, or that we can each be rich and powerful just by believing it, or indeed, that anything can come true just by having faith. Thus, people feel guilty for being ill, or guilty for not being rich and powerful. This is a tragic misunderstanding.

If the TOTALITY creates nature, it is only in the sense of creating space and time and the laws of nature. Sometimes the Higher Self can impose a pattern on random events, which is synchronicity or divination, depending on the context. On the whole, the individual cannot change even his own condition without full knowledge and remembrance of why his higher Self chose these challenges in the first place. Then he may realize there is a reason for this condition, a challenge to overcome, a lesson to learn, or karma to work off. It requires the difficult and slow acquisition of knowledge and skills to change the reality that we experience as Nature. Choice is possible only when a chaotic state is unstable.

"Men think  
That it is peace that I have come to cast upon the world.  
They do not know  
That it is dissension which  
I have come to cast upon the earth:  
Fire, sword, and war."

Jesus said:

"I have cast fire upon the world,  
And see,  
I am guarding it until it blazes."

This is not what the conventionally pious would expect to hear from Jesus, yet these sayings are also in the New Testament. It is exactly what I would expect from one who has experienced the Illumination of Fire, for in this mystical experience, one sees the necessity of destruction and fire, to burn up the old, to make way for renewal and new life. If someone claims to be a mystic, and does not say such shocking, almost paradoxical things, then you know him for a fake. Most of the sayings of Jesus are in both the New Testament and the Book of Thomas. The beatitudes are in the Book of Thomas, scattered through the book, not all in one place, nor delivered at one time. There are a few more of them, such as "Blessed are the solitary and elect, for you will find the Kingdom. For you are from it, and to it you will return." I can see why the author of Matthew put them all in one place, and invented the Sermon on the Mount. What we do not find is any apocalyptic expectation of the return of Christ, or some future coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. According to Jesus, it is already here.

His disciples said to Him,  
"When will the repose of the dead come about,  
and when will the new world come?"  
He said to them,  
"What you look forward to has already come,  
But you do not recognize it."

On another occasion  
His disciples said to Him  
"When will the Kingdom come?"  
Jesus said:  
"It will not come by waiting for it.  
It will not be a matter of saying  
'Here it is' or 'There it is.'  
Rather,  
The Kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth,  
And men do not see it."

This is the wisest and most important teaching in the whole Book of Thomas. Certainly, it should refute all those who believe in the apocalypse. It is also another typical saying of the true mystic. Those who have experienced the Illumination of Fire know all the great and terrible wonder and beauty of the world, the wonder and beauty of destruction as well as the renewal the fire makes possible. What we call disasters are signs of life, in the universe, in geology, and in the course of civilizations. Thus, the world is as it should be. Of course, we can always try to make it better. It is not the terrible and evil place the Gnostics taught and that is one more reason for denying that the Book of Thomas is Gnostic.

From the larger perspective, the advent of Christianity in the West imposed a guru-disciple tradition, a discipline of chastity, poverty, and obedience that destroyed or delayed the incipient

sciences created by Western philosophy. It also smothered those distinctive Western traits of individual freedom and individual genius that only re-emerged after a thousand years of darkness. No wonder the figures in medieval Christian art look so dour and unhappy!

Please note that we cannot blame this oriental guru-disciple tradition on Jesus, for, like Krishnamurti, he rejected the mantle of "Master" that his followers tried to hang around his shoulders, as the following passage will show:

Jesus said to His disciples,  
"Compare me to someone and tell me whom I am like."  
Simon Peter said to Him, "You are like a righteous angel."  
Matthew said to Him, "You are like a wise philosopher."  
Thomas said to Him,  
"Master,  
My mouth is wholly incapable of saying whom You are like."  
Jesus said:  
"I am not your master.  
Because you have drunk,  
You have become intoxicated  
From the bubbling spring which I have measured out."

THE BOOK OF THOMAS shows us the Way of the desert Saints, who then became the Island saints of the British Isles, during the darkest part of the dark ages, when they were the only ones in Europe who could still read and write Latin and Greek. For about 200 years, they kept the slender thread of Civilization alive, and under the patronage of Charlemagne and King Alfred the Great, they were able to pass it on to rest of Europe. They invented the Carolingian Miniscule (lower case), and were the first to separate words by a space. Those Saints who remained in the desert converted to Islam and became the Sufis.

You may wonder why the BOOK OF THOMAS was not included in the Christian Bible. Remember that the Bible was compiled by Churchmen, who were trying to make the Church the one and only way to salvation. If you have the BOOK OF THOMAS, you don't need the church. After all, we are each sons and daughters of divinity, and indeed, everything partakes of divinity. Furthermore, the Kingdom of Heaven is already here. We merely need to see it. It is this awakening to the terrible beauty of the universe that Jesus tried to inspire in his disciples. The desert Saints achieved this epiphany, no doubt because of THE BOOK OF THOMAS and the oral tradition that lies behind it.

There are seven ways to spirituality, all equally valid if properly understood. In addition to the Way of the Saints and Sufis, there is the Way of the Forbidden Sciences, as well as Yoga, Taoism, the Medicine Path, Shamanism, and Animism. Animism is the way of Africa. One can see it in the carved totems and masks of Ghana. Wear a mask and dance all night to steady drumming, and you become the god. The totems are symbols of the gods. We find the same essential thing in Haitian voodoo, and in the African-Brazilian religion. The Way of the Sun combines all seven into a new spiritual and global synthesis.