

## Freewill

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[Page 15] To approach our subject intelligently, we must first analyse our conceptions, think what the idea freedom logically involves; also if we can, form at least a dim idea of what is meant by will, and under what conditions a portion of this cosmical energy can be harnessed to the chariot of the Ego, and with what degree of freedom it may be directed within the limitations of consciousness.

The idea of absolute freedom is as impossible to grasp, as unthinkable as absolute consciousness or any aspect of the Infinite and unconditioned. The will cannot be directed to an unperceived and unthinkable end, hence no action can at the first instant transcend consciousness. Its results may, indeed must, pass beyond the limits of the individual. The outgoing wave is soon beyond that limited area of perception and its reflex may not come for years, even centuries. When it is felt the perceptions of the individual may be limited by the bounds of another personality, and it will then appear to him to come wholly from without, to be causeless so far as he is concerned. He may call it Providence, chance, fate, the will of God, *etc. etc.*, according to education. If he is wiser he will recognise it as the result of some preceding act of his own, and if he chooses to adopt the oriental word will call it Karma. We must distinguish then between the immediate action, which is always within and limited by the potentialities of the actor, and the results of action. These latter as they reflect upon the actor might be called Karma, in the broadest sense, even if the reaction took place within a minute; but practically the use of this term has been limited to those reactions which we fail to trace to some outgoing action.

Science tells us that light is a wave impulse in the ether or primordial matter that compactly fills all space. The light that comes to us from the majority of the stars started from its sources hundred of years before we were born, yet, to us, it is the light of the present day. Thought is the speech of the soul; a word is a deed and a deed is an acted word. " Behind will lies desire", and thought, will and motive, or desire, are the inseparable creative trinity on all the planes of being. These make up the spoken word, the Logos, the thought uttered in action. The echoes of our own voices come back to us across the centuries. Spoken under other skies, amid other scenes, and in other bodies, we know them not as our very own. How mistakenly we speak of the echoless shore. These word-deeds, so freely, so carelessly, so idly uttered in the long ago, come pulsing back to us [Page 16] in thunder tones, or with still small voice, with a shriek, or in fairy whispers, in flute-like notes, in tones of harsh admonition, with a tempest and babel of sound that threatens to sweep us away. If we have sown the wind we shall reap the whirlwind.

These voices come, back to us clothed in all the events of life, in the conditions of our bodies and in all the sensations of which we are capable. As we act today under their influences, we are sending out the magic words of power which will conjure up good or evil forms in lives to come. Each moment we are

conscious of free choice, and of this consciousness no sophistry can rob us. The tension of the will can be thrown to the right or the left, and as like skaters we glide forward over the boundless fields of time, on the narrow edge of present personality, constant inclination, however slight, will swing us to the right or left hand path, leading as far apart in the end, as the north is from the south.

These conceptions of the law of reaction upon an evolving continuously existing being are essential to any lucid thought on our subject. Without them every attempt to deduce a working principle which will satisfy both our reason and sense of justice, must end in a weary round of words. Each barrier to thought can be opened by but a single key. The idea of reincarnation when once clearly conceived is a key that opens many barriers. Without it we will clamour at those iron gates, and may perhaps by closing our eyes, delude ourselves with the fancy that they have been passed, while in our hearts we know that they have not. No man ever lived who was satisfied in his inmost soul that the exercise of will during one brief life, entered under unsought conditions, could justify either the heaven or the hell of the churchmen.

The law of freedom is at the same time that of limitation, for as said before, freedom can be but relative to the individual. Its first limitation is the entire being of the individual. But this is no limitation at all to that particular being. I cannot feel myself restrained from any action of which I cannot conceive and toward which therefore I can exercise no will. It is outside the sphere of my direction. Petty factions may divide the camp, centering in the sphere of my being. Within this sphere however we all feel many limitations: let us analyse their nature. In the first place there are self-imposed limitations — will limits will. Here we come to our own complexity. I may desire to perform some action which I at the same time perceive to be contrary to my own welfare. Animal or instinctive will, that is the aggregate impulses of the cells and lower nerve centres, making up the semi-intelligent or elemental will, the Kamic (not Karmic) principle of the occultist, is restrained by will due to the higher and more widely intelligent nature. The freedom of the lower will is restrained by the higher and a part of the energy of the latter is consumed in this [Page 17] restraint. The available energy for outside purposes is the surplus that remains after counterbalancing internal discord. A badly adjusted machine consumes most of the energy which flows into it in working against itself. The government of an army affords us a better illustration. Each soldier is conscious mainly of his own needs, either real or imaginary, and in matters of common sentiment the association of numbers makes the desires or emotions of each one more intense than they would be if he were isolated; for he feels not only his own but the aggregate impulse. It is the part of the general, not merely to plan the campaign, but to weld the many lower wills with his own and direct the whole as a mighty engine. In so far as he lacks this capacity he will fail in the qualities of generalship.

If one part of the army must be used to subdue the discontent and rebellion of another, its effective force is enormously diminished. The general who takes the field with an army which he has not reduced to a state of unity and discipline, invites almost certain defeat and disintegration. The lower personality is an army with innumerable centres, sub-centres, and units of consciousness and sub-consciousness, of will and energy. The presiding will is that of which we are more directly conscious, although the influence of all these subordinate wills is felt, just as the commanding general feels instinctively the temper of his army without verbal communication with the privates, and even without the reports of his subordinate officers. The average man leads the life of an army in camp, or is comparatively idle. Some degree of drill and discipline is maintained, there may be a little skirmishing or picket firing, but the consumption of rations and the dull routine of camp life occupies the attention of the soldiers whose wills, emotions and desires are aroused in no one particular or that subaltern. The man of violent passions is a man of weak central will. Bumptious corps commanders and loud-mouthed brigadiers are allowed in succession to

invade the tent of the general in chief and compel him to sign orders dictated by themselves.

Perhaps this general is a man of inquisitive disposition, more adventurous than wise, desirous of exploring for himself the surrounding country and of studying the position of the enemy. He may slip away from headquarters when the army is asleep and but few sentinels pace their rounds. He may find on his return, if he escapes capture, that some intruder has assumed his sword and uniform, that he is no longer recognized as the true commander and must remain a helpless outcast, unless at some lucky moment he can regain the insignia of his authority. These things have happened many times and will happen many more.

We will suppose however that no serious dissension divides the army, that the troops drill and draw their rations with virtuous regularity, that order and neatness prevail from reveille to tattoo, This is well, very well, [Page 18] but it is not action. It is the preparation for war and not war itself. Year after year of this routine will deaden the energies of the soldier. To face and align, to march and counter-march, to handle a weapon against imaginary foes is the mechanical part of the soldier's trade, but, say what we may, a soldier is more than a machine. He may be simple and ignorant of any but his rudimentary duties, but he has consciousness, a soul with passions and emotions. An army, if it is to be anything more than a glittering pageant, must like the body, have within its mechanical movements a soul, and that soul must be the attuned wills and emotions or desires of its myriad units. The great masters of military science have been, without exception, not mere martinets or chess board tacticians, but men with deep and intuitive knowledge of human nature, who could feel and know all that the common soldier did, and with iron will and correct judgment arouse and direct his entire energies. These are the men who have forged armies into giant weapons, which could be wielded with the swiftness of the rapier and the stunning force of an iron mace.

The inert bar of steel contains countless particles each with the rudiments of polarity, but pointing in every possible direction. When all these directions are made one, we have, a powerful magnet, forming a channel for the lines of magnetic force which encircle the globe, and aligning itself with them. The bar is no longer a separate thing but finds itself powerfully influenced by great cosmic forces, and also capable of far reaching results.

In like manner the countless wills of which each personality is made up, may be so polarized, so reduced to unity, that powers undreamed of before may be the result, powers which are allied with great cosmic forces and intelligences. The few who arrive at this stage, after lives of steady unwavering exercise of the central will, find themselves confronted with a great temptation. They may become adepts of the right or the left hand path. The powers acquired may be applied to selfish personal ends or for the benefit of the great, the universal self, humanity as it is and may become. As the choice is to the right or to the left, the whole nature of the chooser is affected and intensified from that time on. This period on the path toward adeptship is symbolized in the New Testament story of the temptation in the wilderness. New and wonderful powers are felt, and the kamic devil of self, from a point of wide spiritual survey, urges that they be applied for the many and intense pleasures that the expanded nature is now capable of feeling. This application is easy, but to turn them wholly to the benefit of others seems hard. Can we wonder that so many have failed at this supreme hour, that the Christs and Buddhas have been so few. The leader of men and the ruler of his own complex nature may forge his weapon, weld together the subordinate wills, either in the [Page 19] golden celestial fire or in the lurid flame of animal self and desire. The patriot commander may arouse the higher emotions of his followers, induce them to despise all material

comforts, and carry his army through battle and defeat, through wintry storms and ragged misery to final victory.

He will share their hardships and may look for no greater reward than theirs, that "well done" which comes from within.

The leader in whose breast the selfish love of power is the ruling passion, will attract to his banner a soldiery like himself. At the head of a robber horde he will accomplish his own ends, gain power and plunder by arousing and uniting their worst passions. He must not allow himself to be overcome by yielding freely to the lower vices for his energies are taxed to the utmost in remaining himself on the crest of an ever swelling wave of passion and power. The time will come when he will fail to satisfy the constantly increasing demands of his fierce lieutenants and he will fall a victim to their fury. We have all read weird stories of the black magician who sells his soul, that is, perverts his higher forces to the service of the devil of selfish ambitions and desires; the ever increasing tribute must be paid, the compact has written itself in every drop of his blood and the savage elemental that has evolved through the misuse of his own nature, finds allies without, which seem to take objective forms. The fragments of a dissolving army will retain for a time the semblance of organisation and many degenerate into guerilla bands. A strong and evil personality breaks up in like manner. The tale of the black magician who in the end is torn to pieces by fiends is not so far from the truth as might be supposed. We must remember when we strive to strengthen and unify the will, that the motive is a matter of all importance, the effect will pass from life to life and the forces we rally around us will rapidly take one character or another. It may be better to drill in camp a little longer than risk becoming the chief of a pirate gang.

To sum up we may describe will as an all pervading principle, an aspect of consciousness through which all things are effected. On the highest planes it is the radiant energy of the All-spirit the Atma-Buddhi. In the fields of matter it is reflected as the radiant energy of matter, material light and heat, chemical affinity and magnetism: the love principle of matter. Perfect in itself it becomes evil only when misused, as the pure face of truth is seen distorted and hideous when reflected from the troubled waters of life. Will can be recognised as a force only when definitely directed. Unlimited will would be like the indefinite expansion of gases, tending simultaneously to all possibilities and ends, to the evolution of all possible beings and conditions. To be anything it must be limited by the nature of the willing being, whether that be God or atom, Within [Page 20] these limitations there are others, self imposed, either from moment to moment or the result of previous actions, or self created environment. With time as a sort of fourth dimension of space, and the rebirth of the individual, the will as a constant modifier becomes all powerful. It can expand or contract the being, build up or disintegrate.

"Solve et Coagula," is the mystic motto.

A great eastern poem teaches us, that we progress through the regulation of the will power, the even and harmonious development of all the faculties, not by the starving of some and the pampering of others. The emaciated ascetic wasting time and strength for the sake of gaining a few curious and almost useless psychic powers may be as far from the path as the bloated voluptuary. The word "devotion" occurring so often, refers to the steady, intelligent direction of the will and must not be taken in a narrow and merely emotional sense. The bow is the symbol of will power, the tension of will sending forth, with intelligent aim, the arrows of action.

With the closing words of the Bhagavat Gita we may say:

"Wherever Krishna, the supreme master of devotion, and wherever Arjuna, the mighty bowman, may be, there with certainty are fortune, wise action and wealth."