

Paper for August Order of Light 19th September 2010

I

I am sure that everyone in this room is aware of the story, translated by Sir Max Müller in the 19th century, in which the ancient Indo-Aryan gods decide where best to hide divinity from mankind. After discussing the merits of concealing the Great Secret atop the summit of the highest mountain, burying it in the furthest recesses of the earth or sinking it at the bottom of the widest ocean the gods agreed that in his inquisitiveness and restlessness man would eventually discover the Secret no matter where it was hidden. Then, the oldest and wisest of the gods who had listened intently in silence made his suggestion: let them wrap divinity within man himself because that is most certainly the last place in which he would ever look. And so it was and is; they who seek the ultimate Truth of existence search higher, strive to go further, travel ever wider, yet in doing so rarely do they tread the tangled paths of self-knowledge that criss-cross their innermost being.

Every esoteric system teaches us that this perishable frame is a vessel for the Divine Spark, the 'I' that is actually a part of the greater One. Recognising this great but hidden Reality is an important stage on our journey to the ultimate destination of Nirvana, the extinction of the 'I' in reunion with 'Us'. Indeed, some would say that it is this inner Light that illumines our footsteps along The Way and that enables us to distinguish the deeper Truths hidden within what are apparently simple things. The best known examples of this esoteric concealment in our Western culture are the parables of the Christian Master. Stories that impart lessons with apparently simple exoteric meanings that are morally uplifting and practically applicable, are esoterically merely cloaks for ideas and concepts that must be guarded from the profane. Thus, for example, the parable of the Prodigal Son is *really* about the reception the penitent sinner will receive from a loving Deity.

Similarly, it would seem that the story of Garuda and the Nagas is *really* about the relationship of the Divine Consciousness and the Spirit, how we must lift the Spirit above the sensual occupations of the flesh to achieve spiritual freedom and that it is only then that we realise that the Spirit is immortal without the need for Amriti. Finally, the last lesson seems to be that once Spiritual freedom is achieved it is through choosing to bind the Spirit to Emotional Devotion (*bhakti marg*) that we achieve the true liberation to Nirvana.

These lessons transcend time and culture: there is a story about Aquila, the Aetos Dios or Bird of God (specifically Zeus, cognate with Indra), which seems to make many of the same points. Aquila is sent by Psyche, on behalf of Aphrodite, to Hades to retrieve some water from the River Styx. By outwitting and outflying the serpents of Hell Aquila recovers the waters that separate this life from the next and returns them to consciousness and to love. Some would find the similarities of these stories amazing and it is certainly the case that the Western world was amazed by the works of Müller, Smith, Ganguli and the other great translators who first revealed that Karna had been found in a basket or that Utnapishtim had built an ark to survive a great flood.

What I actually find most striking is the apparent differences between the stories. These parables act as milestones on the path of revelation which teaches the 'I' more about its

Self, and its relationship with the wider Cosmos that is 'Us'. It is generally assumed that the esoteric meanings and concepts which are explored in these stories are all identical and at first sight they are. However, on closer examination it seems to me that concepts like *bhakti marg* and justification by faith may well be more than subtly different. Yet upon reflection it then seems that this apparent difference does not really exist and that these concepts only appear different to me because I am not yet knowledgeable or perhaps devout or faithful enough to understand the deeper commonality from which they spring. I hope that this will change. Indeed, as we advance along the path like Gilgamesh, Lao-tzu or Gautama surely our understanding of the steps we have taken and the meaning implicit and explicit in what we know must change, becoming both fuller and clearer: if this was not the case how could we be said to have made progress or to have advanced at all ?

Müller's tale also teaches us at least one more important lesson that it seems to me can all too easily be overlooked: the wisest of the gods did not discount the suggestions of his younger brethren, he actually combined them. By hiding the Divine Spark within man he placed It at the pinnacle of creation, buried It deep in the atavistic Adam and submerged It under the sea of emotion. This shows that the Deity within is also to be found atop the mountain, within the earth and beneath the waters in every sense and everywhere between the centre that is 'I' and the circumference that is 'Us'. Thus, whether we are traversing the inner Path or the outer Way, we can only make real progress towards recognising that the most complex Truth is also the most simple when we are willing to travel beyond what we think or feel we know; it is only by gaining a different perspective on what we think we already know that we see it afresh and remake the old anew. This brethren is the reason that I stand before you today humbly soliciting to be admitted to the August Order of Light. You are guardians literally and metaphorically of concepts and ideas that spring from a tradition that resonates with me in ways that I do not yet fully comprehend, and that perhaps I never will, but that will illuminate different facets of the jewels to be found in the Lotus and all of us. Yet I shall strive to understand and to bring to life in my life the important lessons that I hope you will teach and, that in time I hope, I will learn. I hope brethren that you will allow me to fly with you and with Garuda and that, to paraphrase Isaiah, together we shall renew our strength and mount up with wings, as eagles.