

Survey of Life – II: A Talk on Trees

T076 The Inner Teachings 11th May 1938 Pembroke Hall, London

Invocation:

We meet in a spirit of mutual love and helpfulness to receive light and wisdom from the universal Mind. We pray that we may still the vibrations and perplexities of the earthly mind, and aspire to the realms of holiness, whole-ness, health-ness. We mingle with the grand company of angels, archangels and all the world of radiant, spiritual life; as one grand orchestra our hearts are attuned to pour forth thanksgiving for our creation. May the limitations of the earthly habitation be overcome in you during this hour of communion, and may you lose all consciousness of material surroundings, of bricks and mortar and the turmoil and noise of the city, and through your higher mind contact and become aware of beauty.

Amen.

You may not have realised before what an important place the nature world holds in the grand scheme of life. We are conscious of the beauty of trees, and many love to be alone and walk under the trees, or sit beneath, and contemplate the sunlight and dream of life made radiant and beautiful. Even thus you may not become fully aware of the pulsating life behind, beneath and above those trees. A tree may mean no more than a tree. But through aspiration and attunement, you can be released from bondage, and see with the eye of truth and illumination the interblending of all life, the companies of angels, of nature spirits and of devas, and thus become yourself a re-created and regenerated being. In this new world you are conscious of a light which surrounds and permeates all those living, moving atoms of life.

[This is] so different from the sea, contemplation of which will also reveal a new meaning. The sea may lie still and quiet; standing alone in some quiet place, the soul can reach out and become conscious of the vastness, the depth and the profundity of life. Man's frail earthly comprehension reels with the magnificence of the stillness and power of the sea. May the ocean speak to you of the eternal powers which lie within the creation of the universe; the waters enfold man* in an enveloping yet impersonal peace, in the grasp of an immense power, but the trees enfold him as a mother. And so we come to the realisation that the trees are symbolical to us of the Great Mother; in this realisation we can walk in the groves, sit beneath the great oaks or an ancient banyan, or the majesty of the cedar, and become conscious of a mother love enfolding us. Here you may draw very close, to be nearer God's heart in the garden, where the flowers speak, the trees enfold in friendliness and motherliness: nearer God's heart in these conditions than anywhere on earth.

*[*For editorial policy around gender, see the introduction.]*

The mystery schools of the past bring to us understanding of the wisdom of the sages of old, when they chose the trees as their cathedrals. Cannot we recognise in the pillar and arch and groyne of the cathedral or palace a symbol or a replica of the fundamental principles of the structure of the tree? In some quiet woodland, veritably a nature's cathedral, have you not felt the sense of love and peace, and registered the blessing of these natural sanctuaries? There are many such cathedrals built by the tree spirits on the astral plane of life, where many weary souls coming from the earth can find refreshment and worship, not by word, but through the adoration and thankfulness of their hearts.

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You are familiar with the tales of the mystery men of the past and of rites which, unfortunately, have degenerated through the weakness and ignorance of the lower nature of man—both the Grecian rites and those of the Sun worshippers more commonly known as the Druid Fathers. These latter held their ceremonies according to their calendar, when the planetary rays were at the correct angle, and the within, or the soul, of man was most responsive. We agree that some of these ancient mysteries were profaned, but so are all the beauties of God—profaned through ignorance, and through man's effort to grow. Let us not condemn ignorance nor profanity; each has its place in evolution.

Throughout the Bible is continual reference to trees. Genesis tells of the Tree of Life, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; the Revelation [of John] closes with reference again to the Tree of Life, this time which bore leaves for the healing of the nations. The Master Jesus referred more than once to trees—and he cursed the barren fig tree, an action which has remained a puzzle to many Christians.* He cursed the fig tree because it bore no fruit and by so doing showed to us that man must bring forth, and if he fails through sloth or ignorance to bring forth the fruits of life, his incarnation is nil, is wasted. Like a tree, the life of man must not be barren of good, nor wholly unproductive.

*[*Genesis chh. 2, 3; Revelation 22 : 2 and Luke 13 : 6-9.]*

The trees have ever been recognised as symbols of the Mysteries. The oak, by its strength and endurance, was known to some as the symbol of the great Father–Mother God; the ancient sages worshipped beneath its shelter. The pine tree, graceful and worshipping, has ever been symbolical of the Son of God. The trees are symbolical of birth and death. They are symbolical of reincarnation, for whilst they manifest life at the right season and shed their leaves at the waning of the sun, they also pass into abeyance and quietness. They withdraw before they once more put forth their energy to add fresh growth; they pass from rest to labour, and so to rest again—ever the rhythmic cycle of life.

Sun worship perhaps may have been crude in method, but remember that behind these ancient rites was a universal secret of life and creation. The sacred rites show forth the knowledge and wisdom handed down from the God-men and the angel visitants from other planetary spheres. Whilst the mysteries gradually became withdrawn and the spiritual life buried deep within the soul of earthly man (even as the roots of the trees go deep for nourishment, energy and strength) so the message of the trees has become lost. Modern man regards the rites and symbols of the ancient ones as crude and even idolatrous, yet had he understanding he would have reverence and respect.

We ourselves are conscious of having once participated in some of these grand and ancient rites in a pine-clad district; we know how we, in company with our brethren, have remained many days and nights watching the sun reborn behind the irradiated pine trees. We have seen it rise into the heavens, and in silence of prayer and contemplating, seen it disappear as a ball of gold behind the pines. We have been taught that those same pines were symbolical of the birth of the Sun—not only the sun terrestrial, but the celestial Son, even Christ.

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Is it not understandable, then, that the man Jesus was hung upon a tree, symbolical of his passing; symbolical of the death of the man, death of the human, the limited and physical self, and the rebirth or resurrection of the spirit?

Some have worshipped the majestic cedar tree. You would re-read with profit in the Bible concerning the building of Solomon's Temple, the building of the Temple of the Sun*. Follow this wonderful piece of symbology in the Old Testament closely, and learn of the building of the Sun, of the grand Temple in the heavens. Not only are you each and individually building your own Solomon's Temple, but all humanity is contributing its quota towards the building of that grand Temple in the heavens. We read that the cedars of Lebanon were brought in to help in the construction, which cedars are symbolical of the ancient sages, of the wise ones, of men who contemplate in silence, peace and power the grandness of God's handiwork. The ancient sages, then, formed pillars and arches in the construction of Solomon's Temple—King Solomon: the King Sun, the Temple of Light!

*[*1 Kings chh. 5-7]*

Some will be familiar with the symbolism of the acacia tree, the symbol of life, of rebirth. The acacia tree is very sensitive; it is pure, [a] symbol of purity, one might almost say, of spirituality. So great was the reverence for the acacia in the land of the Sun, in Egypt, that the candidate facing the darkness of the caves of initiation carried a sprig of acacia, for its sensitivity and responsiveness to the vibrations of the other worlds, the spiritual worlds. By these qualities only could they hope to pass through initiation. Hence the symbolism of the sprig of acacia; even today depicted over the head of the arisen candidate of the third degree—the symbol of life, of purity, of innocence; one might almost say, the symbol of the Christ to be, of the child. The ancient story tells of the death of Osiris, and how his remains were washed ashore, and rested under the acacia tree, and eventually the tree enfolded the remains of this great unknown Son of God.

To conclude, we can only briefly touch upon the inner meaning of the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Here we bring to your mind the image of man himself. For may you see that man contains within himself the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The spine can be likened to the trunk, and the two aspects of life—positive and negative, good and evil—rise up from the roots of the spine, blossom forth from the head and bring forth fruit. One can see in the circulatory system of the body, its stem, its branches, its intricate network, a veritable Tree of Life. Thus we find within man the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Tree of Life. We see the possibilities of man: of his growth and regeneration from animal man to God man, and the ultimate, the human tree, most beautiful of all beneath whose wide branches of compassion and understanding humanity can shelter, and the fruits of its love and wisdom can find.

Q.You told us to be good to flowers and help on their evolution. Why does God allow frost to come and kill the young buds, and why does He not send rain when the flowers so badly need it?

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A.I think even frost has its place in the clearing away of certain destructive agencies. Even if it nips off buds, good will come the following season. As for the rain being withheld, I think that man expects that God should be obedient, himself ignorant of the laws which govern equilibrium in creation. ‘If God loves the flowers, why does He not send rain?’ ‘Why, if He loves His children, does He permit volcanoes and earthquakes?’ ‘Why, if God loves man, does He permit him to go to war?’

These questions really come under the one category. There are laws which work in exact rhythm and with precision; periods must come when rain is withheld, but eventually it rights itself. You cannot have exactly what man wants until man himself is perfect and so knows what to want. We suggest that it is man’s folly and waywardness which causes certain reactions in the universe which must bring suffering and apparent destruction. It is God’s method—or law—to right the equilibrium, or the balance. The wise man does not blame God when things go wrong. He looks within, and sees how far short he has fallen of His love.

Benediction:

And now, beloved brethren, as did the great Lord Buddha, let us too at this moment assemble under the canopy of heaven, shaded by the branches of the universal Tree of Life—God—and absorb His blessing of peace.

Amen.

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