

The Esoteric Significance of Baptism

T025 The Inner Teachings 21st October 1936 Pembroke Hall, London

Invocation:

Our Father God, we open our hearts to Thine all-pervading love, and we call upon our Elder Brethren in Thy name and through Thy power to draw near, to give unto us their wisdom. And we pray that we may receive in humility of mind and heart, and ponder well this wisdom of the spirit. And may the eternal light of Christ the beloved son grow within our soul.

Amen.

The subject of baptism is controversial; that is, baptism as usually performed upon infants, even the baptism of adults, seems to some minds to hold little meaning. But as with all ceremonies, the esoteric meaning has become hidden, covered, enshrouded by formalism. Thus today little is understood of the significance of baptism, associated as it is with the idea that children born into this physical world are born in sin, and therefore entry into Christ's kingdom is denied until they are baptised, washed clean of that same sin which apparently brought them to birth. This conception arose and has persisted from a misreading of the story of the Fall of Man—a wonderful symbolical story now brought almost to ridicule by the analysis of the earthly mind of man*. We have already learnt that to understand spiritual things it is necessary to use the inner wisdom or the vision of the heavenly world. Try to understand divine truth through the reason, and you will hold only the casket and lose sight of the jewel within. Yes, the old idea of original sin is interwoven with the necessity for the cleansing and purification of the child through baptism.

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

We assume that all present understand the law of rebirth, to some extent at any rate. But let us go deeper, and discover that when the soul passes away at death, it carries with it a certain residue, even after purification by passage through the purgatorial spheres; this residue—we may call it the seed atom if you like—is incorporated again when the new vehicle is built for the next life on earth. So there is transmitted to the newly born soul certain characteristics, urges and desires which play an important part in the coming life on earth. These desires and urges can be helped, purified and cleansed by the raising of the inner vehicles—those subtler bodies now incarnated in the physical.

This will take some present a little too far; we will try to make it clear to you. But this we impress upon all—lay aside any idea of infant baptism as being without meaning and without power. This form embodies a great spiritual truth. But we agree that in all forms and ceremonies the true source of power may not be contacted, so that the ceremony may prove an empty shell—but not so in all cases. Here we refer to total immersion or baptism of the adult, when the ego has come into full contact with its subtler vehicles, so that the ego can receive and understand, bring through into the consciousness the power and the glory of such baptism, when there may come to the soul that contact with the Holy Ghost, the wisdom of God, after which the soul travels the path towards universal brotherhood.

Whereas in the past evolution has developed along the path of race-consciousness—that is to say, the tribal instinct, the national instinct, a worship of 'The God of my people'—the

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consciousness now emerges into the universal consciousness of brotherhood—‘Not my people alone, but all are Thy children.’

The ceremony of baptism marks an important epoch in growth and evolution. Jesus set the example. John the Baptist was the forerunner, a high initiate sent forth to prepare the way for the coming of the Bearer of the Light of the World. John’s mission was to call his people to baptism to be cleansed, to receive the power of the Holy Ghost. It seems clear that the Master Jesus fully understood John’s mission, for he himself before commencing his ministry was baptised by John—an important point to remember, because Jesus was destined to turn the arc of evolution upward. And the baptism itself emphasised a profound inner truth, as shown by the tremendous power which came upon the Master, the symbol of the dove descending upon him, and the voice crying ‘This is my beloved son, hear ye him.’ At that moment the vehicles, the subtler bodies, together with the physical body of the Master Jesus, received contact with that which is known as the Holy Ghost. It meant no other than the union of Man with God.

Time is nothing. Look back across two thousand years with true vision and it is but yesterday, indeed, no more than a second flashing by. Mankind does not yet understand; he takes the shell, tries in his innocence to digest it, but reason rises and rejects it. The age of reason has proved of great aid to mankind. You have heard it said here that the reason must be laid aside, but we would not decry reason, because we know the importance, the value of mind, of intellect. When these tools have served their purpose however, they should grow into something greater, and that which has been of great value for centuries in bringing to man increasing individual consciousness has now to be superseded by intelligence and intuition.

You ask for food, we give you milk only, but you must pursue your path of contemplation: study and penetrate through intuition to the inner mysteries, but bear always in mind that these old beliefs contain for you a pearl of great price. See that you do not throw away the pearl, but break open the casket to reveal the beauty of the jewel within.

Q.Would you consider it advisable to wait until maturity for baptism to take place?

A.The child may be helped by the baptism at the time of birth. That is to say, the subtler bodies may receive a certain contact with the divine power which will be helpful. But we do not advocate the ceremony as performed at the present time if merely designed to receive the child into some orthodox church. But in the inner sense, designed for the reception of the soul into the Church of Christ, the fuller Light, the universal brotherhood—yes, that is valuable indeed. If the child is baptised shortly after birth, we would say a later ceremony would help it much more, indeed should be considered essential, because the ego is more fully in contact at maturity than when a babe. There are however other forms of initiation which are now taking place.

Q.Are there angels of baptism?

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A. The angels are always at work on the subtler bodies of the child—yes, your vision is quite in accordance with the inner law of life. The angels would carry the vital force, prana* and power to the young child.

[* *The Sanskrit word for life force.*]

Q. Of what worth is a baptism performed by a clergyman intent chiefly on earning his living, for someone quite sincere but with no realisation of the inner meaning of these ceremonies?

A. It depends upon the officiating priest or clergyman. The fact that he must earn bread and butter would not necessarily detract from his sincerity in the office. This question is most important. There is a fear that because an individual—a member of any church, organisation, or lodge—if anyone should receive payment, he or she loses the power to give spiritual help. You may not agree. But those who feel thus must look into themselves for the error. I would hurt no-one, but must give you truth. Look for the good, and it is there; those who recognise the necessity for spiritual workers to eat, be housed and clothed, have no sense of disturbance. In truth, the attitude of earth people to money is all wrong; the right attitude is this: money is a symbol which has uses which should result in harmony—that is right. Let it once possess the mind, whether you are poor or rich, and sin results. A poor man may be just as avaricious with his few coppers as the millionaire with his millions. Your attitude towards money is all wrong.

Now we come back to our paid clergyman. If those participating in a ceremony grudge the clergyman his livelihood, they will surely break the fine contact of spiritual power; if those participating have simple hearts of love, believing in God's power and His love, they also will bless the candidate for baptism. Ceremony, if performed with sincerity and truth, carries a certain power. But if performed (whether the man is paid or not) merely as a lip service, or outward shell, it carries no power at all.

Q. I believe that oil is used at some baptisms. Is it an ancient symbol?

A. I was going to touch upon the use of water, but you have introduced the idea of anointing with oil, an old custom which has as its purpose the facilitation of contact with the Holy Ghost. When a spiritual healer finishes a healing treatment, he washes the hands and arms as far as possible. Water purifies and cleanses the aura, and this is why water is usually used for baptism, water being of importance in cleansing and purifying the vital and desire body, as well as the physical. Oil has the same symbolic meaning as water: the outer contact with an inner spiritual power.

Q. Salt?

A. Salt is also an important element used for purification and very, very old too. It cleanses and purifies. Holy water, of course, should contain salt. Salt we find is associated with the planet Mars. The influence of Mars upon earth humanity is of a purifying nature. Salt mixed with water clears away all the elementals, is very drastic, but a splendid healer and purifier.

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Q. What does 'Born again of water and the spirit' mean?

A. You have touched one of the cosmic mysteries. 'Born again'—rebirth through water and the spirit, through the incoming or the illumination of the Christ man. We would like to make clear to all that our particular mission here is to endeavour to teach the inner mysteries of Christ's mission. That is the work of the White Brotherhood, of whom the Master Jesus is a brother. So much knowledge lies in the invisible which has to be brought into the consciousness of man. When you absorb the mysteries of the spiritual worlds, life on earth will open like a flower in the sun. Life, beloved, is grand, life is glorious.

Down here on earth life is difficult; so many perplexities, so much that you do not understand, and it is a brave soul who carries on courageously, steadfastly obeying the divine urge to keep on keeping on bravely and nobly. The time will come when man will be lifted above drudgery and heaviness, and then he will know how good is God. You, my children, can glimpse the glory of God, because you learn the lesson of love, harmony, and service, and so your feet are on the upward path.

Benediction:

And now, to the Most High, the Creator, the eternal life, law, beauty, wisdom, we wait with open hearts to receive the power of Thy love. May we have the courage to live, to serve and to bless every soul we encounter. May we find tolerance of heart, courage, and a living faith in the eternal goodness of Thy laws.

Amen.

The search matches with either words and phrases, which appear in the text, or the following 'key' words and phrases, which are similar in meaning to those in the document:

Christening, reincarnation, Holy Spirit