

April-May, 1950
Johannesburg, South Africa

My dear Friends:

I am a little late this time because we here in South Africa are very busy getting ready for our Easter Convention when we shall have the delight of having our Vice-President, Mr. Sidney Cook, and his wife with us as special guests. They will not be able to stay very long, as they have to be off by air to the English Convention which always takes place at Whitsuntide. South Africa so very rarely has any of our leaders visiting it, so we are more than pleased at Mr. Cook's visit. One or two of the members here know him from visits to Adyar and elsewhere, and I know him very well and am so looking forward to seeing him again. We always have a "motto" for our Conventions here, and this time we have a saying of Pythagoras: "Take courage, the race of men is divine." The Convention will be held in the pretty town of Pretoria, famous for its jacaranda trees, the Capital of the Union, where the T. S. has a beautiful building set in a garden. The lecture hall is quite one of the loveliest little halls I know. At the back of the platform there is an alcove painted blue with a shining, electric star above it. One of our devoted members, Miss Mimi Cillié, has just achieved the desire of her heart, and built on a lovely little Shrine Room. We all collected last Sunday to see it dedicated. There is a dream fulfilled. Another dream is to build a beautiful Lodge building here in Johannesburg. We have a nice piece of land opposite the Technical College, standing on an eminence overlooking Johannesburg. One day that dream will come true too; it is an enormous help in our work to have a lovely home. Though I quite realize that it can only be undertaken by a large and steady Lodge. In Johannesburg we have over 200 members, so it is one of the largest Lodges in the world. Cape Town has acquired its own property and is busy getting it ready for the Convention next year which will then be held there.

I would like to talk this time about the Spiritual Will. I have just been reading a book which states that the will as such does not exist, but is the result of other qualities. All these subtle things are very difficult to define. Even when we think we have successfully done it we should remember that any words, or even ideas and mental conceptions, are limiting and qualifying, and are never the whole description of what we would consider. Dr. Annie Besant told us that will is the higher form of desire. Desire is the great moving force of the universe, and perhaps we do not always recognize that even when limited, personal and selfish, desire is part of the great Cosmic urge, the world desire. Working through limited, ignorant and clouded personalities, it is often selfish and destructive. It drives a man ignorantly, blindly, towards its fulfilment. If it is strong enough it holds a man completely in its power, and makes him do things to gain its ends that he may well be ashamed of. He is its victim and its slave, partly because he does not realize this. But to the man who can set himself somewhat apart from it and view it objectively, to him it becomes apparent that this is a force not to be blindly obeyed, but to be understood and controlled. Then will begin the transmutation of desire. Instead of being evoked blindly and changeably by outside influences, it will begin to be centred on some object chosen as worthy and desirable. Then it is changing into will.

Light on the Path tells us to "kill out" i.e.: transmute, ambition, desire for comfort, sensation, hunger for growth, etc., and then tells us to desire ardently and to desire possessions above all. Then the book goes on to tell us what to desire. "That which is within and beyond and unattainable." It is called "unattainable" because it forever recedes. We shall enter the light, but never touch the Flame. And the possessions it tells us to desire above all must belong to all equally and we must desire them that we may accumulate wealth for that united spirit of life which is our only true self.

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All the great psychologists have tried to define the will. I remember William James calling it "the shutting off of alternatives." We can all see what he means. When once a course of action is determined upon all the alternatives, and reasonings against such a course, will immediately present themselves. The curious and interesting thing is that it is generally our own selves, not anyone outside, who will present these. If we can keep a hold on ourselves, it is quite interesting to let our minds go on suggesting all sorts of things, and then say to it: "It is decided, I am no longer listening." Thus we have "shut off the alternatives."

The lower desire and will is moved by personal reasons; the higher or spiritual will by impersonal and eternal aims. How can we distinguish its working in ourselves? A Master of the Wisdom writes that if a man's will is strong enough it will transfer its purpose from life to life, thru' many lives if necessary. Is it our will "to acquire spiritual knowledge and strength that the weak may lean upon us, and the sorrowing victims of ignorance learn from us the cause and remedy of their pain"? It takes more than one life to do that, but we must begin some time. Let us begin here and now, just as we are. For we shall carry that purpose thru' from life to life. I have my own definition of that kind of will. I call it the "steady direction of a man's soul." And that is, I think, the "Spiritual Will." However feeble, unevolved, sinful even, we may feel ourselves to be, (and none of us really knows the strength and beauty which is shrouded in us) if we start out on this eternal road all the unseen powers of heaven will help us, though we may never feel them. I like to remember the words of the great Avatar, Sri Krishna: "Even if the most sinful worship Me, with undivided heart, he too must be accounted righteous, for he hath rightly resolved." And the Lord tells us that the ones who do not quite succeed in this life are reborn "in a pure and blessed house." "There he recovers the characteristics belonging to his former body, and with these he labors again for perfection."

Next time I would like to speak of the development of the hero, saint and sage in each one of us. And one day I would like to consider the priceless aphorisms of the Indian Teacher, Patanjali.

Your affectionate friend,

CLARA CODD

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