

THE CALIFORNIA MEDITATIONS

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FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness - to “give for.” God forgives our sin by giving Himself for us to the worst that sin can do to Him, to the nailing of His Body and the criminal’s death. But this giving is only valid for the remission of our sin to the exact extent that we in turn give for ‘them which trespass against us’, give for ‘our debtors.’ If we wish to know what the fear of God is it is enough to meditate on that tremendous petition in the Lord’s Prayer. Forgiveness of our neighbor is not just an easy going ability to make excuses for him or to brush off magnanimously the hurt that has been done us - it is a complete and conscious offering to give for the sin of the other, to suffer his ‘Karma,’ to lessen his guilt by allowing his stones to strike us without any effort at compensation or defense, responding with pure acceptance, pure love. Then only can we say with St. Stephen, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge,” because we have given our suffering for them, instead of warding off the blows and trying to forget the injury out of a vague good nature.



Moreover, in a deeper sense still, as Simone Weil has said, it is in truth God Himself who must be forgiven by us - and therefore for Him is our giving and our suffering. For it is He who made us so infinitely vulnerable to pain of all kinds; it is He who, in the last analysis is always the Trespasser, invading through pain and humiliation, the isolated tower of the ego as we cling to this or that illusion, to this or that pretext which may allow us to believe that life, and therefore God, owes us something. The book of Job is the story of a man who dared to say, “It is God whom I cannot forgive” and who came in the end to the wonder and the peace of wholly irrational reconciliation. The answer of the Cross, while not of course explicit in Job, is certainly implicit in his awakening - in

his total abandonment and recognition that the will of God, if it is to be adored at all, is not only adorable in the movement of the stars and the strength of Leviathan but likewise in the miseries of his body and the agony of his soul. And this is not because he has deserved such suffering - he rightly knows he has not - but wholly and simply because it is the inscrutable will of the 'altogether lovely'. The last realization is his great leap of consciousness, that which brought the grace and the blessing - and the lack of which in his friends was their undoing. It is easy enough to be resigned to deserved suffering, to live by the good and pious reasonableness of the moral law. The sin of the friends of Job through the ages is the sin of the failure to recognize that which is beyond all law. The thieves on their crosses repeat the story at the greatest of all moments. The one makes the great leap of consciousness - 'we receive due reward - but this Man hath done nothing amiss - Lord remember me.' The other cannot believe, for his God will not suffer, his God is one who must prove himself by delivering from suffering - 'If thou be the Christ save both thyself and us.'

Note also how the story of Job foreshadows the Incarnation in another respect. When Job finally forgives God, repents*, and enters into peace, his realization obtains forgiveness for his friends also - "My servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept, lest I deal with you after your folly." So man gives for man, and man gives for God till the moment in time when God gives Himself and the moment out of time when there is no more giving and receiving for God and man are no longer two.

**Repents - not of the non-existent sins presumed by his friends, but of his real sin of spiritual blindness.*

Meister Eckhart: "God is our suffering."