

Letter 39

## THE DOCTRINE OF DEATH

Many times during the months in which I have been here have I seen men and women lying in a state of unconsciousness more profound than the deepest sleep, their faces expressionless and uninteresting. At first, before I understood the nature of their sleep, I tried as an experiment to awaken one or two of them, and was not successful. In certain cases where my curiosity was aroused, I have returned later, day after day, and found them still lying in the same lethargy.

“Why,” I asked myself, “should any man sleep like that—a sleep so deep that neither the spoken word nor the physical touch could arouse him?”

One day when the Teacher was with me we passed one of those unconscious men whom I had seen before, had watched, and had striven unsuccessfully to arouse.

“Who are these people who sleep like that?” I asked the Teacher; and he replied:

“They are those who in their earth life denied the immortality of the soul after death.”

“How terrible!” I said. “And will they never awaken?”

“Yes, perhaps centuries, perhaps ages hence, when the irresistible law of rhythm shall draw them out of their sleep into incarnation. For the law of rebirth is one with the law of rhythm.”

“Would it not be possible to awaken one of them, this man, for instance?” -

“You have attempted it, have you not?” the Teacher inquired, with a keen look into my face. -

“Yes,” I admitted. -

“And you failed?” -

“Yes.” -

We looked at each other for a moment, then I said: -

“Perhaps you, with your greater power and knowledge, could succeed where I have failed.” -

He made no answer. His silence fired my interest still farther, and I said eagerly: -

“Will you not try? Will you not awaken this man?” -

“You know not what you ask,” he replied. -

“But tell me this,” I demanded: “could you awaken him?” -

“Perhaps. But in order to counteract the law which holds him in sleep, the law of the spell he laid upon his own soul when he went out of life demanding unconsciousness and annihilation-in order to counteract that law, I should have to put in operation a law still stronger.”

“And that is?” I asked. -

“Will,” he answered, “the potency of will.” -

“Could you?” -

“As I said before-perhaps.” -

“And will you?” -

“Again I say that you know not what you ask.” -

“Will you please explain?” I persisted, “for indeed this seems to me - to be one of the most marvellous things which I have seen.” -

The face of the Teacher was very grave, as he answered: -

“What good has this man done in the past that I should place - myself between him and the law of cause and effect which he has willfully set in operation?”

“I do not know his past,” I said. -

“Then,” the Teacher demanded, “will you tell me your reason for - asking me to do this thing?” -

“My reason?” -

“Yes. Is it pity for this man’s unfortunate condition, or is it scientific - curiosity on your own part?” -

I should gladly been able to say that it was pity for the man’s sad - state which moved me so; but one does not juggle with truth or with motives when speaking to such a Teacher, so I admitted that it was scientific curiosity.

“In that case,” he said, “I am justified in using him as a demonstration of the power of the trained will.”

“It will not harm him, will it?”

“On the contrary. And though he may suffer shock, it will probably be the means of so impressing his mind that never again, even in future lives on earth, can he believe himself, or teach others to believe, that death ends everything. As far as he is concerned, he does not deserve that I should waste upon him so great an amount of energy as will be necessary to arouse him from this sleep, this spell which he laid upon himself ages ago. But if I awaken him, it will be for your sake, ‘that you may believe.’”

I wish I could describe the scene which took place, so that you could see it with the eyes of your imagination. There lay the man at our feet, his face colourless and expressionless, and above him towered the splendid form of the Teacher, his face beautiful with power, and his eyes brilliant with thought.

“Can you not see,” asked the Teacher, “a faint light surrounding this seemingly lifeless figure?”

“Yes, but the light is very faint indeed.”

“Nevertheless,” said the Teacher, “that light is far less faint than is this weak soul’s hold upon the eternal truth. But where you see only a pale light around the recumbent form, I see in that light many pictures of the soul’s past. I see that he not only denied the immortality of the soul’s consciousness, but that he taught his doctrine of death to other men and made them even as himself. Truly he does not deserve that I should try to awaken him!”

“Yet you will do it?”

“Yes, I will do it.”

I regret that I am not permitted to tell you by what form of words and by what acts my Teacher succeeded, after a mighty effort, in arousing that man from his self-imposed imitation of annihilation. I realised as never before - not only the personal power of the Teacher, but the irresistible power of a trained and directed will.

I thought of that scene recorded in the New Testament, where Jesus said to the dead man in the tomb, "Lazarus, come forth!"

"The soul of man is immortal," declared the Teacher, looking fixedly into the shrinking eyes of the awakened man and holding them by his will.

"The soul of man is immortal," he repeated. Then in a tone of command:

"Stand up!"

The man struggled to his feet. Though his body was light as a feather, as are all our bodies here, I could see that his slumbering energy was still almost too dormant to permit of that really slight exertion.

"You live," declared the Teacher. "You have passed through death, and you live. Do not dare to deny that you live. You cannot deny it."

"But I do not believe -" began the man, his stubborn materialism still challenging the truth of his own existence, his memory surviving the ordeal through which he had passed. This last surprised me more than anything else. But after a moment's stupefaction I understood that it was the power of the Teacher's mental picture of the astral records round this soul, which had forced those memories to awaken.

“Sit down between us two,” said the Teacher to the newly aroused man, “and let us reason together. You thought yourself a great reasoner, did you not, when you walked the earth as So-and-so?”

“I did.”

“You see that you were mistaken in your reasoning,” the Teacher went on, “for you certainly passed through death, and you are now alive.”

“But where am I?” He looked about him in a bewildered way. “Where am I, and who are you?”

“You are in eternity,” replied the Teacher, “where you always have been and always will be.”

“And you?”

“I am one who knows the workings of the Law.”

“What law?”

“The law of rhythm, which drives the soul into and out of gross matter, as it drives the tides of the ocean into flood and ebb, and the consciousness of man into sleeping and waking.”

“And it was you who awakened me? Are you, then, this law of rhythm?”

The Teacher smiled.

“I am not the law,” he said, “but I am bound by it, even as you, save as I am temporarily able to transcend it by my will - again, even as you.”

I caught my breath at the profundity of this simple answer, but the man seemed not to observe its significance. Even as he! Why, this man by his misdirected will had been able temporarily to transcend the law of immortality, even as the Teacher by his wisely directed will transcended the mortal in himself! My soul sang within me at this glimpse of the godlike possibilities of the human mind.

“How long have I been asleep?” demanded the man -

“In what year did you die?” the Teacher asked. -

“In the year 1817.” -

“And the present year is known, according to the Christian - calendar, as the year 1912. You have lain in a death-like sleep for - ninety-five years.” -

“And was it really you who awakened me?” -

“Yes.” -

“Why did you do it?” -

“Because it suited my good pleasure,” was the Teacher’s rather - stern reply. “It was not because you deserved to be awakened.” -

“And how long would I have slept if you had not aroused me?” -

“I cannot say. Probably until those who had started even with you - had left you far behind on the road of evolving life. Perhaps for - centuries, perhaps for ages.” -

“You have taken a responsibility upon yourself,” said the man. -

“You do not need to remind me of that,” replied the Teacher. “I weighed in my own mind the full responsibility and decided to assume it for a purpose of my own. For will is free.”

“Yet you overpowered my will.”

“I did; but by my own more potent will, more potent because wisely directed and backed by a greater energy.”

“And what are you going to do with me?”

“I am going to assume the responsibility of your training.”

“My training?”

“Yes.”

“And you will make things easy for me?”

“On the contrary, I shall make things very hard for you; but you - cannot escape my teaching.” -

“Shall you instruct me personally?” -

“Personally in the sense that I will place you under the instruction - of an advanced pupil of my own.” -

“Who? This man here?” he pointed to me. -

“No. He is better occupied. I will take you to your teacher - presently.” -

“And what will he show me?” -



“The panorama of immortality. And when you have learned the lesson so that you can never forget nor escape it, you will have to go back to the earth and teach it to others; you will have to convert as many men to the truth of immortality as you have in the past deluded and misled by your false doctrines of materialism and death.”

“And what if I refuse? You have said that will is free.”

“*Do* you refuse?”

“No, but what if I had?”

“Then, instead of growing and developing under the law of action and reaction, which in the East they call karma, you would have been its victim.”

“I do not understand you.”

“He is indeed a wise man,” said the Teacher, “who understands the law of karma, which is also the law of cause and effect. But come. I will now take you to your new instructor.”

Then, leaving me alone, the Teacher and his charge disappeared into the grey distance.

I remained there a long time, pondering what I had seen and heard.