

Disaster, a Boon and a Blessing to Man

Perhaps the Time in Which We Are Living is a Purifying Fire

A.J.H. van Leeuwen



Editorial Commentary

The following article was first published at “The Theosophist”, India, in its May 1965 edition, pp. 89-100.

The fact that its author belonged to the Adyar Society is an evidence among many that the members of the several schools of Theosophical thought have made significant contributions to the esoteric movement as a whole.

This is the case of Adyar Society thinkers like C. Jinarajadasa, N. Sri Ram, I. K. Taimni, Rohit Mehta, Mary Neff, Virginia Hanson, Radha Burnier, Vicente Hao Chin, Jr., N. C. Ramanujachary and many others.

Contrast is part of life. History shows that students who are exposed to pseudo-theosophy can make significant contributions to the Cause and to the authentic theosophical literature, once

their intention is noble and their writings are not based on fancy or false clairvoyance.

On the other hand, one who has the authentic teachings of theosophy as his sole master-key in philosophical studies is surely exposed to a number of mayavic possibilities, among them the danger of attachment to dead letter.

The fact, therefore, that unlike the members of Adyar Society the students of Helena Blavatsky are not directly exposed to pseudo-theosophy is no guarantee against self-illusion. Far from that: different misguiding lights surround and *test* them all the time.

Those who have a deep interaction with authentic literature inevitably share the karmic fire of a certain *responsibility* for human present and future. Such a challenging duty, according to Blavatsky and the Masters, constitutes a central issue in the effort of the theosophical movement.

Our Planetary Cycles

Many religious traditions coincide with ancient philosophy and modern theosophy in teaching that materialistic civilizations do not have a luminous future. Their unpleasant end is an unavoidable part of evolution, and could not be postponed for ever. However, its degree of pain can be reduced, and it is possible to avoid much unnecessary suffering by the presence of true wisdom among human beings.

There is a positive aspect in worldly loss and disaster in the cycles of evolution, individual and collective. One should remember the warning made by one of the Masters of the Wisdom in “The Mahatma Letters”:

“The approach of every new ‘obscuration’ is always signaled by cataclysms - of either fire or water. But, apart from this, every ‘Ring’ or Root Race has to be cut in two, so to say, by either one or the other. Thus, having reached the apex of its development and glory the fourth Race - the Atlanteans were destroyed *by water*; you find now but their degenerated, fallen remnants, whose sub-races, nevertheless, aye - each of them, had its palmy days of glory and relative greatness. What they are now - you will be some day the law of cycles being one and immutable. When your race - the fifth - will have reached at its zenith of *physical* intellectuality, and developed the highest civilization (remember the difference we make between *material* and *spiritual* civilizations); unable to go any higher in its own cycle - its progress towards *absolute* evil will be arrested (as its predecessors the Lemurians and Atlanteans, the men of the third and fourth races were arrested in their progress toward the same) by one of such cataclysmic changes; its great civilization destroyed...”.¹

The most important words in this passage link the physical planetary events to the moral cycle of the souls: “**When your race (...) [becomes] unable to go any higher in its own cycle - its progress towards *absolute* evil will be arrested (...) by one of such cataclysmic changes**”.

A few pages before these words, the Master had said:

“What do you know of America, for instance, before the invasion of that country by the

¹ See Item 5, pp. 156-157, Letter 23-B, in “[The Mahatma Letters](#)”. (CCA)

Spaniards? Less than two centuries prior to the arrival of Cortez there was as great a ‘rush’ towards progress among the *sub-races* of Peru and Mexico as there is now in Europe and the U.S.A. Their sub-race ended in nearly total annihilation through causes generated by itself; so will yours at the end of its cycle.”²

Another classic text about the topic was written by Damodar K. Mavalankar. While using other words, Damodar clarifies the same aspect of the law of Karma:

“Modern scientific men can see no connection between the cause of earthquakes and events on the mental plane of the earth. But when they understand that there is no such thing as accident in this universe, that every event which appears to us as accident, is the effect of a force on the mental plane, then they will be able to understand why the superstitious Hindus look upon earthquakes as the effect of accumulated sins committed by men.”

And Damodar explains -

“The superstition of the Hindus properly understood means this: That the accumulated effect of the bad Karmas of men on the earth, impressed in the astral fire, is to produce a change in the position of the centre of the force which is earth’s life. (...) When the earth, to sustain its own life, requires to change the position of the centre of its active life, a disturbance in the internal magnetism of the earth is produced, amongst other phenomena earthquakes occur, just as nervous tremors occur in a man’s body.”³

The text by Mr. A.J.H. van Leeuwen is distinctly helpful along these lines of investigation.⁴

(Carlos Cardoso Aveline)

000

Disaster, a Boon and a Blessing to Man

A. J. H. van Leeuwen

Living would have no sense if life had no meaning. Life becomes worth living, only if man has a conception (or thinks he has) of what he is living for. That is what religion, education, sociology and philosophy try to help him to conceive. But man has never been very certain on this point and often his meaning has shifted to opposite points. Sometimes the ideal has been to become a worthy citizen of the State and nationalism was the meaning of life; another time the ideal was to cut off all relationship with worldly existence and become absorbed in ecstasy towards God. The ideal has been of loosening all karmic bonds and denying this very

² From Item 1, p. 149, Letter 23-B, in the book “[The Mahatma Letters](#)”. (CCA)

³ See the article “[Human Ethics and Earthquakes](#)”, by Damodar. (CCA)

⁴ It corresponds to a lecture given at the 89th International Convention of the Theosophical Society, in Adyar, Madras-Chennai, India, in December 1964. (CCA)

existence; of earning a decent and honorable living for man himself and his immediate family; of becoming only a cell in the collectivity of the all-important State, and so on. Theosophy also has conceived its special ideal which sometimes has been described as the liberation of the divine spirit from the fetters of ignorance.

Our human existence is enacted in space and time and the interrelation of both these abstract principles gives the sensation of being alive - of living a life of events amidst physical objects. Time is represented under three aspects: past, present and future. Of these three, the future usually seems the most interesting, as it is the most puzzling. We always want to know what will happen the next moment, or within a couple of hours, or tomorrow. Man is always planning for his future. We are never tired of enquiring what happened next? Often men say: "There is only hope in living", by which they mean in the future. Hope is desire for continuation of experience. Hope is expectation projected into the future. Therefore hope is one of the most dangerous fetters, which will prevent our spiritual liberation. Very few realize this.

What is there to hope for?

History is interesting as a report of past events, out of which results the present situation. We have a certain deep-rooted conviction that the future will also be determined by what has happened in the past as well as by what is happening at the present moment. We call this the Law of Karma. If we could know exactly and completely all the influences, forces, aggregations and combinations of past events, we perhaps could predict what will happen in the nearby future. That is indeed what science originally has been aiming at in its deepest sense; and it is why man consciously or subconsciously believes in fate and predestination. It is the fundamental principle of our present Theosophical concept of Karma and perhaps also of reincarnation or the life after death. But by our study of Theosophy we know that, though Cosmic Laws are immutable and inviolable, their effects can be influenced and altered by the interplay of other spiritual laws and other cosmic forces. One of those is Free Will; but for reasons obvious enough for those who understand, that force is still exceedingly weak in most of us today.

In all great cultures there is - next to the moral, social and religious instructions and teachings - a body of mythology or a collection of stories through which Mystics and Teachers, have tried to tell mankind of the great Scheme of Creation, of the Divine Plan. Sometimes the definition is given that a myth tells a story that is happening all the time, but will never take place. Therefore it gives the impression of history, but actually it is more universal and essential and goes far deeper psychologically and spiritually. A myth gives the timeless and essential background of manifestation; it gives the reason and the meaning; while common history only provides us with an account of the phenomenal aspect of what has happened at a certain moment.

Present historians certainly give us far more for they interpret history in psychological terms and even give a philosophical or semi-symbolical interpretation; but they are compelled to keep to the facts as they actually happened. Myth has not that restriction and moves in a freer sphere of imagination. Myth gives a pattern of life; history must be but an objective report. All myths are composed on the same principal scheme, which is sevenfold. These seven phases are respectively: Creation - Paradise - Transgression of some divine commandment - Catastrophe - Exile and roaming about - Coming of the Teacher - Liberation. (Here I want to say that by "Teacher" is not necessarily meant some physical person, a guru or saviour. In

most cases the teacher is not a human being at all). This is the scheme of every true fairy-tale and also the ground-pattern for every hallowed myth in the sacred books of man.

This scheme may truly be called archetypal; it is the unfoldment in time and space of the Divine Plan which is arranged in perfect order according to the immutable Law of Harmony which, if we could only see it, pervades all history. This is the reason why in occultism we can speak of microcosmos and macrocosmos and see both reflected in one another, for both are projections of the same Divine Scheme of Manifestation.

Presumably there are three Fundamental Laws of Manifestation. Sometimes they are given as:

1. The Law of eternal *Rhythm* or *Periodicity*,
2. The Law of continuous *Transformation* or *Awakening*,
3. The Law of perfect *Harmony* or *Equilibrium*.

The first law, according to the Masters in their letters to A. P. Sinnett, is the supreme and ultimate one. The human mind cannot possibly conceive of something higher or more essential.

The second law is very aptly described by the Greek philosopher Thales (of Miletus), who wrote: *Panta rhei kai oudèn menai* (All things are fleeting, nothing remains unchanged). Therefore no period in history is a perfect copy of either a past or a future one for each occurs according to the same principal pattern. They are projections of the One Divine Life upon the ever-changing screen of history in time and space.

The third law is that of Harmony and Beauty and by far the best symbolical representation for it is the *circle*. The circle is indeed the mathematical ground-pattern of every curved line and in infinitesimal mathematics the circle-radius in every curve is sought, however twisted the line or the surface happens to be and however sharp is the curve.

These three fundamental laws give the ground-pattern of every myth and they manifest themselves in the seven aspects of the story of Creation. We also see them at work in the human life-story where they mark the passing of one life-stage to the next. There are first the three preliminary stages: pre-existence, the pre-natal as the yet unborn child, and the helpless babe up to about three years. The fourth stage is youth, the fifth is the adult, the sixth is old age and the last one is post-existence, if we may call it so. Of course this is all very schematic, because real life is not to be divided into watertight compartments, nor is it confined to the age of the body.

In the Bible we can find the perfectly balanced Myth of Creation in which the seven stages are very dramatically described. This is specially so in the Old Testament or Torah. The New Testament is very much corrupted by misinterpretations, insertions, commentaries, omissions and adapted translations. But in spite of these the Eternal Myth can be found there also, if we but see through all the false.

The seven stages of cosmic life are depicted in the story of Genesis in the following order:

1-3: are the three stages in Paradise, where archetypal man, Adam, was given three labors to

execute: first, to build the Garden of Eden, second, to guard the Garden against all contamination, and third, to give names to all living beings;

4: is the period from the expulsion from Paradise until the Flood;

5: is the period after the Flood until the construction of the City and the Tower of Babel;

6: is the period after the dispersion of the nations and the history of the three Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the descent into Mizraim or Egypt - the land of darkness;

7: is the period of the 400 years of slavery until the Exodus or the journey to the Promised Land.

In occultism we are told that humanity is at present in the era of the Great Dragon, Makara. In *The Secret Doctrine* of H. P. Blavatsky we find many particulars about this crucial period. It may be sufficient to state that it is the fifth of the series and also that the Aryan race is the fifth of the seven Root-races on this planet. In this period we have to train the intellect so that it will develop from the lower, kama-manasic level towards the higher, buddhi-manasic level. In the series given above, this is the period after the Flood and the construction of the City and the Tower of Babel. It is the period in which man has lost the Word and tries to keep the power in his own hands.

In Astrology we are told that we are passing from the zodiacal sign of Pisces (the Fishes) into the next which is Aquarius (the Waterman). Aquarius carries a vessel containing not only water, but within the vessel and the water are the fishes of the foregoing period. Now Aquarius pours both water and fish out onto the earth, which is a disaster meaning certain death for the poor fish, if nothing unusual happens.

Water and fish are symbols of human consciousness and in modern psychology the fish is a dream-symbol of the subconscious mind and more especially of repressed emotions and desires. In Theosophical language, the fish, in its lower and psychical aspect, is the expression of kama-manas in consciousness.⁵ Kama is the basis of all our subconscious conflicts which have to be uprooted and brought into the light before clear and objective reasoning is at all possible. In my opinion this is also what Mr. J. Krishnamurti tells us to do with our many problems - not to try to escape from them by following some ideal⁶, not even to try to solve them with knowledge gained by our former experiences; but to find out how they arise within our minds, and what is the role played by that mysterious force of desire. We should not wrestle with our problems, trying to overcome, but only to observe and find out the real source and root from whence they come. Like Aquarius, we have to pour out the water and the fish of our subconscious mind. In a book entitled *The Bible as a Creation*, by Dr. F. Weinreb, there is a description of the mythical time of the building of the City and the Tower of Babel, which runs as follows:

⁵ True in part. There are high and inspiring aspects in the Piscean and Neptunian consciousness, and they are the central ones: see the article "[Neptune, a Mystery In Front of Us](#)". As to Aquarius and Uranus, consider reading "[A Few Words on Uranus](#)". (CCA)

⁶ J. Krishnamurti, the false Christ of the 20th century, recommends not to have an ideal. See the articles "[Krishnamurti and Theosophy](#)", "[Krishnamurti on Besantian Delusions](#)" and "[The Making of an Avatar](#)". (CCA)

“The unity of human society consisted in its common endeavor, with the assistance of the available forces of the earth and of physical matter in all its phenomenal aspects of fire and stone, to build the ‘city’, the place where one should feel himself safeguarded against all possible disasters and enjoy himself in the fullest degree with earthly life, where one could forget that other aspect of human existence of spiritual responsibility and in that ‘city’ they wanted to build a Tower, which would reach into heaven itself.”

“Tradition gives some details. Man wanted to expand earthly life so as to include ‘heaven’ and ‘paradise’. He wanted to conquer heaven in order to make earthly existence more comfortable, more secure and more constant. And he wanted this to be realized by physical means and with ‘the powers of human intellect and skill’.”

Of course we see the correspondence with our own time of scientific and technological progress, which is based also upon the knowledge of this phenomenal universe and which acknowledges only the powers of reason and skill. This attitude must eventually lead to disaster as it is not in harmony with the eternal Laws of the Divine Plan - Laws which are not only physical and psychical but are spiritual as well. This fact begins to be realized at present by modern scientists, who confess that all scientific knowledge is, and can only be, theory, supposition and hypothesis, but never certainty.

There is nothing in heaven and on earth which can be known in its essentiality and totality, because the human mind is not a fit instrument of such knowledge. Here you will find creeping in the factor of uncertainty, doubt and confusion. The construction of the Tower cannot be achieved and so the work begins to slow down and, at a certain moment, will stop altogether. This uncertainty is symbolized by the “confusion of tongues” and the “dispersion of the nations”. The former unity of striving for earthly happiness and security is broken down, because it is becoming more and more apparent that the goal cannot be realized.

This uncertainty will lead at last to an explosion or a tremendous collapse - the catastrophe which awaits us in the future. Our intellectual society - with its prominent leaders, economists, politicians, professors and technicians of immense knowledge, skill and world-fame - is continuously seeking for a solution, for a way out. But they can never succeed. It is the Mystery of the Ark of Noah, which had to be left unfinished one “ama” (yard) beneath the top; it is the unfinished Tower of Babel; it is the missing topstone of the Great Pyramid at Gizeh; it is the unfinished Temple at Jerusalem.

The catastrophe will come upon us before the finishing topstone can be laid on the building of man’s ingenuity. And by the light of that catastrophe those who are worthy and ready will discover what has been wrong all the time in the egoistical endeavor of seeking personal security. To them will come the Word of God as it came to Abraham: “Go ye out of this country and tread the path which I will show unto you.”

That word came to Abraham and one can perhaps imagine the hopelessness of this command. A man leaving his country, his people, his family goes forth into the utter darkness and the absolute insecurity of the completely unknown, only because a Divine Vision had told him to do so. Of course we have to take this symbolically and understand it in the same way as we have to understand the call of the Master: “Come out of your world into ours.”

By obeying the call of the Divine Vision, by accepting whole-heartedly the consequences of

the catastrophe, Abraham became the initiator of a new era of the Jewish race and its first Archpatriarch. The same happened to the mystical man, Moses, who accepted catastrophe, exile and tragedy, but never flinched for a moment from the commandment of his God and therefore could lead his people to a new existence of freedom.

Catastrophes and disasters are indeed the forces which tear down the veils of ignorance and error and as such we must welcome them and not try to escape. Symbolically that would be as if the fish which are poured out of their element, try separately to regain the river or the sea in order to continue as before their existence. Our present time is that situation where the fish of the era that is coming to an end are poured out of their element and are struggling for life. Is this not a striking picture of our time? Everywhere around us we see fish sprawling in agony because of the uncertainty of the future.

What can be the answer to this problem?

The biblical Myth of Creation gives us the key and helps the serious student to find the way out as Noah found it when the Flood came over the earth; and as Abraham, Moses and all the great Teachers have found it and have tried to give it to their fellowmen, who would not accept. At the first day of Creation, the Elohim not only created the fish out of the waters of the ocean but also at the same time created the birds in the sky. Birds are a symbol of awakened consciousness as air is the universal symbol of the spiritual world. You will remember the sentence in *Light on the Path* about the flower which is opening its heart to the air.

If the fish of our suppressed emotional thinking and feeling could adapt themselves to the new circumstances and develop or rather transform their fins into wings, they would turn from fish into birds and live quite happily and comfortably in the new circumstances. Psychologically interpreted, this means that our kama-manasic dream-consciousness has to cross the threshold which divides this phenomenal world from the far more real spiritual world, and to develop into buddhi-manasic waking-consciousness. In Western psychological terminology, emotional thinking must give way to intuitional inspiration.

This is possible only if man can realize the spiritual and beneficial meaning of disaster. It is the passing over from the age of grown-up man with all his responsibilities into that of the ripe and elderly man, when spiritual clear-sightedness will reveal to him the deeper meaning of existence. It corresponds with the Vanaprastha Ashrama, or the stage of seeking the feet of the spiritual Teacher. The only real and ever-present Teacher is Life itself in all its richness, spontaneity and freshness.

Perhaps here I may draw attention for a moment to the beautiful inner meaning of Hebrew words. The name Babel can be read as *Bab-El*, which means "gateway unto God." The gateway itself is designated by the characters *Beth-Aleph-Beth*, which have the numerical values 2-1-2, and picture the two columns representing duality of manifestation - the physical and the psychical - crowned by the arch of spiritual Unity. The root of the word Babel is *Mabul*, which means "Confusion" and that is also the name given to the Flood. The prominent man in this Biblical myth belonging to the beginning of the era of the building of the City and the Tower is Ibri or Heber, the mythical ancestor of the Hebrews, who are the transitional race before the Aryan root race. The name Ibri (the kabalistic value 222 designates his duality, mentally, psychically and physically) means "he who is coming over" or "pilgrim"; and perhaps there is no better symbol for man, as he is really a Pilgrim, always coming over from

one world - crossing the threshold of catastrophe - and entering into a new one.

Now we can understand how meaningful and beneficent disaster is for those who can understand. It helps us to cross a certain boundary or limit of consciousness, which we had felt to be insurmountable. Every disaster has this liberating potentiality, if only we would accept it and make use of it in our lives. When disaster overcomes us unexpectedly it is always very disagreeable - as the fire of purgatory must needs be very disagreeable to earthbound souls. But by overcoming the purifying fire of catastrophe, man emerges as a Phoenix, reborn and rejuvenated in a higher state of consciousness, which does not mean some occult plane of manifestation, because that would be quite irrelevant. It is a widening of our mind, a clearing of the windows, a turning on of a new light, which we did not realize but which has always been there.

Perhaps the time in which we are living at present is really such a purifying fire, not only with regard to human society, but, to a smaller degree, also in the domain of our Theosophical Society⁷ and even as regards the still smaller realm of our own private consciousness. We ought to be exceedingly grateful that we are given the opportunity to live in a period in which old values being turned upside down, are put aside for quite another evaluation, when humanity is seeking a new path of living together and developing towards brotherhood. But then we must not close our eyes to the approaching disaster, but keep them wide open and even welcome the coming of the rains, which will eventually develop into a Flood. This is a time to become pioneers of a New Age and perhaps that is the only right reason why we have become members of this Theosophical Society. Potentially we have to be co-workers and co-operators with the Masters of the Wisdom, who live to help mankind in its struggle for Light, Love and Freedom.

Knowledge and therefore study are certainly indispensable means to understand life. But they are means only. Life itself is essential and if we cannot make Theosophy a really living force in our relationship with our fellowmen, we shall have missed our mark and shall fall aside, notwithstanding all our so-called occult knowledge and all our good intentions. I do not think, nor do I propound, that our time is in any way a final period. There will come many more catastrophes and disasters in the future. In the myths of the Bible there are also other disasters after that of the "confusion of tongues" and the "dispersion of the nations". And disasters will most certainly come to us in due time. But if we study these myths in the light of the Perennial Wisdom, we will certainly discover how each catastrophe always opens the gateway to a wider and more meaningful life.

For that reason it is not so very paradoxical to state that a disaster is a boon and a blessing to man, because it helps him to awaken the Divine Life within his most sacred Inner Being.

000

⁷ Theosophical Society, *id est*, the theosophical movement, with its many different organizations. (CCA)



The text “**Disaster, a Boon and a Blessing to Man**” was published in the associated websites on 13 August 2019.

See other articles on [Planetary Change and the Civilization of the Future](#).

Read “[Old Prophecies and Atomic War](#)”.

000

On 14 September 2016, a group of students decided to found the **Independent Lodge of Theosophists**. Two of the priorities adopted by the **ILT** are learning from the past and building a better future.

000