

THE MEANING OF A LIFE

A feature often noticed in accounts of matriarchal life is the great respect and even reverence accorded to old people. It is an attitude common to most traditional civilisations, and one which to the modern mind is almost incomprehensible - as a measure of politeness it can perhaps be understood - but a genuine belief in the superiority of the old seems to contradict all reason. What the modern mind generally fails to take account of is the possibility that some difference in the whole nature of those times was such as to make old people worthy of special respect; that gave them certain qualities which for the most part they no longer possess today.

Of course, in a world which is not forever chasing its own tail in the endless circles of fashion, or pursuing the will-o'-the-wisp of "progress" across the technological wasteland, old people are less prone to get "left behind". But something of a far deeper order is in question here - a real depth of quality which belongs by nature to old age in any society that is not hopelessly cut off from the real roots of human life.

Matriarchal life revolved around Eternity. The purpose was not to increase to the greatest possible degree the material possessions either of society as a whole or of any particular group, but rather to serve the Goddess and to facilitate to the greatest possible degree the spiritual development of every soul incarnated within it. It was realised that the purpose of human life is not simply to maintain human life (like a signboard saying "Do not throw stones at this signboard"), but that a soul's brief journey through a human incarnation has a definite purpose within her development, reaching both before and beyond the present life. And this purpose can only be a spiritual one, since all the money, comforts, luxuries, fame, knowledge or skills (in the material sense), power or prestige she has gathered in this life will, an hour after her death, be as worthless as the treasure on last night's dream.

This is not to deny or reject the physical world; for to say that the world is worthless would be to say that our incarnation has no purpose - that we would be better off as disembodied forms floating among the nebulae in prayer and contemplation! On the contrary, this world, beautiful in itself, reflects the Divine beauty on a hundred levels and leads us toward Her if we live in harmony with its true rhythm and meaning.

And that is the reason for the reverence of the old. For in a normal community not cut off from the wellsprings of Truth, most people in the course of a life accomplished at least something of the purpose of that life. They have grown in the disciplines of prayer and meditation. They have penetrated each into the sacred Mysteries of the craft of her calling; they have gained a certain knowledge and maturity in the Spirit which only long experience of the world, seen in the light of sacred wisdom and brought to fruition by long contemplation, can teach. Even as the corn ripens in the field, or an apple on a tree, so, in a truly human (which is to say a truly divine) society does human life ripen and continue to ripen until it is ready to drop.

We are not speaking here of Heras or saints or even of the outstandingly pious, but of the normal person. There were some who did not reach this maturity, and there is always the problem of senility (much less common, interestingly, among people of any spiritual advancement), but for the normal person, this was the pattern. Age takes many things from us - strength, sharpness of the physical senses, quickness of the more superficial part of the rational faculty, and eventually health. These are in nature's plan, for it is natural to retire from activity toward the end of life and to turn more fully to the care of the soul. In return, age brings a spiritual depth and maturity, a ripe and mellow wisdom wherewith to guide others along the path: the fruit of a life lived "in themis" - according to life's pattern and life's plan. The reward of a soul that has reaped the golden harvest which she came on earth to sow. She has gathered that true wealth which will not "evanish as the wealth of dreams" upon her death.

But modern life is not lived in themis. Cut off by its own ignorance from everything that lies beyond the reach of the five physical senses, modern humanity puts its reason to work simply to find more ways of satisfying those senses - to find ever more sophisticated ways of living at the level of animals. In this life, age still takes everything which it took before, but gives nothing in return, for no spiritual seed has been sown, and there is nothing to reap.

In a Madrian-matriarchal society, life as a whole was the sowing and growing of the seed. Each craft had its own symbolic meaning and its exercise was not merely a utilitarian act of "production" but a sacred ritual in itself. The craft practised by an individual expressed her own particular nature - it was a true vocation, and not a "job". Modern employment treats people like books used to prop up the short leg of a chair. No notice is taken of their rich bindings (the personality), still less of the unique and precious contents (the soul). So long as they are the right thickness and can perform the purely quantitative task demanded of them, they are shoved in.

Madrian-matriarchal education shows the world not as a spiritually meaningless tangle of accidental "facts", but as a living whole - it looks beyond the outward chaos of physical appearances to the underlying unity.

In the same way, stories, songs, arts, sciences, customs, manners, clothes and every other aspect of life were governed not by mere utility nor by fashion, but each by its own themis - its part within the sacred ritual which united all life with She Who is the Source and meaning of all life.

By an unconscious but nonetheless unerring logic, each feature of modern life has precisely the opposite effect - its noise, its rush, its constant change, its trivia, the endless flow of banal brainwash from the ubiquitous media, the severance from seasonal rhythms and a thousand other things could have been purpose-made to slice off human life from its super-natural root and source - and in a sense they have been.

In returning to the spiritual fountain-head of matriarchal civilisation - the love and worship of the Goddess - we are re-attuning ourselves to the true rhythm and pattern of life. Automatically our souls begin to respond to sacred rhythms and to cut themselves off from profane ones. For the spiritual dissonance of profane rhythms carries within it the seed of their destruction,

All life flows from the Spirit, and to cut oneself off from Her is like sawing off the branch on which one is sitting. Final success is final disaster, and the impending spiritual disaster is mirrored on the physical level by the energy, ecological and other physical crises which are rapidly engulfing us. Neither profane physical science nor profanised patriarchal religion can offer any answer to what is essentially a spiritual problem. They may postpone the symptoms, but they cannot cure the disease. Sooner or later, a collapse will be the result, unless people make the choice to return to the Goddess.

