

Understanding Good and Evil **- interpreting with Biblical allegory and metaphor** **- by Eugene Halliday**

The Bible is not merely a "religious" book in the sense in which irreligious people use this word. It is a one-volume library of the **wisdom** of the ancient world, a gathering together of many works of men who had **meditated deeply** on the basic problems of **humanity** and of **divinity**. Throughout the Bible recur certain **symbols** of the most important **principles** that **rule all living beings**. Knowledge of the meaning of these symbols is essential to the **true understanding** of the real meaning of the word "**religion**".

When in the primitive world wickedness had spread through most of mankind, so that their hearts were continually evil, there was a need for some protection of the few intelligent members of the human race from the rest. Only by selection of the most wise men from the others could the human race be saved from total degeneration and a fall backwards into the sub-human stage of life. The Bible symbolises this selection process by God's command to Noah to build an ark of gopher wood. Because of the violence of men, God would have to destroy them, but because life must go on, **Intelligence** (Noah), and his three sons and their wives would be saved. A new world would have to be built, with intelligence as the preserver of that world.

Daily we see everywhere more and more **violence** in the world: in vandalism, air-plane high-jackings, political up-risings, military take-overs, race-riots and individual acts directed against other individuals. The world situation once again repeats the conditions of Noah's day. But the cure to come will not be in the form of a universal flood, for this was an insufficient measure, and after it men returned again to their evil ways.

The cure for our time promises to come in the form of a world-wide nuclear war. Only the intelligence of a modern Noah, guided by the **inner divine principle**, can avert this threat. The hot, dark impulses of the unconscious pleasure seeking power symbolised by Ham, must be brought under the control of the higher levels of awareness signified by Shem and Japhet.

The **three sons** of Noah together symbolise the **three powers** which constitute intelligence as we know it in the human being. These three powers function respectively as **feeling awareness** (Shem), **impulsive pleasure seeking** (Ham), and **intellectual analytic capacity** (Japhet). The impulsive pleasure-seeking power, acting without contact with the highest intelligence, insensitive to the need to veil the real significance of what was meant by Noah being drunk, exposed his father's nakedness to his two brothers.

Why should there be a need to veil the significance of Noah, the principle of intelligence, being drunk in his tent? To answer this, we must understand the nature of **fallen** man, and that of **unfallen** man as well.

Unfallen man was man as originally created, sensitive, intelligent and of unspoilt pure will. Fallen man, as a result of his error in succumbing to the temptation to **know the nature of Good and Evil**, lost his original **purity of will**, for in choosing to know evil as well as good, he exposed himself to the **effects** of evil.

Evil is a force acting against life. The effects of evil are, therefore, reduction of life-forces, degeneration of the organs of the living body, cessation of living processes and finally, death. The approach to death may be **lingering**, accompanied by a slow, painful corruption of body tissues, or there may be a swift, **immediate** departure from this world to the next.

Death can occur at different levels of being, **physical, affectional, mentational, conceptual, volitional**. It is possible for our physical organs to die from lack of food, or from intake of poison, or from deficient circulation resulting in shortage of oxygen to body-cells. It is possible for our affections to die from lack of kindness; our mind may die from insufficient mental stimulation. Our principles may die from non-application. Our will may die from experience of non-appreciation of our good intentions.

When Adam sinned, he became at once aware that he had in some way diminished his life, reduced his capacity for participation in the living process of all other creatures around him. In **choosing** to know evil as well as good, he had chosen to experience forces contra life.

Unless we actually experience things by **participating** in them with our own being, we cannot truly say that we **know** them. If we **hear** the word "evil", and do not actually take part in the type of activity signified by this word, the word remains for us a mere sound, with no real meaning. Only if we **engage** in an action which manifestly results in a diminution of life do we actually **know** the meaning of the word "evil".

How did Adam become aware of the meaning of evil? We human beings are wiser in our depths than our **conscious mind** comprehends. Modern psychology has accepted the idea that the human mind is rooted in **unconscious forces** that are capable of actions not only constructive. There are powers at work in our depths which may suddenly **flash out** in deeds of violence. As long as we are capable of **conscious** control of our energies, we are able to maintain **harmonious** relations with our fellow men, and we consider ourselves to this degree "**good**". Our energies work constructively, creatively, not destructively.

All the energy in the Universe around us exhibits a **two-fold process, building up and tearing down** the innumerable forms of things and creatures that constitute for us our **environment**. As living beings with a love of life, we tend to view the tearing-down aspect of the world-process as "**bad**" or "evil" especially where it begins to threaten our own **continuance**. For us the worldwide present fear of a nuclear war illustrates this point very clearly.

Great religious thinkers of the world have seen that the world we live in is a "**fallen**" world. They have perceived that the tearing down processes of the universe indicate that our world has somehow, somewhere back in history, gone wrong, has fallen from a prior state of **perfection**, has been precipitated from an **eternal** perfectly harmonious state of **inter-**

relatedness, into a **temporal**, imperfect, disharmonious state of **disintegrated** warring forces. The mystery of this fall has fascinated the greatest intellects of the world.

The Bible has something to say of tremendous importance about this problem. It is clear that the universe, as a product of **one supreme power**, must originally have been in **perfect harmony with itself**. Yet the world we live in, the universe around us, is torn apart, everywhere exhibits destructive tendencies, and threatens the lives of all living creatures. True, not all the forces of the universe are destructive, for if they were, we should not be here. Myriads of living creatures go about seeking sustenance and the continuance of their existence. But at any moment a careless boot may crush out the lives of minute ants pursuing their own modes of livelihood; or an earthquake may cast down man-made buildings and destroy thousands of human lives.

How the forces of destruction gained entrance into the universe is indicated in the words of Jesus, where he says that he saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Today few educated people believe in the "**heaven**" referred to in the world's religious systems, the "**after-world**" in which, after this life's fitful fever the "good" shall be eternally happy, unperturbed by the "bad" souls of fallen humans and devils, who have been forever excluded from that paradisaical world.

Most people use words without adequate definitions, for the **defining of terms** can be a very delicate process. Thus the word "heaven" is not usually clearly defined "**Heaven**" means the condition of **perfectly balanced power**, a state of being in which all the energies of that being are held in **perfect, easy harmonious interplay**, a state of **spiritual bliss beyond all possible discordancies**. This was the state of Man before the fall. This was the condition which Adam suddenly **lost** as he accepted the serpentine suggestion that he should **know** both good **and evil**.

Prior to his fall Adam was in a state of perfect harmony with **himself** and his **situation**. He was in the condition of **supreme good**, but had experienced this without the contrast of evil. "Good" was simply his being as he experienced it, with **no opposing or impeding forces to his unadulterated bliss**.

Let us imagine that in his **innocence**, Adam did not **understand** the nature of evil, did not comprehend that in order to know evil he would have himself to **experience** evil. The **good** he already knew, but not as **contrasted** with evil. So far he had lived the good, but not comprehending it as any other than his own natural harmonious state of being, with no **opposite** with which to **compare** it. He lived and knew harmony. He had **not yet lived and known disharmony or disruption**. Suddenly he **felt** within himself that his own interest in evil had virtually **cut him off from his relationship with his Creator**, for now he **felt** that he would have to **conceal** this interest from God. Hence Adam **hid** himself, thus committing himself to the first fruits of his disobedience, the **alienation** of himself from the very **source power of his own being**.

Of course Man cannot **actually** completely cut himself off from God. But what man can do, led by his own sense of guilt, is to **behave as if so cut off**. We all know this type of behaviour. We do something wrong to someone, and at once feel the need to **remove ourselves** from the presence of the one we have wronged. We remove ourselves **physically** or **mentally** from the situation. We are afraid of **condemnation**, afraid of being proved **guilty**. So with Adam. At the very moment of his disobedience he experienced the evil of **self-imposed alienation**. Henceforth he would hide from the Creator who had brought him into being. His hiding would be ineffective, for **creative power cannot be totally cut off from the creature it maintains**. But from Adam's standpoint the degree of separation he was able to sustain had to suffice. Again we all know the feeling. We cut ourselves off as much as we can from the person we have wronged. We know that we cannot do this **completely**, but we think we can do so **sufficiently** for our **purpose**. We can **suppress** our knowledge of the reality to a degree; **push it down into the deepest depths of our being**. We can create conditions of **nearly total unconsciousness**, but only **nearly**. In spite of all our efforts to repress our guilt, we cannot **totally** succeed; there still remains in us a degree of discomfort about our **real** position in relation to the **person** we have wronged, and not only in relation to him but also to all his **friends**, and others beyond who fear that we may do a similar wrong to them.

We now come again to the question why there should be over Noah, the principle of intelligence, a **covering**; why Shem and Japhet, respectively the principles of feeling sensitivity and intellectual analysis should, after Ham's exposure of his father's condition, cover up his nakedness.

Guilty people do not like their guilt to be **exposed** to the gaze of others. Prophets who, in the ancient world, spoke against inhumane rulers, were put to death. Intelligent men who criticised the bad behaviour of unintelligent men soon learned that direct criticism brought immediate reprisals, so they devised an indirect way of exposing the stupidities and cruelties of insensitive rulers. This indirect way led to the development of **theatre**, in which **plays** could be presented to expose the unintelligent ways of persons in high places. "**The play's the thing**", says Shakespeare, "**wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king**". The Greek word for an actor was "**hypocrite**". It meant "**one who criticises from below**", that is, "one who **indirectly** criticises". Things can be said through the medium of a play that none would dare openly to express.

Thus it came about that Shem (the feeling sensitivity that knew how to name things) and Japhet (the intellectual capacity that knew to analyse correctly a situation) "dwelt together" and conjoined their gifts to control the dark impulsive behaviour of Ham and his descendants. The spiritual intelligence and purpose of Noah had to be covered over so that unfit men, of dark, uncontrolled, impulsive behaviour should be subjected to indirect control.

Naturally, people do not like to think that indirect methods of control are applied to them. They tend to cry out against every influence that may act upon them and determine their behaviour without their knowledge. Especially is this so with people who pride themselves on their own strength of will.

Such people are generally ready to react forcefully against anything that threatens to impede the attainment of their ambitions.

True will is not reactive in this way. It has **respect** not only for its own goals, but also for those of other beings.
