

SERVICE AS A SACRED LABOUR

Dorothy Bell

Before we look at service, it would be helpful to consider some fundamental propositions from the Ancient Wisdom that give it a context. For example, we are part of the One Life – the living but hidden Reality that underlies our existence on earth. We are divine seeds, never been born, never will die, but experiencing a temporary time zone in which to grow. We are each a unit of divine consciousness energy – but we are individualised and localised. We are spiritual entities in human vehicles and souls on a great pilgrimage. We are soul-actors on the temporary world stage playing new roles in different personalities, in order to learn and to grow. I see four issues relating to seeing service as ‘Sacred Labour’:

1. Acknowledging the divinity and sacredness of our inner nature
2. Recognising difficulties we encounter in its expression
3. Choosing the path of self-transformation and purification of action
4. Identifying the distinctive characteristics of a theosophical new world server – a way of being

We are indeed wondrous and powerful beings, waiting to express fully through a beautiful and powerful gift, manas – the mind, which can control and limit us to a personality ego, or it can be the centre of divine operation, the instrument of our inner true selves. These are our real selves. We don’t have to become spiritual: we are already spiritual. We each have a right to be on this planet and to achieve our spiritual potential here. As H. P. Blavatsky expresses: “the essence of Theosophy is the perfect harmonising of the divine with the human in man.” We can learn about and grow in our spirituality, but we don’t become spiritual. We are IT.

In the context of the theme – Service as Sacred Labour is seeing service action as the spontaneous outward expression of our inner sacred spiritual nature – coming from the heart-mind, the centre of spiritual consciousness, and not from the conditioned mind of the personality and its emotional projections on external situations and those who suffer.

In this sense, Service as Sacred Labour is entirely selfless; it is from the Sacred within, operating from true compassion – a detached, unemotional, but not unfeeling state of being, where the artificial personality Ego is subjugated to a higher end, a higher desire of the Soul to be who it truly is. And, expressing through a human vehicle, to see and serve the divine in everything. Love is a form of seeing, as Annie Besant proposed, and is the action of seeing through outer appearances to the hidden Reality within, the Oneness that encompasses all.

In this context, Sacred Labour is when the wholeness and perfection of who we already are within, is expressing outwards to the whole. In this there is union and unity; there is harmony in being one with the Oneness. It is the expression of true and detached Love-compassion. This is the power of practical theosophy – the liberated expression of our inner divine nature. It also reflects Annie Besant’s Motto for the TOS – to form a union of those who Love in the service of all that suffers – the highest level of service.

That brings me to the second point. If we feel this to be our truth, why can’t we just be it, just do it? There are several possible reasons. We may not really believe it and as Annie Besant suggested, the strength of our belief determines if we act on it; or we are happy to leave it as an intellectual idea. Or we don’t know how to get from where we are now to that state of being. Or we are not convinced that the mind is really the “Slayer of the Real”, working to a programmed set of beliefs. Whatever our position, it is accurate – not right or wrong; good or bad. It just is.

So we have choice – the third point – whether or not to pursue the notion that our personality has been programmed into us; that our minds have been hardwired by beliefs, values, attitudes and emotions that are alien to our true nature; that from the moment we are born we are programmed away from being who we truly are and that we go on to live to the expectations of others. We may not like the view of Krishnamurti that ‘we

are second-hand people' nor that we are blinded by form; nor that we are hobbled, attached emotionally to accumulated beliefs which dominate our thoughts and actions. But perhaps we have a responsibility to our true inner selves to examine these views with an open mind.

There is another obstacle to recognise. We have been programmed in our perceptions of, and attitudes to service, as children growing up in the family, schools and church. For example, we may have learned that social service is the right thing to do and that it is important to our emotional needs be seen to be doing the right thing – to care for and help others, to share – and we also may have learnt how this is rewarded with approval, acceptance, recognition and status.

We may have learnt that it was wrong to have abundance; to feel guilt in our good fortune in the face of those starving to death, diseased without medical help, being victims of injustice and so on. In this way of thinking, pity arises and we help from an unconscious position of superiority and compensation, of feeling sorrow for others. This childhood training usually produces a mixed bag of motives – self-serving as well as genuine caring for those who suffer.

Annie Besant recognised these mixed motives on the path of service, which she called “the path of purification of action.” She identified three phases – self-gratification and meeting the needs of the personality-ego; then service action as duty; and finally action as joyful sacrifice to align with the sacred within, and subjugating the personal ego in so doing. Should we take it, the path of transformation through service action – karma yoga – may be seen as the journey from egoism to altruism.

Service as Sacred Labour is service action that begins with an unveiled spiritual perception of the bigger picture of our Reality. It comes from our understanding of universal laws and who we are; the evolutionary journey of the soul – where we have come from, where we are going and the purpose of our sojourn on this planet – the great Schoolhouse of learning that involves pain and suffering.

In this context of the Divine Plan of evolution, we can learn to see with the eyes of Divine Wisdom, to change our perceptions of service and in particular, we can learn to see those in need of a helping hand in a new light. My fourth point is that it is not that we change anything that we do as service, but maybe we see it differently – as living theosophy and expressing our inner divinity. To try to exemplify this, how might two new world servers – Theo and Sophie – work towards seeing service through theosophical eyes; through the eyes of spirit?

They would work daily towards seeing the divine in everything and everyone; to see through outer appearances into the hidden, sacred Reality of the interconnected whole – which they serve. They would come to see everything as consciousness energy, conditioned by the form in which it resides; and to see others as spiritual entities being limited in their true expression by their programmed minds filled with others' beliefs and attitudes.

Theo and Sophie would work towards understanding their own programming from the illusions of separateness and working to look at themselves in a new light of non-judgment, self-acceptance and compassionate understanding as they come to understand the impact of social programming of the human mind – and how they have been blinded and hoodwinked. They would be working to see others as themselves without judgment, accepting everyone as how they are; knowing that they are the result of numerous lifetimes of programming, like themselves, on the great pilgrimage of the soul.

They would recognise that everyone on this planet suffers in one way or another – obvious and hidden – and that it is an integral part of growth and the purpose of Earth experience. Sophie and Theo would also work to understand that each person on this planet is in the right place at the right time for the right reasons, according to the educational agenda of the soul and the operation of the great universal law of Karma – perfect divine justice. And this would in no way affect the offering of their helping hands to those in need.

They would come to see that so-called ‘injustice’ in the world did NOT take into account the whole life of the Soul, and all its former lives, and the soul’s agenda for this lifetime; that in natural or divine law, everything is accurate, not right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust. It just is – with the Law of Karma being the most magnificent and perfect educational tool.

They would come to see that there are no victims or favourites, no one greater or lesser, in the bigger picture. There are only causes and consequences to experience and understand and from which to move on with insight. They would acknowledge that we have all created our world from actions of the past – and that we experience the consequences for our learning.

Whatever social service action Theo or Sophie take, they would work towards NOT being invested in the outcome of their action. This would be right action, harmonious action. They would become selfless and passively active in service – the mark of altruism – working with detachment and true compassion; moving towards feeling one with the Oneness of all that exists, including all those suffering – animal, mineral, vegetable or human. “We cannot really help in the service of all that suffers until we are free of fear.”¹

Above all, they would come to see suffering in a new light – as serving the needs of the soul to learn and grow – a sacred process involving the suffering and pain of the personality. This opens the way for a deeper respect for the Soul entity in its choice of experience on the planet, and unveils the awesomeness of the Divine Plan in operation before their eyes, and seeing how it is an honour to serve in this context; this sacred context of human evolution. “We have to earn the right to be a world server.”²

This is how I see Service as Sacred Labour – as moving away from service as pity, being sorry for, or having compensatory guilt; away from these emotional projections of the personality, to learning to see and understand with distinctive theosophical eyes the role of suffering in the bigger picture, in the interests of the soul’s growth. And to anyone who crosses our path in need of a hand on that journey, it is simply given. This opens the way for true compassion. It is Service from the Sacred within, to the Sacred in another. Service to the whole: to the One Life.³

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¹ Robert Sardello, Freeing the Soul from Fear

² Annie Besant, Initiation

³ Dorothy Bell, International Theosophical Order of Service Conference 2013, Wheaton, USA.