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A Look at Evil

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For the past several months, we have been working many hours each day on a new edition of Dancing with Siva, A Modern Hindu Catechism. It covers all the basic beliefs and insights, gathered by India's mystics over the millenia. One of these is dharma's understanding about suffering and evil. I thought you would enjoy some excerpts on this subject from the new catechism.

Why Is There Suffering in the World? The nature of the world is duality. It contains each thing and its opposite: joy and sorrow, goodness and evil, love and hate. Through experience of these, we learn and evolve, finally seeking Truth beyond all opposites.

There is a divine purpose even in the existence of suffering in the world. Suffering cannot be totally avoided. It is a natural part of human life and the impetus for much spiritual growth for the soul. When we are unjust and mean, hateful and holding resentments year after year and no one but ourselves knows of our intrigue and corruption, we suffer. Just as the intense fire of the furnace purifies gold, so does suffering purify the soul to resplendence. So also does suffering offer us the important realization that true happiness and freedom cannot be found in the world, for worldly joy is inextricably bound to sorrow, and freedom to bondage.

The Agamas explain: "That which appears as cold or as hot, fresh or spoiled, good fortune and bad, love and hate, effort and laziness, the exalted and the depraved, the rich and the poor, the well-founded and the ill-founded, all this is God Siva Himself; none other than Him can we know."

Does Hell Really Exist? Is There a Satan? There is no eternal hell, nor is there a satan. However, there are hellish states of mind and woeful births for those who think and act wrongfully - temporary tormenting conditions that lift the fiery forces within.

Hell, termed the narakaloka, is the lower astral realm of the seven chakras below the muladhara. It is a place of fire and heat, anguish and dismay, of confusion, despair and depression. Here anger, argument, mental conflict and tormenting moods plague the mind. Access to hell is brought about by our own thoughts, words, deeds and emotions - suppressed, antagonistic feelings that court demons and their aggressive forces. Hell is not eternal; nor is there a satan with power equal to God's, though there are devilish beings called asuras, immature souls caught in the abyss of deception and hurtfulness. Hell can be experienced in the physical world. We do not have to die to suffer the narakaloka. If we do die in a hellish state of consciousness, with the symbols of our mental hell around us - hatred, remorse, resentment, fear and all the distorted patterns of thought - we arrive in the narakaloka fully equipped to experience this temporary purgatory. The Vedas explain, "Sunless and demonic, verily, are those worlds, and enveloped in blinding darkness, to which all those people who are enemies of their own souls go after death."

From Whence Do Good and Evil Arise? Instead of seeing good and evil in the world, we understand the nature of the embodied soul in three interrelated parts: instinctive, or physical-emotional; intellectual or mental; and superconscious or spiritual.

Evil has no source, unless the source of evil's seeming be ignorance itself. Still, it is good to fear unrighteousness. The ignorant complain, justify, fear and criticize "sinful deeds," setting themselves apart as lofty puritans. When the lower instinctive nature dominates, one is prone to anger, fear, greed, jealousy, hatred and backbiting. When the intellect is prominent, arrogance and analytical thinking preside. It is when the superconscious soul comes forth that the refined qualities are born - compassion, insight, modesty and the others. The animal instincts of the young soul are strong. The intellect, yet to be developed, is nonexistent to control its strong instinctive impulses. When the intellect is developed, the instinctive nature subsides. When the soul unfolds and overshadows the well-developed intellect, its harness is loosened and removed. When we encounter wickedness in others, let us be compassionate. The Vedas explain, "The mind, in truth, is for mankind the means of bondage and of release: for bondage if to objects bound; from objects free - that is called release!"

How Can a Benevolent God Create Evil? From the highest perspective, there is no good or bad. God did not create evil as a distinct force from good. He gave man freedom of choice within a vast arena of consciousness, ranging from subtle to crude. Good or evil, kindness or hurtfulness returns to us as the result, the fruit, of our own actions of the past. That which is generally known as evil arises from the instinctive intellectual nature. All that the Lord has created is in perfect balance. The sense of evil is only ignorance. Let us again be compassionate, for truly there is no intrinsic evil. The Vedas explain, "As a man behaves, so does he become. A man of good deeds becomes good, a man of evil deeds becomes evil." We hope that you have enjoyed this sharing.

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