

# Self-sacrifice and the Ethics of Magic

by Michael Freedman

When considering sacrifice in terms of 'self-sacrifice', that is, the sacrifices of our own desires and needs that we might feel we need to make on behalf of others, many people assume that such considerations can only be made within a religious or philosophical, ethical context.

The point of view put forward in this article is based on theories of biological and cultural evolution rather than on religious or ethical theories, and, as such, accords better with the point of view of Magician, who are generally closer in spirit to technicians or scientists than they are to theologians or philosophers.

## Communication and Co-operation

The basic assumption underlying all that follows is that the principal adaptive factors that have enabled the human species to survive have been:

firstly the heightened ability of its members to communicate with one another, and so co-operate together in a community, rather than its technical manual and mental abilities that have been used to develop more powerful tools and weapons to use competitively against other species;

secondly the development of compassion and feeling for one another that led humans to care for and take care of others in their community.

*The Fable of the First Human Tribe* that follows this article tells how this might have worked out in practice.

As we mature, physically, socially and spiritually, we become able to comprehend more and more of our universe, so that we become more aware of the need to balance our personal welfare and desires against the welfare of an increasingly larger proportion of the universe.

The table, from a diagram in my paper, *The World Ages in the Tides of Time*, sets out the widening horizons of a maturing human being. The human race is still young as a species, so that few of its members are yet able to see even as far as the general welfare of all the members of even their own city or nation, except in times of extreme emergency.

Yet, some already have compassion not only for their fellow humans but for all living beings on the earth.

However, children and immature adults need clear guidance on how they should balance their own needs and wishes against those of the larger community. For at least 5000 years, there have been formal attempts to regulate human relationships through laws and rules for behaviour.

Parallel with the development of legal and

moral codes, some very mature humans, such as Hillel and Jesus, have drawn attention to love as the most efficient basis for human relationships. Biologically, every organism has two basic drives: one for its survival as an individual; the other for the survival of its species.

## THE WIDENING HORIZONS OF A MATURING HUMAN BEING

YOU  
YOUR FAMILY  
YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD  
YOUR COMMUNITY  
YOUR CITY  
YOUR NATION  
THE ALLIANCE OF NATIONS  
THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE  
ALL LIVING BEINGS ON THE EARTH  
EVERY LIVING BEING IN THE UNIVERSE

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Among all animal species, the survival of the species seems to take precedence over the survival of the individual organism, whenever there is any conflict between these two drives for survival.

#### **A complex brain brings wider choice**

The more complex an organism is, and the larger the brain that it has in relation to its size, the wider the variety of responses that it can develop to the events in its environment.

Human beings have the most complex brain of all land animals. Correspondingly, human individuals usually have a much greater range of responses than most animals to events and situations in the world around them.

The positive result of this wider freedom of choice is the extent to which the human race has been able to survive and increase until it has become the dominant species on earth, and is now able to control, to a very large extent, both its environment and the evolution of life.

The negative result of this wider freedom of choice has been the extent to which individual humans have been able to put their own survival, their own needs and wishes, ahead of the survival of the species, ahead of the needs and wishes of their community.

#### **Selfishness a sign of immaturity**

In this scenario, deliberately to choose to pursue your own needs and wishes at the expense of others and of the community as a whole is both a sign of immaturity and the beginning of evil. It is therefore possible to say that selfishness is the primary sin.

Because human beings begin their lives as self-centred infants, they have to learn to balance their own needs and wishes against those of the larger community.

It should be no surprise if it is difficult for some human beings to subordinate what they feel are their rights to those of any community, if all that community has to

offer is its size and its strength to enforce the wishes of the community over those of the individual.

What a difference it makes to what you do, if you regard the community to which you belong as your family, no matter how large or small it is.

#### **Magical activities**

What a difference it might make to the kind of magical activities in which you engage, if you see yourself as a member of a community of fellow beings, rather than as someone separate and alien from other folk.

When human beings are involved in loving relationships, whether between members of a family or between lovers and friends or within some wider community, it is not so difficult to balance your needs and wishes, your rights, against those of the people you love, who also love you.

#### **Signs of social and spiritual maturity**

The human race does show signs of real growth away from its primitive and immature origins towards social and spiritual maturity.

- growing awareness of Earth as a single community of living beings;
- a growing tendency for millions of human beings to co-operate together to help others whose need is greater than their own;
- a growing ability for more people to love others of different races or colours or creeds as though they were family and friends, instead of treating them as foreigners or enemies.

The teachings of such mature humans as Moses, Buddha and Jesus might at last be having some effects, even though their wisdom has been distorted by their followers and ignored by many other people.

The point of view from which this paper is written does not include any belief that the human race is intrinsically evil or incapable of improvement.



We look at humankind and see that we are still very young, and very immature.

Nor do we agree with those members of the Christian religion who teach that humans once were perfect but lost their perfection when they sinned by disobeying God, so that they are

now basically sinful, incapable of self-improvement or of doing any good whether of their own volition or ability.

Nor do we agree with Dualists, such as the Cathars, who teach that matter itself is intrinsically evil, the creation of an evil god; and that as long as we are in the flesh, we cannot help but be evil; & that the only way to achieve salvation is to deny the flesh completely.

#### **An accumulation of mistakes**

The mess that the world is today is the result of the accumulation of the effects of human selfishness over the past 10,000 years or so, compounded by the additional effects of accidental mistakes made as a result of the ignorance or the immaturity of human beings. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes; the children's teeth are set on edge."

It is the point of view of this paper that the human race has, by now, matured enough to be able to love all life on earth, if only each one of us can be freed from those prejudices and enmities which have been conditioned into us by earlier, less mature generations.

The highest possible achievement for any human being is to love steadfastly. The essential nature of love is to share the feelings of the other, whether the other is parent, child, lover, friend, neighbour, alien, enemy, animal or any other being. This is called compassion, and Compassion is at the Centre.

#### **THE INTENTION OF THE GUARDIANS**

*It is our intention to link ourselves with those forces and forms that are building the universe so that we might be a part of evolving life, in COMMUNION with all life, with COMPASSION for all life, and in CO-OPERATION with all life.*

Ethically, then if what I do in life is done with a sense of community rather than being done with one of conflict; with compassion rather than condescension; in co-operation with others rather than by competing with others, what I am doing can *probably* be said to be along the right lines.

And no-one, from our ordinary, limited, human point of view, can ever say more than "I am *probably* heading in the right direction."

#### **The Way of the Great Work**

The Way of the Great Work is to lift all living beings to full awareness of Light and Life and Love. In this context, Light symbolically represents all inorganic existence; Life symbolically represents all organic beings; Love symbolically represents all self-aware beings. ■

#### **Previously published**

**Magic Pentacle Spring 1996**

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