

JAKOB BÖHME

DIALOGUES ON THE
SUPERSENSUAL LIFE

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Dialogues on the Supersensual Life

PREFACE

The Works of Jacob Behmen, the "Teutonic Theosopher," translated into English, were first printed in England in the seventeenth century, between 1644 and 1662. In the following century a complete edition in four large volumes was produced by some of the disciples of William Law. This edition, completed in the year 1781, was compiled in part from the older English edition, and in part from later fragmentary translations by Law and others. It is not easily accessible to the general reader, and, moreover, the greater part of Behmen's Works could not be recommended save to those who had the time and power to plunge into that deep sea in search of the many noble pearls which it contains.

Behmen's language and way of thought are remote and strange, and in reading his thought one has often to pass it through a process of intellectual translation. This is chiefly true of his earlier work, the "Aurora" or "Morning Redness." But among those works which he wrote during the last five years of his life there are some written in a thought-language less difficult to be understood, yet containing the essential teaching of this humble Master of Divine Science. From these I have selected some which may, in a small volume, be useful. It seemed that for this purpose it would be best to take the "Dialogues of the Supersensual Life," including as one of them the beautiful, really separate, Dialogue, called in the Complete Works, "The way from darkness to true illumination." In the case of neither of these works is the translation used that of the seventeenth century. The first three dialogues are a translation made by William Law, one of the greatest masters of the English language, and found in MS. after his death. This translation from the original German is not exactly literal, but rather a liberal version, or paraphrase, the thought of Behmen being expanded and elucidated, though in nowise departed from. The dialogue called "The way from darkness to true illumination" was taken by the eighteenth century editors from a book containing translations of certain smaller treatises of Behmen then lately printed at Bristol and made, as they say, "in a style better adapted to the taste and more accommodated to the apprehension of modern readers." I do not know who was the translator, but the work seems to be excellently well done.

It will be well to say a few words first as to the life, then as to the leading ideas of Jacob Behmen. This name is more correctly written Jacob Böhme, but I prefer to retain the more easily pronounced spelling of Behmen, adopted by the Editors of both the complete English editions.

Jacob Behmen's outward life was simplicity itself. He was born in the year 1575 at Alt Seidenberg, a village among pastoral hills, near Görlitz in Lusatia, a son of poor peasants. As a boy he watched the herds in the fields, and was then apprenticed to a shoemaker, being not enough robust for rural work. One day, when the master and his wife were out, and he was alone in the house, a stranger entered the shop and asked for a pair of shoes. Jacob had no authority to conclude a bargain and asked a high price for the shoes in the hope that the stranger would not buy. But the man paid the price, and when he had gone out into the street, called out "Jacob, come forth." Jacob obeyed the call, and now the stranger looked at him with a kindly, earnest, deep, soul-piercing gaze, and said, "Jacob, thou art as yet but little, but the time will come when thou shalt be great, and become another man, and the world shall marvel at thee. Therefore be pious, fear God, and reverence his Word; especially read diligently the Holy Scriptures, where thou hast comfort and instruction; for thou must endure much misery and poverty, and suffer persecution. But be courageous and persevere, for God loves, and is gracious unto thee." So saying, the stranger clasped his hand, and disappeared.

After this Jacob became even more pensive and serious, and would admonish the other journeymen on the work-bench when they spoke lightly of sacred things. His master disliked this and

dismissed him, saying that he would have no "house-prophet" to bring trouble into his house. Thus Jacob was forced to go forth into the world as a travelling journeyman, and, as he wandered about in that time of fierce religious discord, the world appeared to him to be a "Babel." He was himself afflicted by troubles and doubts, but clave to prayer and to Scripture, and especially to the words in Luke xi.; "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." And once, when he was again engaged for a time by a master, he was lifted into a state of blessed peace, a Sabbath of the Soul, that lasted for seven days, during which he was, as it were, inwardly surrounded by a Divine Light. "The triumph that was then in my soul I can neither tell nor describe. I can only liken it to a resurrection from the dead."

Jacob returned in 1594 to Görlitz, became a master shoemaker in 1599, married a tradesman's daughter, and had four children. In the year 1600 "sitting one day in his room, his eye fell upon a burnished pewter dish which reflected the sunshine with such marvellous splendour that he fell into a deep inward ecstasy and it seemed to him as if he could now look into the principles and deepest foundations of things. He believed that it was only a fancy, and in order to banish it from his mind he went out upon the green. But here he remarked that he gazed into the very heart of things; the very herbs and grass, and that Nature harmonised with what he had inwardly seen. He said nothing about this to any one, but praised and thanked God in silence. He continued in the honest practice of his craft, was attentive to his domestic affairs, and was on terms of goodwill with all men."¹

At the age of thirty-five, in the year 1610, Jacob Behmen suddenly perceived that all which he had seen in a fragmentary way was forming itself into a coherent whole, and felt a "fire-like" impulse, a yearning to write it down, as a "Memorial," not for publication, but lest he should forget it himself. He wrote it early in the morning before work, and late in the evening after work. This was his "Morning Redness" or "Aurora."

A nobleman of the country, called Carl von Endern, happened to see the MS. at the shoemaker's house, was struck by it, and had some copies made. One of these fell into the hands of the Lutheran Clergyman of Görlitz, Pastor Primarius Gregorius Richter, who thenceforth became a bitter opponent of Behmen. He assailed him in sermons, in language of savage invective, as a heretic of the most dangerous kind, until Jacob was summoned before the Magistrates, and forbidden to write anything in future. He was told that as a shoemaker he must confine himself to his own trade. But the affair, as is usually the case, had an effect the reverse of that intended by persecutors. It made him known to various persons more learned than himself who were interested in the subject, and from his converse with them he learned a better style, and some Latin technical terms, which he afterwards found useful for expressing his thoughts.

Jacob obeyed for some years the magisterial command to write nothing, but it was very grievous to him, and he often reflected with dismay on the parable of the talents and how "that one talent which 'tis death to hide" was lodged with him useless. At length he would keep silence no more. He says himself: "I had resolved to do nothing in future, but to be quiet before God in obedience, and to let the devil, with all his host, sweep over me. But it was with me as when a seed is hidden in the earth. It grows up in storm and rough weather against all reason. For in winter time all is dead, and reason says: 'It is all over with it.' But the precious seed within me sprouted and grew green, oblivious of all storms, and, amid disgrace and ridicule, it has blossomed forth into a lily."

Between the year 1619 and his death in 1624, at the age of forty-nine, he poured forth his stored up thoughts, writing a number of Works, including those in the present volume, which were among his very latest. He had the more time to write because his shoemaking business had fallen off, by reason, perhaps, of the question as to his orthodoxy, but some friends supplied him with the

¹ From the Danish Bishop Martensen's book "Jacob Boehme"; an excellent study well translated from Danish into English by Mr T. Rhys Evans, (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1885). An account of Behmen's life is given in the preface to the first volume of the last century English edition of the Works.

necessaries of life. He was now exposed to fresh attacks from Gregorius Richter and was forced this time to go into exile. At this period he went to the Electoral Court at Dresden where the Prince was curious about him, and a conference took place between him and John Gerhard and other eminent theologians. At the close of this Dr Gerhard said: "I would not take the whole world and help to condemn this man." And his colleague Meissner said, "My good brother, neither would I. Who knows what stands behind this man? How can we judge what we have not understood? May God convert this man if he is in error. He is a man of marvellously high mental gifts who at present can neither be condemned nor approved."

Soon afterwards, while Jacob was staying at the house of one of his noble friends in Silesia he fell into a fever. At his own request he was carried back to Görlitz, and there awaited his end. On Sunday, November 21st 1624, in the early hours he called his son Tobias and asked him if he did not hear that sweet melodious music. As Tobias heard nothing, Jacob asked him to set wide the door so that he might the better hear it; then he asked what was the hour, and when he was told that it had just struck two he said, "My time is not yet; three hours hence is my time." After some silence he exclaimed, "Oh thou strong God of Sabaoth, deliver me according to thy Will," and immediately afterwards "Thou Crucified Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon me and take me to thyself into thy Kingdom." At six in the morning he suddenly bade them farewell with a smile, and said, "Now I go hence into Paradise," and yielded up his Spirit.

Frankenberg writes of him: "His bodily appearance was somewhat mean; he was small of stature, had a low forehead but prominent temples, a rather aquiline nose, a scanty beard, grey eyes, sparkling into heavenly blue, a feeble but genial voice. He was modest in his bearing, unassuming in conversation, lowly in conduct, patient in suffering, and gentle-hearted."

As the shoemaker of Görlitz had in his life-time some disciples among highly educated men, so has he always had a few since his departure from this life. Men so diversely situated as the non-juror William Law in England; St Martin, the "philosophe inconnu" of the French Revolution; the sincere Catholic, Franz Baader, in Germany; Martensen, the Protestant Bishop in Denmark, have found in him their Teacher.

The selections contained in the present book belong rather to the practical or ethical side of Jacob Behmen's teaching than to his Cosmogony, or *Vision*, as one may best call it, of the nature of all things. I think that any old cottager, who had read nothing but his Bible, but had lived his life, would well understand the general teaching of most that is contained in these Dialogues, and would find all Behmen's words most beautiful and comforting. It is not, therefore, necessary for the present purpose to attempt fully to set forth the whole Vision of Behmen, nor, in any case would it be within my power to do so. But it may be of service to those readers who are not acquainted with the writings of Behmen or of his disciples, if I here say something as to his general teaching with regard to the nature of the soul of man and its relation to that which is not itself, but like to itself.

The Soul, in the doctrine of Behmen, is a Being which has a will or desire, and is aided by a mirror of understanding or imagination. Will or Desire is of the very essence of the Soul, inseparable from its existence. He says: "Where Desire is there is also Essence or Being." The Soul is subject to the diverse attractions of the Centre of Divine Life and Light, and of the Spirit of the World. Enlightened by its understanding it has the free power to turn its will towards, and unite itself to, this or that. "Choose well, thy choice is brief and yet endless."

The Soul is a magic Fire derived out of, or from, God the Father's Essence, *lumen de lumine*, and imprisoned in darkness. It is an intense and incessant Desire after the Light; it longs to return to the Light-centre, whence it originally came, that is, to the "heart of God." Thus longing, it is a "Fire of Anguish," until it becomes a "Fire of Love." It is a fire of anguish, so long as it is shut up in its dark self. It is a fire of love when it pierces through and escapes from its dark self-prison and burns freely and softly in union with the Divine Love. God then comes as a Light, a soft purifying Fire into the Soul, and changes all the wanting, hungering, empty, restless, self-tormenting properties of

the Natural Life into a sweetness of rest and peace. This is called in Scripture the "new birth." Thus the same thing – the same Fire, – is a cause of torment or of joy according to the conditions under which it is. Man, who is a microcosm of the whole Universe, is a mingling of light and darkness. His anguish comes from his Soul's imprisonment in darkness (as a mere raging fire) and continues until it can break forth and unite itself with *that* whence it came and to which it belongs.

Behmen says "The Eternal Darkness of the Soul is Hell, viz.: an aching source of anguish, which is called the Anger of God, but the Eternal Light in the Soul is the Kingdom of Heaven, where the fiery anguish of darkness is turned into joy. For the *same* nature of anguish, which, in the Darkness, is a cause of sadness, is, in the Light, a cause of the outward and stirring joy... The Fire is painful and consuming, but the Light is yielding, friendly, powerful and delightful, a sweet and amiable Joy."

Pure delight, with no trace of doubt or fear, hope or regret, is the sign of the presence of Love or Light. So again Behmen says: "The Fire in the Light is a fire of Love, but the Fire in the Darkness is a fire of Anguish, and is painful, irksome, and full of contrariety." The end to which all things tend is the final separation of light from darkness; the "last day" means this; but the present world is a perpetual mixture of light and darkness, good and evil, joy and anguish. So, the Cross of Jesus is at once the highest embodiment of Love and Hate.

It is remarkable that in this doctrine of light and darkness Behmen was nearly followed by one who had not, I suppose, ever heard of him, reading as he did little of anything but the Bible, who worked on the Scriptures with his own powerful and earnest insight, the Christian hero, Charles Gordon. In his little book called "Reflections in Palestine" written in that one year, 1883, of unbroken repose from action spent in the Holy Land, just before his final service at Khartoom, Gordon dwells upon the repetition, as he calls it, *both in the individual soul, and in the world's history* of four processes constantly recurring, – a state of darkness, a light breaking forth through darkness, a division of light from darkness or gathering together of light, a re-dispersion of light into darkness, and then a renewal of the four processes, ever upon an ascending level of good, directed towards the final elimination of all light from the darkness.

Fire must have fuel, something on which to feed. It must feed or perish. But the magic Fire-spirit, the Soul, cannot perish because it is an eternal Essence. Therefore it must either feed; or *hunger*. It desires spiritual essence or "virtue" to allay its raging hunger. But, during the space that it is embodied in this nature, it can feed *either* on the Divine Spirit, or upon the Spirit of this World. "Hence," says Behmen, "we may understand the cause of that infinite variety which is in the Wills and Actions of Men." For of whatsoever the Soul eateth, and wherewith its Fire-life becometh kindled; "according to that the Soul's life is led and governed." You become like to that which you eat. If the Soul breaks forth out of its Nature-self and enters into "God's Love-fire," it eats of the Divine Essence (the substance or flesh of Christ) and it is to this that Jesus Christ referred when he spoke of feeding upon his body, and when he spoke of the true bread from heaven "which giveth life to the World" (John vi. 33), of which he that eateth shall "live for ever" (John vi. 58), or the "living water," whereof whosoever drinketh "shall never thirst," but it shall be to him "a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John iv. 13, 14). This feeding is in no way metaphorical but as real and actual as physical feeding.

Behmen says, "The Essence of that Life eateth the Flesh of Christ and drinketh His Blood... Now if the Soul eat of this sweet, holy and heavenly food, then it kindleth itself with the great Love in the name and power of Jesus, whence its fire of anguish becometh a great triumph of joy and glory."²

² It should be noted that Jacob Behmen held strongly to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the actual bread and wine as a "permissive medium" of the real feeding, in order that there may be "a visible sign of what is done in the inward ground." But he says "We should not *depend* on this means or medium *alone*, and think that Christ's Flesh and Blood is *only* and alone participated in this use of bread and wine, as Reason in this present time miserably erreth therein. No, that is not so. Faith, when it hungereth after God's love and grace, always eateth and drinketh of Christ's Flesh and Blood. Christ hath not bound himself to bread and wine *alone*, but hath bound himself to the *faith*, that he will be in men." Works, vol. iv. p. 208. Charles Gordon took the same view of the visible

Behmen held that man lives at once in three worlds, firstly in the outward visible elementary world of space and time (where man "is the Time and in the Time;") secondly, the "Eternal Dark World, Hell, the centre of Eternal Nature, whence is *generated* the Soul-fire, that source of anguish, and thirdly, in the Eternal Light World, Heaven – the Divine habitation." The same processes of feeding and life take place in the three Worlds, so that physical feeding is a kind of outside sheath of spiritual feeding.

If the Soul accustoms itself to feed in this life upon the heavenly food (that *panem de coelo omne delectamentum in se habentem*) it gradually itself becomes of quite heavenly substance, purged from darkness, and, when the natural life falls off at death, stands in heaven, where indeed it already is. But, if the Soul feeds upon the Spirit and Things of this World, then, when by reason of death, it can no longer feed upon them, it is left in the condition of mere "aching Desire," or eternal unsatisfied Hunger, working in a void, in perpetual anguish. Thus Heaven and Hell are not places, but conditions of the Soul. So Milton, who had no doubt studied the translation of Behmen made in his own time, writes:

"The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven."

They are in this life everywhere commingled, but when this life falls away, the Soul remains in that of the two states into which it has in this life brought itself. The Soul, after death, remains *either* as a satisfied Desire, that is, a Desire no longer but a Joy, *or* as an aching Desire. The Persian says: —

Heaven is the vision of fulfilled Desire
And Hell the shadow of a Soul on fire.

Behmen says, Heaven *is* fulfilled desire; Hell *is* a Soul on fire, no mere vision or shadow.

Heaven and Hell are within us, since our souls are portions of the universe of things, in every part of which Heaven and Hell are commingled. The gates of Heaven within us were shut in Adam, but the Power of God, Christ in Jesus, broke open by his passion "the closed gates of Paradise," that is, the gates of our "inward heavenly humanity," and now the wayfarer can, if he will, pass through. We do not spiritually live by a reasoning process, or acceptance of doctrines by the understanding, but by the action of the Desire in feeding upon the Spirit of Love, a process of laying hold, drawing in, and assimilating. True prayer is like feeding, or still more, perhaps, like the unconscious drawing in of the air: it should be as constant. By it is introduced the heavenly life from without to nourish the like heavenly life contained in the seed within. If a man thus rightly feeds, then, in him, the hellish life and passions, portions of the powers of darkness, "our creatures" as Behmen says, will be killed by starvation, wanting their appropriate food. On the other hand, a man can feed these also from without with their appropriate food by misdirected desire, thereby starving the heavenly life in the Soul.

Thus the essence of Behmen's teaching as to the Soul incarnate in Man and revealed by his body, is that it is an eternal Being, and that it is a source of joy or anguish according as it is, or is not, purified or tranquillised by communion with the Centre of Light, or the Fountain of Life. He does not contemplate, as some Eastern teachers perhaps do, the annihilation of the Will of the Soul by a kind of higher spiritual suicide; its existence is to him the very condition of good no less than of evil; he contemplates its liberation from the dark, contracted, self-prison, its purification, and entrance into the full heaven-life. This magical soul-fire, like visible fire, can rage and destroy, or it can serve as the means and ground of all good. Here is the foundation both of good and evil, in man as in all things.

"eating," as being a great assistance to the spiritual feeding, but not indispensable to it. (Gordon's "Letters to his Sister.")

To understand this better, one must consider the cosmic teaching lying behind the rich profusion of images, often inconsistent and clashing, in which Jacob Behmen embodies his Vision.

Man has fallen into Nature. But Nature itself, apart from and unfilled by the Divine Light, is a self-torment, a mere Want, a Desire, a Hunger. The true distinction between God and Nature is that God is an Universal All, while Nature is an Universal Want, viz: to be filled by God. Physical attraction is nothing but the outer sheath of this universal desire. Nature filled by God is Heaven or fulfilled Desire.³ Without God it is Hell, mere Desire. Heaven is the Presence of God: Hell his Absence. It is as true to say that Heaven is in God, as to say that God is in Heaven.

Apart from the existence of God there could be neither Presence nor Absence, neither Heaven nor Hell. If the Soul of Man were wholly divided and separated from the Divine Life, it would, as a part of Nature, be a mere hungering, restless, conscious Desire. In so far as it is so separated it partakes of this pain. For "through all the Universe of Things nothing is uneasy, unsatisfied, or restless, but because it is not governed by Love, or because its Nature has not reached or attained the full birth of the Spirit of Love. For when that is done, every hunger is satisfied, and all complaining, murmuring, accusing, resenting, revenging and striving are as totally suppressed and overcome as coldness, thickness and horror of darkness are suppressed and overcome by the breaking forth of the light. If you ask why the Spirit of Love cannot be displeased, cannot be disappointed, cannot complain, accuse, resent or murmur, it is because the Spirit of Love desires nothing but itself, it is its own Good, for Love is God, and he that dwelleth in God dwelleth in Love."⁴

Behmen's idea of the "fallen Angels" is that they are entirely and hopelessly divided from the Life of God. They are mere embodied, hopeless, self-tormenting Desires. They have fallen into the hell within themselves, they *cannot but* be hating, bitter, envious, proud, wrathful, restless; and therefore tormentors of others. They have lost that which man, however far astray, always possesses, the faculty of return or regeneration through submission to and union with God. The spark of the Life and Spirit of God which is in Men is not in the fallen Angels. Let us hope that Beings so utterly lost do not exist.

God is outside of Nature and yet in a sense inside also, because there is a divine life or virtue in Nature which, longing to re-unite itself with its source, is a cause of anguish while divided, and of joy when united. So, in the outer world, the seed buried in earth contains a power kindred to the virtue of the sun. It is this which breaks forth from the seed, forces itself up through the dark, imprisoning, and yet nourishing and necessary earth, and at last, if it can win its way through obstacles, cheerfully expands in the light of the sun and feeds upon his warmth. That, in man's inner nature, which answers to this power or life in the seed, is called by Behmen the Life or Spirit of Jesus Christ. Egoism or *Ihood*, the old contracting, narrowing cell, is destroyed as this expansive and expanding force grows and breaks forth. Behmen says: "As the Sun in the visible world ruleth over Evil and Good, and, with its light and power, and all whatsoever itself is, is present everywhere, and penetrates into every Being, and wholly giveth itself to every Being, and yet ever remaineth whole, and nothing of its being goeth away therewith. Thus also it is to be understood concerning Christ's person and office which ruleth in the inward spiritual world, and penetrateth into the faithful man's soul, spirit and heart. As the Sun worketh through a herb, so that the herb becometh filled with the virtue of the Sun, and, as it were, so converted by the Sun that it becometh wholly of the nature of the Sun, so Christ ruleth in the resigned will or Soul and Body, over all evil inclinations and generateth the man to be a new heavenly creature." The same teaching is finely set forth in a passage of William Law.⁵ He says:

"Man has a spark of the Light and Spirit of God, as a supernatural gift of God given into the birth of his Soul to bring forth by degrees a new birth of that life which was lost in Paradise. This holy

³ Dante's "ricchezza senza brama."

⁴ Law's Works, vol. viii., p. 177.

⁵ Works, vol. vii., p. 65, ed. 1765.

spark of the Divine Nature within him has a natural, strong, and almost infinite tendency or reaching after that eternal Light and Spirit of God, from whence it came forth. It came forth from God, it came *out* of God, it partaketh of the Divine Nature, and therefore it is always in a state of tendency and return to God. All this is called the breathing, the moving, the quickening of the Holy Spirit within us, which are so many operations of this spark of life tending towards God. On the other hand the Deity as considered in itself, and without the Soul of man, has an infinite unchangeable tendency of love and desire towards the Soul of man, to unite and communicate its own riches and glories to it, just as the Spirit of the air *without* Man unites and communicates its riches and virtues to the Spirit of the air that is *within* Man. This love or desire of God toward the soul of Man is so great that he gave his only-begotten Son, the brightness of his glory, to take the human nature upon him, in its fallen state, that by this mysterious union of God and Man, all the enemies of the Soul of Man might be overcome, and every human creature might have a power of being born again according to that Image of God in which he was first created. The gospel is the history of this Love of God to Man. *Inwardly* he has a seed of the Divine Life given into the birth of his Soul, a seed that has all the riches of eternity in it, and is always wanting to come to the birth in him, and be alive in God. *Outwardly* he has Jesus Christ, who as a Sun of Righteousness, is always casting forth his enlivening beams on this inward seed, to kindle and call it forth to the birth, doing that to this Seed of Heaven in Man, which the sun in the firmament is always doing to the vegetable seeds in the earth.

"Consider this matter in the following similitude. A grain of wheat has the air and light of this world enclosed or incorporated in it. This is the mystery of its life, this is its power of growing, by this it has a strong continual tendency of uniting again with that ocean of light and air from whence it came forth. On the other hand that great ocean of light and air, having its own offspring hidden in the heart of the grain has a perpetual strong tendency to unite and communicate with it again. From this *desire of union on both sides*, the vegetable life arises and all the virtues and powers contained in it. But let it be well observed that this desire on both sides cannot have its effect till the husk and gross part of the grain falls into a state of corruption and death; till this begins, the mystery of life hidden in it cannot come forth."

The sun only acts by stirring up in each thing, and calling into activity, its own imprisoned, dormant, heat or life. Save by the same nature-process, working in an inner sphere, there cannot come to pass the flower and fruit of the Soul. The Sun, true emblem of the Redeeming Spirit, helps each vital force to break forth from its state of death – even though, like the grains of wheat found in Egyptian graves and then new-planted, it has[Pg xxviii] been immured there thousands of years – and to enter into its highest possible state of life. Indeed, in this school of wisdom, the natural visible light, of which the Sun is the dispensing medium to our solar system, and other suns to other circles of planets, is actually an outer manifestation of the inner supernatural light, and warmth, not a mere emblem at all. We speak more truly than we know, when we speak of a "heavenly day." All Nature is a series of "out-births" of the Deity. "The outward world," says Behmen, "is sprung out of the inward spiritual world, viz., out of Light and Darkness." And his English interpreter says: "Whatever is delightful and ravishing, sublime and glorious in spirits, minds, or bodies, either in heaven, or on earth, is from the power of the Supernatural Light opening its endless wonders in them. Hell has no misery, horror or distraction, but because it has no communication with the supernatural Light. And did not the supernatural Light stream forth its blessings into this world, through the materiality of the Sun, all outward Nature would be full of the horror of Hell." And elsewhere, "There is no meekness, benevolence or goodness in Angel, Man, *or any other Creature*, but where Light is the Lord of its life. Life itself begins no sooner, rises no higher, has no other glory, than as the Light begins it, and leads it on. Sounds have no softness, flowers and germs no sweetness, plants and fruits have no growth, but as the Mystery of Light opens itself in them."⁶ And so Behmen himself says: "There is nothing that is

⁶ Law's Works, vol. viii., p. 189.

created or born in Nature but it also manifests its internal form externally; for the internal continually labours or works itself forth to manifestation. We know in the power and form of this World, how the only Essence has manifested itself with the external birth in the desire of the similitude; how it has manifested itself in so many forms and shapes, which we see and know in the stars and elements, likewise in the living creatures, and also in the trees and herbs." Thus there is a real communion between all beauty, sweetness, and glory, within and without the Soul of man.

It is this truth, not of the analogy between the essential life of Man and Nature, but of the unity in all things, that is now opening itself out in many ways. Wordsworth, a true seer, has given to it its highest expression in English Poetry. Modern science all tends to confirmation of this unity.

God, then, must become Man, there must be a birth of the Life of God in the Soul, in order that the Soul may live its highest life. Only in this way can the wild properties of Nature be subordinated and turned to their proper use, their restless hunger pacified. Goodness and happiness can be expected from nothing else but from the Divine Life united to and dwelling in the Nature Life. It is the "ingrafted Word" of St James' Epistle.

The plant cannot but grow towards the sun. If it is too deep in earth, or prevented by a strong soil, or withered by dryness, so that it cannot attain to its end, the fault is not with it. But, in the spiritual inner world (in which the plant dwells not) the Soul of man has this freedom – that it can consciously turn towards God, whose Spirit and Life will then come forth to meet it, or can turn towards the Things of this World. Upon this freedom of choice is founded Behmen's moral teaching. The Soul is like a woman (and all nations have testified in their languages and parables to their sense of this) who can freely choose to submit and surrender her body to this Lover, or to that. When she has chosen her free power ends. As she has chosen, so her life-faculty will be fertilised by good or evil; so will be the new life that arises within her, and so will be her future joy or sorrow.

In a deep sense, the desire of the spark of Life in the Soul to return to its Original Source is part of the longing desire of the universal Life for its own heart or centre. Of this longing the universal attraction, striving against resistance, towards an universal centre, proved to govern the phenomenal or physical world, is but the outer sheath and visible working. It has been said that Sir Isaac Newton (who was a diligent reader of Behmen's Works) "ploughed with Jacob Behmen's heifer." There is in truth but one Religion, that founded upon the eternal, immutable, universal processes of the actual Nature of things, and of this Christianity, rightly apprehended, is the supreme Revelation. This will be seen better by all as the Religion unfolds itself. Rightly speaking there is no such thing as *supernatural* religion; there is but one Religion, that of Nature. It is the work of visible religion to teach by signs and parables, embodying the mystery in symbols, and clothing it with adoration.

Jacob Behmen's mode of expression is all his own, and there is much in the fabric of his thought which men of our time, if they take a superficial view, would not find it easy to accept. The doctrine of Evolution now profoundly influences every corner of the field of thought. We now incline to think rather of the rise of Man out of Nature than of his fall into it, though, perhaps, there can no more be a rise without a precedent fall, than there can be a return without a precedent out-going. Evolution may be the time-form of Attraction. But all this affects the outside form, not the essence of the doctrine. Behmen is concerned with the real nature of things, apart from time and space, with their apparent, but so misleading, facts. He appeals to each Soul's knowledge of itself, and, on the principle that *all is in everything*, draws from the nature of Man, that little Universe (and we can no otherwise learn things as they are in themselves), his teaching as to Universal Nature. "In Man (he says) lies all whatsoever the Sun shines upon, or Heaven contains, as also Hell and all the Deeps." His Iliad is the struggle between light and darkness, life and death, expansion and contraction, the centripetal and centrifugal force, heat and cold, love and hatred, peace and wrath, humility and pride, self-sacrifice and self-seeking, joy and anguish, repose and restlessness, in the whole of Nature and in the Soul of Man. Does not every man, who has lived his full life, know the truth and reality of all this? It is known more especially and actually by those ardent and adventurous spirits who have sailed in far seas of

thought or action, not merely coasting along the shores of tradition, authority and established rule. Sinners know some things more vividly[Pg xxxiii] than those who ever and easily have been good. Only the man who has been sick knows the difference between sickness and health. The prodigal who had wandered in a far country and had lived as he would, understood the meaning of peace and love better than the brother who had always stayed at home.

These wanderers, if they return in time, know best, taught by the heart-rending lessons of experience, the difference between the Heaven and Hell within them; the Hell of wrath, self-torment, fear, anxiety, envy, malice, evil-will, pride, cruelty, sensual passion, longing to domineer, and the Heaven of love, benevolence, meekness, humility, compassion, peace, joy, long-suffering.

They know that Heaven and Hell can alike be revealed in the Soul. From youth they have felt something in them striving, often feebly enough, against passionate desires for wealth, honour, success, and for mastery over the minds, affections, and bodies of others. Behind all this turmoil and ever unsatisfied anguish of seeking that which satisfies not, they have been aware of a diviner life slowly growing towards heaven, ever and again thwarted and driven back by the renewed assaults of the Spirit of the World, yet never quite destroyed. At the moments of fiercest fight against rebel passions they have felt the divine assisting strength flow into them, if only they powerfully invoked it, turning towards its source as a babe towards its mother's breast. They have heard the "Peace be still" amid the wildest spiritual storms. They know that if they have been saved, it is not by their own strength nor by reasoning, but by this power from without.

They know the impotence, in action, of the merely reflective or spectator faculty. In this sense of the word "reason," they would agree with him who wrote "Your Heart is the best and greatest gift of God to you; it is the highest, greatest, strongest, and noblest Power of your Nature; it forms your whole Life, be it what it will; all Evil and all Good comes from it; your Heart alone has the key of Life and Death; it does all that it will; Reason is but its plaything; and whether in Time or Eternity, can only be a mere Beholder of the wonders of happiness, or forms of misery, which the right or wrong working of the Heart is entered into."⁷

William Law remarks that Jesus Christ, though he had all wisdom, yet gives but a small number of doctrines to mankind "whilst every moral teacher writes volumes upon every single virtue." It is, he adds, because our Lord "knew what they know not, that our whole malady lies in this, that the Will of our Mind is turned into this World, and that nothing can relieve us, or set us right, but the *turning* of the Will of our Mind and the Desire of our Hearts to God. And hence it is that he calls us to nothing but a total denial of ourselves and the Life of this World and to faith in him as the Worker of a new birth and life in us." On this one root of the whole matter Jacob Behmen insisted, expressing one truth in a thousand ways and through images, which to him are not images but the same process working in other spheres. His whole practical, moral teaching enforces the right direction of Desire. *Mali mores sunt mali amores*, said one who also truly *saw*; the profound Augustine. The hunger of the Soul must be turned to the source of eternal joy. All that is good and beautiful in nature or in the heart of man flows from that fountain. Desire *is* everything in Nature; *does* everything. Heaven is Nature filled with divine Life attracted by Desire.

⁷ Law's Works, vol. vii., p. 162.

PRELIMINARY NOTE

Before entering upon the Dialogues I have thought it well to insert some sentences taken from a treatise of Behmen's called "Regeneration," together with some taken from another treatise of his on "Christ's Testament" because they show well the spirit in which he thought and wrote. The freedom of thought and expression which he claims is, happily, far more readily accorded now than it was in his own day.

I have only one thing to add. In the eighteenth century English translation of Behmen's Works, all the substantives, as was then the frequent custom, are printed with capital letters. There is a philosophic basis for this practice, because a substantive is an attempt to denote a "thing in itself" and is therefore of greater weight than an adjective, which only expresses qualities which we attribute to it. To Behmen's Works this mode of printing seems especially appropriate. In our now too literary language, many words have become so trite and carelessly [Pg xxxviii] used that they have almost ceased to have reference to real existing things. But Behmen never uses words in this merely literary way, being indeed in nowise a man of letters. It might have been said of him, as indeed his enemies did at the time say, that which was said by the Jews of our Lord, "How knoweth this man letters having never learned?" When he speaks of the "*glory*" of God, he means something as real as if he spoke of the "*leaves* on that tree," and so with all his words. I was therefore somewhat inclined, in order to mark this, to adhere altogether to the old custom in this case, and though I have not done so, fearing it might annoy the eye of the unaccustomed reader, I have preserved the capital letters in many cases, where it is especially desirable to dwell on the expression of real existences by the words. It is of course an illogical compromise between two customs.

The title "Supersensual Life" is not altogether a good one, but it is that which is used in former editions of Behmen. The idea is rather of Life behind, than above, the life of sense.

Sentences Selected from Jacob Behmen's Treatises "Regeneration" and "Christ's Testaments"

1

A true Christian, who is born anew of the Spirit of Christ, is in the simplicity of Christ, and hath no strife or contention with any man about religion.

2

The Christendom that is in Babel striveth about the manner how men ought to serve God and glorify him; also, how they are to know him, and what he is in his Essence and Will. And they preach positively that whosoever is not one and the same with them in every particular of knowledge and opinion, is no Christian, but a heretic.

3

But a Christian is of no sect. He can dwell in the midst of sects, and appear in their services, without being attached or bound to any. He hath but one knowledge, and that is, Christ in him. He seeketh but one way, which is the desire always to do and teach that which is right; and he putteth all

his knowing and willing into the Life of Christ. He sigheth and wisheth continually that the Will of God might be done in him, and that his Kingdom might be manifested in him. His faith is a desire after God and Goodness, which he wrappeth up in a sure hope, trusting to the words of the promise, and liveth and dieth therein; though as to the *true man*, he never dieth.

4

For Christ saith: *Whosoever believeth in me shall never die, but hath pierced through from death to life; and, Rivers of living water shall flow from him, viz. good doctrine and works.*

5

Therefore I say that whosoever fighteth and contendeth about the Letter, is all Babel. The Letters of the Word proceed from, and stand all in, one Root, which is the Spirit of God; as the various flowers stand all in the earth, and grow about one another. They fight not with each other about their difference of colour, smell, and taste, but suffer the earth, the sun, the rain, the wind, the heat, and cold, to do with them as they please; and yet every one of them groweth in its own peculiar essence and property.

6

Even so it is with the Children of God; they have various gifts and degrees of knowledge, yet all form one Spirit. They all rejoice at the great Wonders of God, and give thanks to the Most High in his Wisdom. Why then should they contend about him in *Whom they live and have their being*, and of whose substance they themselves are?

7

It is the greatest folly that is in Babel for people to strive about religion, so that they contend vehemently about opinions of their own forging, viz. about the Letter. When the Kingdom of God consisteth of no Opinion, but in Power and Love.

8

As Christ said to his disciples, and left it with them at the last, saying: *Love one another as I have loved you: for thereby men shall know that ye are My disciples.* If men would as fervently seek after love and righteousness as they do after opinions, there would be no strife on earth, and we should be as children of one father, and should need no law or ordinance. For God is not served by any law, but only by obedience. Laws are for the wicked, who will not enhance love and righteousness; they are, and must be, compelled by laws.

9

We all have but one Order, Law, or Ordinance, which is to stand still to the Lord of all Beings, and resign our wills up to him, and suffer his Spirit to play what music he will. And thus we give to him again as his own fruits that which he worketh and manifesteth in us.

10

Now if we did not contend about our different fruits, gifts, kinds, and degrees of knowledge, but did acknowledge them in one another, like Children of the Spirit of God, what could condemn us? For the Kingdom of God consisteth not in our knowing and supposing, but in Power.

11

If we did not know half so much, and were more like children, and had but a brotherly mind and goodwill towards one another, and lived like children of one mother, and as branches of one tree, taking our Sap all from one Root, we should be far more holy than we are.

12

Knowledge serves only to this end, viz., to know that we have lost the Divine Power in Adam, and are now become inclined to sin; that we have evil properties in us, and that doing evil pleaseth not God; so that with our knowledge we learn to do right. Now if we have the Power of God in us, and desire with all our hearts to act and to live aright, then our knowledge is but our sport, or matter of pleasure, wherein we rejoice.

13

For true knowledge is the manifestation of the Spirit of God through the Eternal Wisdom. He knoweth what he will in his children; he sheweth his wisdom and wonders by his children, as the earth putteth forth her various flowers.

14

Now if we dwell with one another, like humble children, in the Spirit of Christ, are rejoicing at the gift or knowledge of another, who would judge or condemn us? Who judgeth or condemneth the birds in the woods that praise the Lord of all Beings with various voices, every one in its own essence? Doth the Spirit of God reprove them for not bringing their voices into one harmony? Doth not the melody of them all proceed from his Power, and do they not sport before him?

15

Those men therefore that strive and wrangle about the knowledge and will of God, and despise one another on that account, are more foolish than the birds in the woods, and the wild beasts that have no true understanding. They are more unprofitable in the sight of the holy God than the flowers of the field, which stand still in quiet submission to the Spirit of God, and suffer him to manifest the Divine Wisdom and Power through them.

16

All Christian Religion consisteth wholly on this, to learn *to know ourselves*; whence we came, and what we are; how we are gone forth from the Unity into dissension, wickedness, and

unrighteousness; how we have awakened and stirred up these evils in us; and how we may be delivered from them again, and recover our original blessedness.

17

First; How we were in the Unity, when we were the Children of God in Adam before he fell. *Secondly*; How we are now in dissension and disunion, in strife and contrariety. *Thirdly*; Whither we go when we pass out of this corruptible condition; whither with the unnatural, and whither with the natural part. And *lastly*; How we came forth from disunion and vanity, and enter into that one Tree, Christ in us, out of which we all sprung in Adam. In these four points all the necessary knowledge of a Christian consisteth.

18

So that we need not strive about any thing; we have no cause of contention with each other. Let every one only exercise himself in learning how he may enter again into the Love of God and his Brother.

19

The written Word is but an instrument whereby the Spirit leadeth us to itself within us. That Word which will teach must be living in the literal Word. The Spirit of God must be in the literal sound, or else none is a Teacher of God, but a mere Teacher of the Letter, a knower of the history, and not of the Spirit of God in Christ.

20

All that men will serve God with must be done in Faith, viz. in the Spirit. It is the Spirit that maketh the work perfect, and acceptable in the sight of God. All that a man undertaketh and doeth in Faith, he doth in the Spirit of God, which Spirit of God doth co-operate in the work, and then it is acceptable to God. For he hath done it himself, and his Power and Virtue is in it. It is holy.

21

Strife and misunderstanding concerning Christ's Person, Office, and Being, or Substance, as also concerning his Testaments which he left behind him, wherein he worketh at present, ariseth from the deflected creaturely Reason, which runneth on only in an Image-like opinion, and reacheth not the ground of this mystery, and yet will be a mistress of all things or beings, and will judge all things. It doth but lose itself in such Image-likeness, and breaketh itself off from its Centre, and disperseth the thoughts, and runneth on in the multiplicity, whereby its ground is confused and the mind is disquieted, and knoweth not itself.

22

No Life can stand in certainty, except it continue in its Centre, out of which it is sprung.

23

When the Soul that is sprung from God's Word and Will is entered into its own desire to will of itself, it will run in mere uncertainty till it return to its Original again.

24

Seeing that human life is an outflowing of the Divine Power, Understanding and Skill, the same ought to continue in its Original, or else it loseth the Divine Knowledge, Power and Skill, and with self-speculation bringeth itself into centres of its own, and strange imaging, wherewith its Original becometh darkened and strange.

Therefore say I, that this is the only cause that men dispute about God, his Word, Essence or Being, and Will, that the understanding of man hath broken itself off from its Original, and now runneth on in mere self-will, thoughts and images in its own lust to selfishness, wherein there is no true knowledge, nor can be, till the Life returneth to its Original, viz. into the Divine Outflowing and Will.

25

If this be done, then God's Will speaketh forth the Divine Power and Wonders again through the human willing. In which Divine Speaking, the Life may know and comprehend God's Will, and frame itself therein. Then there is true Divine Knowledge and Understanding in man's skill, when his skill is continually renewed with Divine Power.

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