

## TEMPTATION AS A FACTOR IN THE HIGHER LIFE

In the “Prolog in Heaven,” which precedes *Faust*, Goethe shows the inner purpose of temptation. When Lucifer asks permission to tempt Faust, God responds:

*... Man is aye too prone to shirk,  
Undisturbed, at rest he fain would live,  
Hence this companion purposely I give,  
Who stirs, excites and must as devil work.*

In the Book of Job also God sanctions temptation of a good man. When we compare the Bible story where Jehovah moved David to number the people (2 Sam. 24:1), with I Chronicles 21:1, which says that Satan provoked David to number the people, we cannot escape the contusion that Jehovah and Satan are identical, and from the ordinary point of view it seems exceedingly unjust that such severe punishment is dealt David for this act by the very one who had moved him. But when viewed from the esoteric viewpoint, all difficulties disappear.

Jehovah was the divine leader of the Original Semites, the forebears of the Aryan race, who were destined to evolve reason, the faculty whereby we “prove all things,” that we may “hold fast that which is good.” David had been told to trust Jehovah, who fought for Israel against other people when they obeyed his behests. There is only one way to try if he, or any other person will hold fast the good—by giving them a chance to let go; and it is the duty of the Teachers in Life’s School to ascertain by temptation whether we have learned our lessons, as it is the duty of teachers in ordinary schools to examine their pupils. Each method brings out weak points in the pupil to give the teacher a true basis for future educational efforts. David was therefore moved by Jehovah to number Israel that it might appear whether he put his trust in the number of men in his fighting force or in the unseen Jehovah, who fought for His chosen people. By this act Jehovah became momentarily the adversary (Sathanas) of David.

Regardless of whether this tempter appeared in bodily form, or as an inner voice, David’s reason ought to have told him that the mighty arm of Jehovah counted for more than millions of men, and he should have said to himself, or to his outward tempter, What is the use of numbering Israel? Jehovah is our shield! Instead, he sent men to number Israel as suggested; he was, no doubt, puffed up with a sense of his power; perhaps he may have even felt able to dispense with Jehovah and follow his own dictates.

Therefore, it became necessary for the divine Leader to prove him mistaken before all the people, and as they were a stubborn race, prone to digress, the lesson must be salutary to prevent them from emulating the example of their leader. Pestilence diminished their number in a few days to such an extent that it was evident to all that Jehovah is stronger than any number of men. Thus, the faith and obedience, without which no divine leader can foster new faculties in his charges, was strengthened, and Israel had taken a distinct step on the path of progress.

Everyone who has ever put on the garment of flesh has been tempted; not even Christ escaped, and the more evolved we are, the more subtle the temptations put in our path. Further, these temptations frequently come through one in whom we have full confidence, in order that we may learn to discriminate as to the intrinsic merit of any proposition, regardless of our sympathy or antipathy for whoever submits the proposition.