

## THE LAMB

By William Blake

Study Material for 2<sup>nd</sup> semester English (Compulsory Course)

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William Blake (1757-1827) was an English poet, painter, and printmaker. Although largely neglected during his lifetime, he is now considered a leading figure in the history of the poetry and visual arts of the Romantic Age. His collection of illustrated poems "Songs of Innocence and Experience" (1789) juxtaposes the innocent, pastoral world of childhood against an adult world of corruption and repression. The collection as a whole explores the value and limitations of two different perspectives. Many of the poems fall into pairs, so that the same situation is seen through the perspectives of innocence first and then experience.

**The Lamb** which was published in "Songs of Innocence" is a counterpart to Blake's poem **The Tyger** in the "Songs of Experience". Like many of Blake's works, the poem has Christian connotations. The lamb is a common metaphor for Jesus Christ who is also called "the Lamb of God". It is a hymn to God, praising His creation. The poem has two stanzas, each containing five rhymed couplets. Repetition of the first and last couplet gives the poem a song like quality.

The poem begins with the question "little Lamb who made thee". The speaker is a child who innocently asks the lamb if he knows who has created him. The child wants to know who gave him life, who fed him while living along the river and over the meadow. The child also wants to know from the lamb that who provided him with his delightful clothing which is soft and woolly. The child further wants to know who gave the lamb its tender voice which makes the surrounding valleys rejoice in happiness. The speaker is clearly awed by the lamb and its existence which is a clear proof of the beauty of God's existence. In the first stanza the poet depicts an idyllic pastoral scene where the lamb has unlimited freedom and joy.

While the first stanza asks about the lamb's existence, the second stanza provides the answer. Here there is an amalgamation of the symbols of the

lamb, the child and Jesus Christ. There is complete identification. Christ has another name, that is, lamb, because Christ too is meek and mild like the lamb. Christ was also a child when he first appeared on this earth as the son of God. The child, the lamb and the Christ all represent the creative being.

The first stanza is thus descriptive and pastoral, but the second concentrates on analogy and explanation and deals with spiritual matters. The question of the child is both profound and naïve and discloses his faith in his simple Christian faith and his innocent acceptance of its teachings. *The Lamb* is the most representative of the poems of "Songs of Innocence". The child is a symbol of innocence, the state of the soul which has not yet been corrupted by experience. The lamb itself is an emblem of purity and innocence and represents the mild and meek side of Christ. Thus this seemingly simple poem subtly approaches the subject of creativity and the creator.