

The Lamb

BY WILLIAM BLAKE

Little Lamb who made thee

Dost thou know who made thee

Gave thee life & bid thee feed.

By the stream & o'er the mead;

Gave thee clothing of delight,

Softest clothing wooly bright;

Gave thee such a tender voice,

Making all the vales rejoice!

Little Lamb who made thee

Dost thou know who made thee

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,

Little Lamb I'll tell thee!

He is called by thy name,

For he calls himself a Lamb:

He is meek & he is mild,

He became a little child:

I a child & thou a lamb,

We are called by his name.

Little Lamb God bless thee.

Little Lamb God bless thee.

The Lamb

William Blake

The speaker directly addresses a lamb, asking it if it knows who created it, who gave it life and invited it to eat. The lamb is then described in its natural environment, frolicking beside streams and running through fields. Whoever made the lamb also gave it its coat, which is made out of soft white wool. The lamb's gentle noises, according to the speaker, make the surrounding valleys happy. The speaker then asks again: Who made the lamb?

In the second stanza, the speaker excitedly offers to tell the lamb the answer. The creator has the same name as the lamb, and indeed calls himself "Lamb." This creator is gentle and kind, and he was once a small child. The speaker, too, is a child, and both the speaker and the lamb share the name of their creator. The speaker then asks God twice to bless the lamb.

THEME OF THE POEM

- a. **God and Creation:** The Lamb" is a religious poem that marvels at the wonders of God's creation. In the poem, a child addresses a lamb, wondering how it came to exist, before affirming that all existence comes from God. In the humble, gentle figure of the lamb, the speaker sees the beautiful evidence of God's work. Furthermore, the lamb is not just made by God—it's an expression of God, as is the speaker. Through the example of the lamb, the speaker suggests that the entire world is in fact an expression of God.

The poem is directly addressed to the lamb. Though the lamb of course cannot respond, its very existence is answer enough to the question of "who made" it. The speaker is clearly awed by the lamb. Though the Christian God is often associated with power and might—and even, at times, violence—the lamb is none of these things. It is small, fragile, and

innocent. By existing, it proves the delicate beauty of God's creation, which is why it makes the speaker so joyful.

The poem rhetorically asks, "who made thee," but everything that follows is presented as evidence that God is the maker. The first stanza depicts the lamb in its natural habitat, a beautiful pastoral scene in which the lamb is free to run around. All that the lamb needs is provided for it, making the lamb a symbol of freedom and uncomplicated joy. This, argues the poem, is God's intention for all His creatures: that they live happy, joyful lives.

As the first stanza asks the question about the lamb's existence, the second gives the clear reply. Here, the poem picks up on the symbolism of the lamb. In John 1:29 in the Bible, Jesus Christ is given the title "Lamb of God." So the poem is not just marveling at the lamb itself, but also at the way in which the lamb is God, just as the Bible describes Jesus himself to be God. Both the lamb and the speaker, who is a child, are "called by his name." That is, in addition to being called "lamb" and whatever the speaker's name may be, they are both also called "God." That's because, ultimately, everything that exists was created by God and nothing is separate from its creator. The poem thus expresses deep trust and faith in God's work, suggesting that both the child and the lamb are safe in God's hands. And to emphasize this sense of blissful comfort, the poem ends with the speaker blessing the lamb. By extension, the poem thus blesses all of God's creation, both praising it and expressing thanks for its existence.

"The Lamb," taken from the "Innocence" section of Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience, is a kind of hymn to God's creation. In the figure of the lamb, the poem sees a symbol for all of God's works. The poem is an expression of the purity of God's creation, untarnished by the kind of negative influences that Blake introduces in other poems.

- b. Nature:** The poem presents an idyllic pastoral scene, painting a vivid picture of the lamb frolicking in its countryside environment. The urban world is notable for its absence. Implicitly, then, the poem seeks to highlight the beauty of nature and to portray it as a powerful source of happiness and freedom. The lamb itself is one part of nature, but it's also a symbol of the freedom and happiness associated with the natural world more generally, which the poem implies can't be found in the modern urban environment. The first stanza expresses this deep connection between nature and joy. The lamb lives among streams and meadows. These are places where nature is allowed to grow, and they in turn give the lamb a beautiful and free environment to live in. That's why the lamb's coat isn't just "clothing," but "clothing of delight." Nature allows the lamb to be fully itself, without restriction. That idea is also behind the association of the lamb's coat with "brightness"—this is a positive environment without any of the misery of the city (the kind that can be found in Blake's famous poem "London"). The lamb in turn has a positive effect on its natural environment—its "tender voice" makes the "vales" (valleys) "rejoice." The lamb and nature, then, are in symbiosis—a balanced and nurturing relationship that benefits them both. This balance, in turn, makes the speaker happy and joyful. In the lamb's freedom and nature's beauty, the child speaker sees an idyllic way of life. The child feels close to the lamb and its environment, implying that this is an instinctive relationship between humans and nature too. That is, it's the natural world that makes people joyful and free—not the restrictive, dangerous city. Implicitly, then, the poem calls on its readers to value the relationship between humanity and nature. It asks its readers to nourish and nurture that relationship in the same way that the unspoiled natural environment allows the lamb to live happily.
- c. Childhood and Innocence:** Blake famously believed that humans are born with everything they need to live lives of joy, freedom, and closeness with God. By making the speaker in this poem a child, Blake argues that people need to hold onto the values childhood represents—

not unlearn and reject them through the fears and worries of adulthood. All of the poem's joyful appreciation of the lamb, nature, and God is tied to the speaker's childhood perspective. Childhood, then, is not a state of ignorance, but one of innate understanding.

In the first stanza, the child worships the lamb. The child feels drawn to the small creature, perhaps sensing in the lamb a kind of symbol of himself: innocent, vulnerable, and joyful. The child's ability to appreciate and understand the lamb brings up the question of whether this is something that adults can do in the same way. Adulthood, with all its troubles, can keep people from appreciating the world. In contrast, the child speaker hasn't yet had to encounter the perils of the adult world and is therefore able to look at the "little lamb" in this uncomplicated light. But Blake suggests that this is not a naïve perspective. Rather, it's a kind of enlightenment. The second stanza makes this point clearer.

Though the child expresses wonder at the lamb's existence, the child is nonetheless able to intuitively understand "who made" the lamb. That is, the child instinctively understands that the lamb is an expression of God's design—and that the child, too, is a part of this design. The child refers to Jesus, pointing out that he—the savior of humankind—was also born into the world with all the innocence, vulnerability, and curiosity of a child. Jesus was God himself, showing that childhood is, in fact, something sacred. To underline this link between the lamb, the child, and God, the speaker states that "we are called by his name." That is, they are unified because they are all a part of God.

Childhood, then, is not presented as something to grow out of in the way that people often think of it now. Instead, it is an enlightened way of seeing the world that the poem implores its readers to retain—in doing so, it argues, they will see the joy and beauty that surround them.