

What is the Work of Theosophists?

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You may well ask me this question: am I proclaiming some new religion, some new gospel of salvation ? Today in country after country , you will find reformers, some to reform social injustices, some to bring about changes in the economic life of the world, some to abolish war, and so on, working for one reform after another. There are not many working to reform religion; it is almost as if people were becoming convinced that religion cannot help to abolish the material and moral evils from which the world is suffering. Seeing that there are so many organizations working for various excellent objects, what do the Theosophists propose to do ? [Page 2]

UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD

To answer you very briefly: Theosophists are working to establish in the world an era of Universal Brotherhood. The phrase "Universal Brotherhood," means that all men, of every race, of the East or of the West, of every stage in culture, from that of the savage to the highly civilized, in all grades of life, whether rich or poor, educated or ignorant, good citizen or criminal, all these are brothers, Universal Brotherhood implies that not only are all men brothers fundamentally, but also that all our sufferings, both of the individual and of the world, are due to our ignoring this fact of our common unity.

There are thousands who accept Universal Brotherhood as a noble ideal; no one will challenge the principle that it must be the ultimate aim of civilization. It is implied in the word Democracy; it is clearly manifested in the motto of the Republic of France: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. The idea is not new. [Page 3] There are many who are working for it in every land. Theosophists are not the only people who are working for Universal Brotherhood. But the Theosophists are working for Universal Brotherhood in a special manner. It is the way of our working, the ideas which inspire us as we work, which are worth your attention.

The principal idea in Theosophy about man is that he is immortal. In other words, man is not the body which perishes at death; he is a consciousness which survives the death of the body. The body is his garment; but discarding the body at death makes no more change in his consciousness or in his memories than there is any change in me when I put off these clothes which I now wear when I get ready for sleeping. Just as clothes are not the individual, so the body is not he. But as my clothes are mine to wear for certain social conveniences, so my body is mine, to be used by me for a certain work in life.

Man is therefore a spirit, a soul; we can call him by what term we will, provided we realize [Page 4] this deathless nature. This spiritual nature in him is the same spiritual nature which exists in all other men. All men are immortal souls. It is because of that fact that there is Universal Brotherhood. We all know that there is a kind of Brotherhood, because the blood in all men has the same colour and composition, and

because all are subject to the same laws of nutrition, growth, disease and death. It is a brotherhood of decay and dissolution. But the Universal Brotherhood of the Theosophists is a spiritual brotherhood, a brotherhood of life and co-operation.

REAL CIVILIZATION

Since all men are immortal souls, what they are in their physical bodies is of little importance. One child may be born into a king's family, another into a beggar's. But both children are souls, and therefore brothers. Rich and poor, wise or ignorant, good citizen or criminal, brown man, yellow [Page 5] man, black man or white man, all men are brothers.

It is perfectly true there is inequality. There is inequality not only in wealth or poverty, but also an inequality in mental capacity, and in moral strength. Some of us are cleverer than others; this difference is not due merely to education or environment. Some children are clever children, others are dull; some children: desire to co-operate with their parents and teachers, others are rebellious. There are good men and bad, just men and criminals. Inequalities exist; all can see them. These inequalities do not lessen the bond of Brotherhood. The Law of Brotherhood becomes all the more insistent. For, high and low, rich and poor, good and bad, are all as links in one chain. The strength of the chain is only in so far as all the links hang together and bear the common strain when the chain is stretched. In exactly the same way, it is only when the rich are generous to the poor, when the wise share their wisdom with the ignorant, [Page 6] when the good are patient with the wicked, that civilization progresses.

The chief characteristic of a true civilization is not that there is no poverty, nor disease, or that all can read and write, and that there is employment for all. All these are necessary and excellent attributes of a nation. But that people or nation shows the highest marks of culture where all are mutually helpful, where the strong is the champion of the weak, where the rich considers his wealth as a trust for all, where the cultured are eager to share their refinement with the less favoured.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

I stated at the beginning that all our sufferings whether of any individual, or of a nation, or of the whole world, are due to our ignoring the fact of Universal Brotherhood. Who does not know that today the whole world is plunged in suffering? There is unemployment in every [Page 7] nation, and the suffering of educated men and women who are thrown out of employment is especially great. There are fierce rivalries among the nations, and each is organizing itself to sell as much as possible to foreign nations, and to keep out their goods by high tariffs. The leading nations are fearful of each other, and are spending enormous sums on armies and navies. Fear and mistrust exist on all sides.

Yet it is a fact that nations are dependent on each other. Without the raw materials such as rubber, copra, cotton and many kinds of minerals which Asiatic nations export to Europe, the industries of Europe would be jeopardized. And we in Asia need the machinery of Europe and America. However much each nation tries to be exclusive, to concentrate only on its own progress, every nation is linked for prosperity or depression to every other nation. The franc is linked to the English pound and the American dollar; the transfer of gold from Paris to New York or [Page 8] from New York to Paris slowly affects the prices of

goods sold in Saigon. Our modern civilization is surcharged with jealousy and hatred. It is certainly not a civilization of Brotherhood.

Now let us imagine that every man and woman, in every country in the world, has understood the fact of Universal Brotherhood, that the progress of the individual in a community depends on the progress of the community as a whole, and that the welfare of a single nation is dependent on the welfare of all other nations. Imagine for a moment what changes would result. First, all the wealth of the world — its mineral resources, the products, from agriculture and industries of all nations — all this wealth would be recognized as the joint possession of humanity as a whole. A careful adjustment would be made by an International Committee representing all the nations of how much each nation requires of raw products, machinery, and manufactured goods, and how much of each commodity that nation should [Page 9] export to other nations. All would accept the principle that no single nation must use its special advantages to dominate other nations.

The International Committee could not create a paradise for all, but it would do much towards that goal by abolishing the fierce competition of today. What makes that competition possible ? By using the accumulated wealth of privileged classes, by calling out the inventiveness of specialized brains and by exploiting the helpless masses, a certain number of business men organize their nation to dominate other nations. There is not today the faintest idea in business that the wage which should be paid to a man should not depend on the selling price of goods, but must be guided by the need of the worker for certain conditions of living which are essential for his life as a human being who has not only material needs but also cultural and spiritual needs.

But in an era of Brotherhood, the value of the franc or the sovereign or the dollar would [Page 10] not be the indication of the prosperity of France, England or America. The indication which we shall look for will be how many diseases have been abolished, how many gardens and parks there are, how many hours for leisure, how many men and women are poets, how few crimes there are, and how refined and courteous the people have become. In an era of Universal Brotherhood, we shall concentrate on the welfare of every individual, whether he be rich or poor, uneducated or educated. Each nation will recognize the need to co-operate with all other nations, and where necessary to sacrifice its own particular interests for the good of humanity as a whole.

It is towards this great era of the future that we Theosophists are working. We work not only with mere sentiments, but with definite ideas which are clear and logical. We present to the mind of the inquirer certain broad principles for his examination; we do not say, "You must believe, or you will go to Hell". We say: "Here are certain facts and laws [Page 11] which you can discover for yourself, if you care to undertake the task. The knowledge which you obtain will make you happier and more useful".

FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS

Let me now outline for you some of the main ideas of Theosophy.

First, that the universe is not just a place where nature's forces operate by chance. Every event that has happened from the beginning of time has happened according to certain laws inherent in the universe.

These laws are the expressions of a Consciousness. Everything that exists, from the electron to the largest star, is impregnated with Consciousness.

This Fundamental Reality is so far beyond our grasp, that sages and saints have called it by contradictory terms. Many have termed it “God”; but some have called it Law, Heaven, the Great Architect, Evolution. Each man, [Page 12] according to his temperament and his experience, must determine how he will regard this Consciousness which directs everything. Let us call it God.

The next great truth is that the nature of God resides in every man and woman. We are not these bodies which perish; they are only garments which we wear for a while and cast aside. We are Immortal souls. The perfection of God dwells in us also, for we “live and move and have our being” in Him. But we are unconscious of our Divine Nature, till we awaken it.

It is to realize our true nature that we are born. Our birth is as the entrance into a workshop or laboratory, where by work we slowly unfold our faculties. But it is not possible to realize the Divine Nature in us by the experiences of one lifetime. So we reincarnate again and again. We enter into life, we are born, we grow, we act, we finish our work, and we return. Our return is death. After a rest in heaven, growing by realizing the [Page 13] joys we planned but did not achieve, we return to birth again, more purified, stronger, wiser, to work again, so as to become more expert in thought and feeling and action. This is Reincarnation.

As we live and act, sometimes we succeed, sometimes we fail. We do good and we do evil, guided by our altruism or our selfishness. When we do evil, we create discord in the universal harmony, and we must restore that harmony. The evil we did must be undone by new good; the good we did must be reshaped to a more far-reaching good. This process of sowing and reaping is called Karma. It is the law of readjustment which a man puts into operation by every one of his thoughts, words and deeds.

Since all souls are divine, all souls are equal. There are young souls and old souls, but all are brothers. In spite of every difference — of birth, capacity, environment; of race, creed; sex, caste or colour; of goodness or wickedness — all men form an indivisible Brotherhood. [Page 14]

All of us, high or low, ignorant or wise, make a chain, and the stronger grow by helping the weaker. Brotherhood is the law of growth for all men.

But this Brotherhood extends to all — animals, birds, fishes, even the plants, mountains and seas. We grow by our unity with all things. The Divine Nature, which is latent in them as in us, helps our inherent Divinity to step forth in its beauty.

DIVINITY IN MAN

Here I have to draw your special attention to the idea which I have just mentioned, that within us there exists Divine Nature which is full of goodness and beauty. When we look round the world and see so

many selfish and cruel men, so many who are unjust and who care nothing for the welfare of the community and the nation, it is not easy to believe in the fundamental goodness of man. Yet one of the greatest truths of Theosophy is that, whatever [Page 15] a man may do of evil, nevertheless he is good and noble in his fundamental nature.

Why then does he do evil ? Through ignorance. We all desire to be happy; that is a deep-seated instinct in us. But we do not yet possess the knowledge concerning the true means of happiness. We blunder in our search for happiness, just as a man who finds himself in a dark room will fall over obstacles if he tries to get out quickly. No man does evil consciously, that is, knowing that it is evil. He thinks that it is not evil, or that he is justified in some manner. The evil in us is due to a want of understanding of the laws of our growth, just as any ill-health from which we suffer is an indication that we have broken the laws of health.

One of the greatest puzzles is this, of good and evil. The puzzle begins to be solved when we commence with the axiom that each man has somewhere within him the nature of the Divine. But this Divinity resident in a man is hidden; it is so veiled from our eyes that [Page 16] in the wicked man we note only his wicked acts, but not the seed of goodness and beauty which is trying to burst its shell and put out roots and grow. Have you not noted that all great saints, the truly perfect men, are tender to all, even to the wicked ? Why ? Because, as they look at the wicked, they note, not his wicked deeds, but the attempts of the seed of good to manifest itself. Like a little child whose limbs are still feeble, and who falls after two or three steps, so are men who are evil. They do not understand themselves, nor the laws of their true growth and happiness. They are moved by the impulses of their desires, and then they blunder and hurt themselves and others.

Have you ever held in your hand a rough diamond, one that has not yet been cut and polished by the diamond-cutter ? The rough diamond is without lustre, there is no sparkle in it; you might easily pass it by as a small pebble. Yet in that rough diamond there exists the brilliance of the perfect [Page 17] diamond. But the perfection has to be brought out by the art of the diamond-cutter. He cannot change the diamond's crystal structure; but he uses the knowledge of its structure to polish its dull surfaces till they become smooth and brilliant. The beauty of the perfect diamond is always hidden in the dull diamond as it is dug up out of the ground.

So too is our human nature. In the deepest recesses of our selves, we are goodness, truth. love and beauty. But who will call them forth from those recesses? Who will understand our mysterious nature and help us to reveal our true selves ?

WHAT KARMA SAYS

There is one who understands, and who will help us. It is Life. This Life, which you and I have to live, with so much struggle and pain, and so little joy and peace, this life itself is our teacher and guide. Our lives are not what they are by chance. There is no chance [Page 18] anywhere in the world. If I see a mango on the ground under the branches, I do not say that it is there by chance; I know the whole story, how once from a mango seed there grew a tree, how that tree after many years began to flower; how, soon after, there were hundreds of little mangoes, and how one day because a certain mango was becoming ripe or the tree was shaken violently by a storm, that mango fell. All the time I note that effect follows cause;

even if I was not present when the wind blew, I know what must have happened.

In exactly the same way, this law of cause and effect guides our lives. This law of Karma says: Do good, and happiness follows; Do evil, and misery is the result. Sometimes, the effect follows the cause at once; put your finger in the fire, and you suffer instantly, for the law of Karma acts swiftly. But sometimes the result is delayed; sow some rice seeds and you must wait days before the green sprouts appear, and weeks before you will get rice for a harvest. All the difficulties of life — [Page 19] the pains of body and of mind, the denial of our longings, the obstacles which beset our path as we seek happiness, these are the effects of causes which we set going long ago, in past lives. We do not remember where and when we set those forces in operation; but all the same the effects return to us. How shall we meet those effects, how shall we receive our harvest?

The wise man receives his harvest of pain with resignation; the ignorant man becomes furious and blames others. Karma does not punish you, because you broke the law of goodness; but it sends you the result as pain. But Life means you to grow all the time, to reveal to the world the hidden beauty of your soul. If, then, you are wise, you will accept your harvest of pain without rebellion; you will use your sufferings as an opportunity to make yourself more pure, more understanding of others, to be stronger in all ways. The foolish man will blame others, and in his resentment he will become unjust to them, [Page 20] and so he will create another harvest of pain for himself.

I have spoken of the difficulties and sufferings of life. But there are also happinesses. Each occasion for happiness is also a harvest from the past. The wise man will receive such harvest thankfully, and he will scatter far and wide his seeds of joy so that all men may benefit by his good Karma; but the ignorant man will hug his joy to himself and say: "It is mine", and he will not share it with others. The wise man will grow both by his pains and joys; like the rough diamond which is ground on the diamond-cutter's wheel, the wise man will use whatever Karma returns to him to perfect his character.

KARMA OF NATIONS

Just as there is no chance in a man's life, just as each day it is a matter of reaping a harvest from the past, or of sowing for a harvest to come, so is it with the world as [Page 21] a whole. The world which is composed of millions of men has its Karma of good and evil, the collective Karma of those millions. For the world's inhabitants of today were its inhabitants five hundred years ago, a thousand years ago in other lands. As they are reborn, they bring with them their past Karma. Just as a man sows good and reaps happiness, sows evil and reaps misery, so too is it with Nations. The men and women who now live in any one nation lived together in the past in some other land, centuries ago; there they helped each other or injured each other. They come back together again to exhaust their Karma. Nations rise and fall, empires come and go, not by chance, but because of Karma. Behind the growth of nations and empires there is the inflexible law of Karma. If a nation allows its helpless citizens to suffer, if it allows the weak to be exploited by the strong, then as that nation is reborn, calamity after calamity comes as its harvest of Karma. There is a stern unbending judge who judges [Page 22] the unscrupulous, the cruel, the powerful, both among men and nations. It is Karma. Karma sometimes acts swiftly, sometimes its action is delayed; but it always acts, and no one can stop its action by prayer or penitence.

THE UNIVERSITY OF LIFE

Like as a child in order to be educated must pass from class to class, from the kindergarten as a little child, to the University class as a boy or girl nearing manhood or womanhood, so is it with each one of us. We must not only not do evil, we must rejoice in good and create good on all sides. We must not only be patient, but also strong to develop our own initiative. We must not only possess a good intellect but also a compassionate heart that understands. Every virtue which your imagination can conceive is needed for the perfection of your character. And the school and university for our training is Life. [Page 23] Guided by the Law of Karma, we are born again and again, now as a man, now as a woman; sometimes in an eastern body, sometimes in a western. The world with its races, nations, occupations, arts and sciences — this is our university where we perfect ourselves.

As we are so reborn, we bring with us our capacities of the past. If I was a good musician in my past lives, I shall have a natural capacity for music, even as a child. If I had lived as a miser, or as a cruel man or woman, I shall show those attributes even as a child. I do not come by chance into the family where I am born; my father, my mother, brothers, sisters, my wife or husband, my children, all who are bound to me by Karma, were so bound to me in the past. The friend I love now devotedly was one who helped me in a past life by drawing love out of my nature by his goodness to me. The enemy who is cruel to me is one whom I injured in a past life. On all sides, there is [Page 24] Karma, for the individual, for the nation, for the whole world.

But as the ages pass, the world is changing slowly. Life after life each one of us is becoming more noble and more endowed with love. As we all return life after life, we carry civilization to higher goal with each epoch of the world. And all this happens, not mechanically but because there is a plan behind it all.

GOD'S GREAT PLAN

Just as the diamond-cutter needs to know a science of diamond-cutting, just as he has a plan in his mind for the work he is going to do, so there is behind the world a plan for its growth from stage to stage of civilization. Is there not a science of plants, called Botany ? Does not Botany reveal to the student that all plants grow according to laws inherent in nature ? So, too, there is inherent in the world a plan for its evolution. [Page 25] Some call this plan the Mind of God which directs evolution; others call it Dharma or the law of Righteousness. Should you care to study Theosophy, much will be placed before you to show that the world's events are not due to chance. The migrations of peoples, the rise and fall of empires, the coming of one religion after another, the appearance of rulers, poets, artists — all these are parts of a Great Plan which is striving to organize the lives of men so that each man will reveal the goodness and beauty which are hidden in him.

Suppose by some miracle you could be given a complete understanding of the meaning of your life, why you are born with certain faculties and not with others, why from your birth to this day various events have been happening in your life; would not such an understanding help you to solve the puzzles which now confront you daily? Suppose also that you could be given an understanding of the reasons for the complicated events of the [Page 26] world, why there are national jealousies, what will be the outcome of them, would not such an understanding make the world more interesting ?

It is to an understanding of this kind that Theosophy can lead you; as you study Theosophy you will begin to understand yourself, your friend, your enemy, your country, the whole world. You will discover first, that there is no chance anywhere, but always the operation of law; and second, that the whole world and its millions are being guided by Divine Reason. Your mind will begin to see reason everywhere; your sympathies will be quickened when you see that the whole world is slowly being guided to happiness, in spite of the terrible weight of its present misery.

THEOSOPHY CALLS TO ACTION

Suppose someone were to take you to a desert land bordering on a crowded city which cannot expand, and where men and women [Page 27] are living so crowded that there is not a single park or playground for the children; suppose this person were to say to you: "We will bring water from the mountains, we will construct canals, we will plant grains, vegetables, trees; here we will make a park, there a theatre, and in that place playgrounds for young and old; we will break up that crowded unhealthy city and bring its thousands to live in this desert land which we will make into a garden; come, will you not help me?" What would be your answer? Would you not spring forward, when once you understood that such a wonderful scheme can be realized ?

Similarly is it with life, when once you have grasped the main ideas of Theosophy. Behind the tragedy of your life, behind the tragedy of the world as a whole, you will see a wonderful plan. The wisdom which has come to you through Theosophy will reveal to your deepest intuition that behind the Plan is the infinite love of God who pours Himself in love and pity, and that the Plan will come to a glorious [Page 28] success because no human will can thwart at last the Divine Will. Theosophy will come to you as a call to action, bidding you go forth as a champion of your fellowmen, to fight to abolish evil in every form — brutality, cruelty, drunkenness, disease, corruption, ignorance, and apathy.

Theosophy will teach you that the only way to tread the path to your own happiness is to work first and last for the happiness of others. You will know through its teachings that you can help, though you may often feel that it is you who are in need of help most. The Wisdom of God which is Theosophy will not be any kind of a religion given to you by others, but the inner light of your own soul which you have discovered, because you have torn the bandage from your eyes and can see for yourself.

WORK FOR OTHERS

Throughout the world, in fifty-six countries, Theosophists are working to usher in the era [Page 29] of Brotherhood. They know that this Golden Age cannot come at once; as centuries have gone to create and maintain the present evils, so centuries will be needed to abolish them. But their hearts are committed to that work; they know that when they depart from this life, other generations of Theosophists will carry on the work, till they return in a new incarnation to take up the work once again.

We Theosophists are not different from the rest of our fellowmen; we have to earn our living in the professions, in commerce, as employees, as merchants, as workmen. We are as you are. Yet we are different, and that is because we look far ahead and see a glorious future for all men and for ourselves. We know that our salvation will come, not from some external saviour, but from ourselves, as we become

noble and tender. Daily our enthusiasm grows as we understand more of the Wisdom of God which is called Theosophy. We would share our enthusiasm with you; we would infect you with our idealism, with our **[Page 30]** courage; we would share with you our hope and our consolation. We have received so much from Theosophy and we would share it with you. It is for that purpose that I have come into your midst, to discover you as my brothers, to reveal to you that I am your brother, and that working together as Theosophists, we can make into one Brotherhood the whole world.