

On the Higher Aspect of Theosophic Studies

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Reprinted from "The Theosophist" March, 1885

Reprinted from "Theosophical Siftings" Volume 7

The Theosophical Publishing Society, England

[Page 10] THE study of Theosophy, in which we are engaged, is in its character unique. The Esoteric Science, which is but another name for Theosophy, is at once a complete system of Physics, Ethics, and Metaphysics, demanding the devotion of all the faculties of man for its proper comprehension. Unlike those departments of knowledge which usually occupy attention, it directly deals with the great problem of happiness, a happiness which is complete and eternal. The ultimate value of all effort is the production of happiness, and objects excite our interest in so far as we believe them to be conducive to that great and ultimate consummation of existence — happiness. Thus it will be seen that Theosophy, claiming, as it does, to be the science of happiness, must embrace within itself all objects of human interest. In fact it must be omniscience itself. The definition here attempted is, no doubt, infinite in extension, rendering every claimant to a complete knowledge of it worthy of supreme contempt and ridicule, or, perhaps, even unworthy of that. One thing, however, is certain: the Great Science of Supreme Knowledge, as it is called in the East, is the science of supreme bliss and the art of acquiring it. As a science it recognizes the direction in which our highest faculties perceive the unfoldment of existence to be the direction of happiness, and looks upon all divergence from that direction as productive of unhappiness. As an art it naturally concerns itself most with the objects of our highest interest — ourselves (it is necessary to adopt this form for the plural in defiance of grammar), and attacks the problem of happiness from their standpoint. These selves, or as they are technically called, personal egos or personalities, are candidates for happiness, and therefore entitled to special consideration. It is needless to discuss here the contention which is sometimes heard that action, life, or existence is possible without a tendency towards happiness. Even a superficial examination will show that while pursuing apparently an unpleasant object, the man's real motive is still a desire for happiness. The author of the Upanishads shows great wisdom when he asks: "Who would have moved or who would have lived if happiness did not pervade all space?"

The universally admitted relations of the personal ego to objects, usually regarded as external by reason of their non-identity with the self, must be recognized before any scheme can be formulated or means devised [Page 11] for the acquirement of happiness. This part of the inquiry is confined to the domain of what is commonly, though empirically, called positive knowledge, and is physical; it is conducted by means of physical senses.

Having found the object to be made happy in the self, it becomes necessary to examine its nature, so as to discover how to make it happy. This branch of the inquiry, which is metaphysical, must be pursued with the aid of what may be called super-physical senses or higher intellection. Ordinarily we find all actions in life, proceeding upon a system of trial and error, seek to attain that happiness in which hope promises unchanging enjoyment and rest. But as the investigation into the true elements of happiness advances, a

very important fact becomes apparent from our conception of time. We see that the personality, the aspirant for happiness, has itself such a characteristic as to be unable to exist without change in consciousness, and that exist it must. That which is, can never absolutely cease to be; no relationship can be legitimately postulated between a thing and its utter negation. Therefore the scheme of happiness, which the personality sets up in ignorance of its own nature, must be given up for its true happiness. In order to be truly happy the personality has to realize its own perpetual changefulness, and the result of such realization will be the surrender of the desire for the permanence of any particular state of its existence, a desire springing from ignorance of its own nature. When this ignorance is dispelled and the personality conforms itself to its own natural law of change, the character of the ego is so completely altered as to render the personality, to all intents and purposes, extinct; to mark the difference of state the entity is then called an individuality. It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the nature of the existence of the individuality during the time the personality lasts, or strictly speaking, engages attention. Suffice it to say, that if one could survey the universe from the standpoint of eternity there would be no change, but everything would appear present, changeless and everlasting. But such a state can never be realised. The only eternity that exists is an eternity of change. Change alone is permanent. Forgetful of this, our personalities build up schemes of happiness in which the desire for the permanence of some particular state occupies a prominent position. As a consequence we bring pain upon ourselves when that desire meets with inevitable disappointment. A thorough realization, therefore, of the perpetual mutability of existence is essentially necessary for that happiness which is most perfect. To be supremely happy we must renounce all desire for happiness as the result of our work, but find it in the work itself.

This being concluded, the next step is to know our work. A proper examination of the nature of change, the law embodied in the personality aspiring to happiness, furnishes this knowledge as the highest faculties of [Page 12] each project their searching light upon the massive darkness of what is to be as involved in what was and what is. Examining the true nature of our consciousness, we find that the great cause of pain and suffering is the personality itself, or, in other words, the great interest we feel in ourselves under the conviction of their separateness and opposition to other selves. But the changefulness of the personality necessitates the existence of a permanent basis; and its separateness implies an underlying entity. This permanent basis must not, however, be considered a distinct entity. It is merely a state which has no more existence without change than change has without it. The more the personality realizes this permanence, this state of unity of all personalities, with which, in its present state, it feels such an opposition, the greater does its happiness become. For at each step of this realization the limitations imposed by the personality upon itself diminish in number and generate happiness. The effort to realize the ideal of Universal Brotherhood, — the emotional counterpart of the consciousness of unity which underlies the diverse forms of manifestation, — is usually known as the practice of morality. As the work of ethical evolution proceeds, the personality, which produces the consciousness of opposition of self and selves, slackens its bonds and expands until it loses itself. The presence of opposition produces pain, which disappears in proportion as its true cause, the feeling of separateness, disappears; happiness grows, with the growth of more permanent interests, and reaches its consummation when the "dewdrop slips into the shining sea", and the personality destroying its limitations merges in the all and loses its name. The peaks of perfection that the glorified individuality then begins to scale are far beyond the ken of mortal eyes. It never indeed loses "the glory of! going on and still to be".

The path, however, by which this truth — this happiness — is realized, is not the same for all. The very fact that one personality is not another shows that each has a peculiar path of its own. No man is a superfluity in the Universe. The existence of the humblest human creature is not without a reason. A contrary supposition involves the assumption of omniscience, and is tantamount to a denial of the

existence of reason itself. Each man, therefore, has a right to a perfect liberty of conscience, and no man is entitled to judge his fellow man. One's opinions are one's own, but one is not justified in imposing them on others. A neglect of this rule has a tendency to transform the whole of the human race into multiple images of a single individual, which must necessarily produce pain by its opposition to the natural law which underlies the diversity of manifestation. Nothing in Nature can be annihilated, and all attempts to achieve the impossible must produce unhappiness. Leave the meanest individual to enjoy his birthright-liberty of conscience. When another's acts cross [Page 13] our path of duty and offend our sense of fitness and propriety we have a right to condemn the deed and endeavour to neutralise its evil effects, but it is wrong to shut our hearts against the doer; he is entitled to all the pity that is in our nature. For by the Law of Karma

The false tongue dooms its lie; the creeping thief
And spoiler rob, to render.

The law of Karma is the true order of our personal experience, as seen in the light of that mode of Nature's manifestation, commonly called Causation. That which is cannot cease to be. But it cannot remain in a state of permanence, for that would destroy the idea of succession, which is inseparably connected with existence. Our acts, therefore, live in their effects or subsequent forms. Until we can remove all material desires from our acts they will always necessitate material effects and produce reincarnations. It will be out of place in the present paper, which deals but with the practical aspect of our studies, to elucidate the Law of Karma and Reincarnation, or to meet even the principal objections raised against it. But attention is to be drawn to the fact that this Law offers a satisfactory explanation of the apparent injustices of life. We find around us not only pain and suffering but also moral excellence and depravity, forced upon individuals by circumstances over which they seem to have no control. No amount of speculation or dogmatism will furnish a clue to this anomaly so long as the above-mentioned Law remains unrecognized. Exception is taken to this Law on the ground that is repugnant to justice that a man should experience the consequences of a prior act without preserving the memory of that act. It is hardly necessary to point out that this line of argument is based upon the assumption that the word justice, as applied to the working of natural laws, has the same meaning as the justice demanded by us in intercourse between man and man with their limited knowledge and selfish motives. Is a man, who is struck down by a disease, ever told the precise moment and circumstances when he received the germs of his malady? The justice of Nature is vindicated by the undisturbed sway of the law of Causation. If *you* suffer there must be a reason for it, and that reason must have some connection with *you*, otherwise it would not have produced *your* suffering. It should not, however, be supposed that the cause of suffering is here sought to be connected with the present form of you, your personality, the aggregate unity of a certain bundle of experiences, that personality being in fact but the form which your old self has assumed under the operation of self-generated causes, which are the progenitors of your present suffering and enjoyment. Ye suffer from yourselves; "that which ye sow, ye reap".

From the considerations, so briefly urged above, it will be obvious how wrong it is to entertain resentful feelings for evil done to ourselves. We [Page 14] must be indifferent to it and pursue our path of duty: the evil experienced is the outcome of our own previous deeds. No power in heaven or on earth can by a moment's duration prolong or shorten the term of our suffering or enjoyment. The sum-total of human happiness will receive considerable addition if unswerving allegiance is given to this law, which alone can furnish a true and scientific basis of Ethics. Our Ethical notions, however, cannot be fixed and permanent, because the personality in which they inhere is itself changeable. The morality of a Polynesian savage will be converted into its opposite when he is changed into a civilized man. The same law also obtains in

the domains of Physics and Metaphysics. What is Metaphysics today will be Physics tomorrow, as the right of now will be wrong of then. This truth, nevertheless, regains constant, that there will be always something unknown with which Metaphysics will concern itself, and which Ethics will demand to have brought within the grasp of Physics — the science of objectivity. There dominates throughout the whole range of existence the eternal struggle to convert Metaphysics into Physics, and Ethics is the power that fights. Any scheme of life or happiness that neglects one and enthrones, the other of these will always defeat its own end. Physics without Metaphysics is empiricism; Metaphysics without Physics is dogmatism; and Ethics by itself is superstition. The harmonious combination of these three elements forms what is called Theosophy, Wisdom-Religion, or Esoteric Science. The study of this Great Science leads to a proper development of all the different faculties, the synthetic unity of which is the man. Physics requires the cultivation of the intellect. Metaphysics can be comprehended only by the development of the intuitive, or purely rational, faculties, while the emotional nature is expanded by Ethics. The feeling of reverential awe which we have, for what we call the spiritual is produced by the combination of the metaphysical and ethical faculties. Metaphysics recognizes the true nature of consciousness, which Ethics, acting through the emotions, forces us to realize. This impelling conviction produces the feeling of awe for the subjective side of nature, and makes it sacred.

Objection is sometimes taken to Theosophy because it is not new. The logical connection between novelty and truth is, however, not easy to discover. If Theosophy is the Divine Wisdom which is the Science of Divine Bliss, and if happiness is the tendency of all existence, there must be Theosophy whenever there is metaphysical faculty in man to contemplate problems that lie deep in his nature. Novelty is an attribute which has never been claimed for our doctrines. But at the same time it must be recognized that a truth is the richer for having passed through a larger number of minds. It is the realization of the truth that we seek, and in this great task, we accept help from each other's expedience; no statement [Page 15] is authoritative but has to be accepted or rejected according to the dictates of the individual judgment. Abstract truths are like mathematical formulae: the underlying principles must first be understood and afterward facility acquired in their application, and it is no detraction from the value of mathematics that some of its results can be accomplished by empiric rules.

The Great Science is the Science of Eternal Life, the contemplation of which causes the present life to assume its true proportions. Misconception of the true value of the existence we now lead shrouds from view the permanent basis which underlies all changes of form, and has on the one hand led some to sink into the condition of Tennyson's St. Simon Stylites, and on the other produced Epicurean Corporealism, A right understanding of the subject shows, however, the worth as well as the worthlessness of this existence, which at once, imprisons us and gives us liberty. It is but a small link in an unending catena of changes — it is but a drop in the ocean; but still it is a link and a drop. Our happiness entirely depends upon a correct estimate of the value of life. Ignorance is painful, and it is immaterial whether that ignorance begets an over-estimate of the importance of life or the opposite. The great delusion of belief in an absolute existence outside the Cosmos produces a perfect paralysis of the present life and all the misery consequent thereupon, while the over-estimate of life ends in sensuality and bigotry. This over-estimate proceeds from two distinct causes, both equally dangerous: Corporealism, which cannot conceive of any existence dissociated from the present body; and certain forms of dogmatic religion which supplement this erring, miserable life, of humanity by an eternity of existence, the nature of which depends on causes generated in finite time. The pleasures of this life appear in gigantic proportions to a votary of the former system, and dogmatic morality becomes the omnipotent ruler of the so-called religious man.

But the only eternity we recognize is an eternity of change. This life is only one out of the numberless patterns which the ceaseless motion of the kaleidoscope of existence produces. The contemplation of this great fact, of our nature broadens our view of life, and helps us to realize present existence in its true light. As we penetrate further into details, the realization of the harmony of being grows upon us in strength, and the darkening medium of ignorance loses its density.

The fragments of Esoteric cosmogony contained in Theosophical literature now before the world carry us a long way towards estimating the true worth of life. This teaching must, however, for most minds in our age, rank as Metaphysics, appealing for sanction to the human reason, until the practice of Ethics makes it capable of realization as Physics, a task, already accomplished by some individuals. But the practicability of converting [Page 16] Metaphysical concepts into Physical facts by the help of Ethics must not be lost sight of.

A mere intellectual study of this system of Metaphysics is no doubt productive of great good, but at the same time it is to be observed that the best result can be achieved only by its practical application to life and conduct, or, to translate an Eastern phrase, by constant sitting beside it — assiduity in its etymological sense. An effort to realize the immense tract of time during which the course of human evolution has been traced by the above mentioned fragments makes the mind dizzy at first, but in the course of the process, when even a shadowy comprehension of the truth is obtained, the factitious importance with which ignorance invests each fleeting phase of existence disappears and leaves earth-life to take its proper place in the endless manifestation of being through which we pass.

Taking the present objective life itself, we find it to be like a note in music, which when sounded must inevitably produce its third and fifth, and then return into itself in the higher octave. When a unit of consciousness, called a human entity, coursing along the present curve of objective evolution, reaches the furthest point of that curve and turns in a different direction, the phenomenon of death takes place. Death marks the point of comparative no motion or unconsciousness. Of course absolute unconsciousness has no existence in a universe, which is itself a grand consciousness. At death the unit of consciousness begins to disappear into the subjective side of existence. It is obvious that the rate of motion will be affected by forces tending in an opposite direction. In other words, an entity which generates material inclinations, is retarded in its progress heavenward, to use a popular expression, by those inclinations in proportion to their intensity. This state of conflict is rightly termed in the East, Kama-loka, or the World of Desires. It corresponds to the Purgatory as understood by some schools of Christian theology. The duration of the Kama-loka state depends upon the relative intensity of the material and spiritual inclinations of the personality. This state succeeding, as it does, the earth-life, is the nearest to it, and therefore the first which meets a psychic. The direction in which the living psychic-moves being opposite to that of the retiring entity, he gets of it but a retrospective glimpse, and reflects such of its thoughts and emotions as are of the earth earthy. We must not forget that in the view of life taken in this paper, the spiritual is closely connected with what is ordinarily called the abstract, and is something higher than what is considered moral by the work-a-day world. It need not, therefore, excite surprise to find men, considered good on earth, passing through the state of Kama-loka. Those alone who, during a long course of unselfish life have shed every atom of material craving, are able to overleap Kama-loka altogether, while in the case of the generality its [Page 17] duration varies from some hours to a great many years. It will, I believe, be confirmed by the experience of those who investigate the character of existence in Kama-loka, that men dying at ripe old age with the satisfaction of having accomplished all life's labours, very rarely manifest through mediums. This gives some indication of the

true nature of Kama-loka entities.

Let us return to the analogy between human life and a musical note. A man possessed of a peculiarly constituted sense of hearing, which prevents his taking cognizance of any other overtone besides the third of the original note, will never suspect the existence of the fifth and the octave. Thus the untrained psychic or medium, whose purview is confined to Kama-loka, cannot obtain any idea of the higher states. It is a matter of regret that transcendental Metaphysics should not be more generally studied, as that alone, in the absence of the incomparable clairvoyance of the trained seer, can fathom the mysteries of spiritual life. To some minds the manifestations of the *séance*-room are conclusive and satisfactory proofs of the immortality of man, but the illegitimate nature of the process of reasoning which yields such a result is plain to all metaphysical thinkers. It is not our purpose to enter into further discussion of a subject, whose importance demands separate treatment. For the present, it will suffice to remark that an examination of the state of consciousness known as Kama-loka does not give a clue to a right understanding of the higher existence, even though the examiner be assisted by the testimony of entities which have passed into that state. What amount of reliance is to be placed upon the information obtained through mediums regarding the mysteries of true spiritual life? In answering this question we must remember that there is nothing in the mere fact of death which would invest an otherwise incompetent person with authority to pronounce the last word upon spiritual matters. Problems which are amenable to reason are as much within the grasp of an embodied as of a disembodied spirit. We do not attach any value to a man's belief that his brain is made of wax or molten lead, although the brain is his and not ours. Nor do we throw our Euclid overboard on the assurance of some one that at the North Pole the three angles of a triangle are not equal to two right angles.

The secrets of the soul will never be revealed to sense. The physical man can only cognize astral existence, the borderland between the physical and the spiritual. It will thus be seen that the information obtained through Spiritualistic mediums will never enable us to solve the problems of the true spiritual life. In the meantime there is a grave moral objection to the practice of Spiritualism, which all its services against the fatal progress of materialism do not remove. Concluding upon insufficient data obtained by communication with the astral or semi-ethereal phase of existence that the [Page 18] personality is eternal, one is sure to take an exaggerated view of the present life, and of the personality manifested in it. As a consequence, the very life-stream of true Spiritual development, which is but another name for liberation from the bondage of personality, is poisoned at its source. The immorality of Spiritualism thus lies on a higher plane, and is, therefore, the more reprehensible. It is more pernicious to implant in a man's mind a germ of thought which expands into a upas tree of evil, than to rob or even murder him. From another point of view it is evident that the entity communicated with by a medium, is very seriously injured by being turned away from the higher life towards which it is pressing. The injury thus resulting is liable to be underrated by reason of our want of familiarity with the operation of causes on superphysical planes of existence. The illustration above cited as to the effects of thought-energy will throw some light on the subject. A tendency being set up in a Kama-loka will be prolonged to a much greater extent than will be readily admitted. The evil effects on the medium himself of his astral intercourse are quite manifest. The surrender of will is the surrender of duty, and treason to manhood.

We now enter upon a consideration of the truly spiritual counterpart of our life on earth, a state called Devachan in recent Theosophical teachings. In this state the entity lives in the highest spiritual manifestation of its personality on earth, and in the realization of all its hopes and aspirations. No communication, other than subjective, is possible with such a purified being. While the spiritual life of an

individual is unfolding itself in Devachan, sympathetic souls on earth feel the vivifying and spiritualizing influence of that unfoldment, and translate it into their physical lives according to their respective spiritual development. Whenever an individual on earth is enabled by his highly spiritual life to live upon the plane of soul, he can consciously receive the influx of spiritual energy thus showered upon the world, and trace it to its source. True spiritual communication must be of a subjective character. The pure spiritual being, even while on earth, vibrates in unison with some glorified predecessor, a good man in life and goodness in death. It will thus be seen that good men, freed from the limitations of the flesh, become inspiring influences to their race, and so remain for a period immeasurably greater than the span of their lives on earth, before making another descent into objective life. But the state of Devachan is, from a higher stand-point, still a very selfish state. Although the spiritual energy evolved by an inhabitant of Devachan is a factor in the spiritual development of the race, yet the entity, wanting in the element of self-consciousness (as all entities are in Kama-loka and Devachan, when left to themselves), cannot be credited with unselfishness any more than the tree can be styled unselfish for affording a shelter to the weary passer-by. In each fact of consciousness there are two elements, the [Page 19] mere perception and the reflective consciousness of that perception. When I see a thing there are two facts present in my mind; the fact of seeing the thing and the fact that I see it. When the higher thoughts and aspirations are realized by an entity in Devachan, it is in the position of one who is lost in an enjoyment, the intensity and keenness of which prevent this reflective consciousness or self-consciousness. Truly unselfish beings do not enter into the state of Devachan, but obtain immediate reincarnation so long as there is any possibility left for their further development on earth after which they pass into the state of Nirvana, as Sakyamuni has done, and become the true spiritual pabulum for those who thirst and hunger after righteousness.

This is the doctrine against which the charge of selfishness is sometimes very hastily preferred, but the extravagant injustice of the accusation is manifest on the least thoughtful consideration. If happiness is to be the supremely important object of all effort, our adversaries urge, where is that spirit of self-sacrifice which alone can open the portals of the highest good? Such a contention can live only in the shadow cast by the ignorance of the true nature of self-sacrifice and the highest good. Neither good nor evil has any absolute existence. No act performed in a finite period of time can ensure results which will retain their power of producing happiness or unhappiness to the actor through all eternity. The same reasons which condemn eternal punishment as absurd, also sap the foundation of eternal bliss, as the consequence of energy operating during a finite period of time. It is not here maintained that even the feeblest flash of energy is destructible, but that owing to the changefulness of the personal ego the manifestations of a cause lose in time their unhappy or happy character as regards the unit of consciousness which originally produced the cause. Happiness alone is the constant factor and the final criterion to which all our conceptions of goodness must be referred. But what is the highest happiness? It is an utter renunciation of all desire for happiness, and a supreme satisfaction in the performance of one's work, which in reality is one's nature, purified from egoism. Selfishness, or egoism, as it is the greatest enemy of happiness, is the greatest evil. Applying this principle to self-sacrifice as ordinarily understood, we find that by itself it is neither good nor bad, but may be either, according to the motive which underlies it. The surrender of self to duty is the only sacrifice of self; under all other circumstances there will be self-slaughter, not self-sacrifice. A subtle and dangerous form of selfishness is often found mixed up with many acts commonly regarded as self-sacrificial. Consciousness of personality is the great evil, and that evil is not removed by the way in which the consciousness is manifested. When one rushes on death with the determination of giving up self, no matter with what object, there is still a consciousness of [Page 20] self which is being given up, and consequently the object is selfish. Self-forgetfulness in the performance of duty, which reaches its consummation when duty and nature become one, is the true self-sacrifice. So long as there is an opposition between self and other selves, the self has

not been sacrificed. Self-sacrifice is a perpetual effort towards the attainment of that goal where, to quote the words of a great Indian teacher, the "All is filled by the self, as the world is filled by water at the great universal cataclysm". It often involves a greater act of sacrifice to live on and perform one's duty than to be relieved from it by the approach of death. Thus the ideal sacrifice of self, is to be found exemplified in the life of Buddha, who, for our sakes lived on. If by confounding a thing with its polar opposite, this is considered selfishness; so be it.

We have dwelt upon a few facts regarding Kama-loka and Devachan, not with the intention of expounding the subject, but to demonstrate its practical value. We have attempted to show how a careful study of Esoteric Doctrine, with earnestness of purpose and sincerity of heart, must needs impress us with the immense importance of cultivating the spiritual side of our character on earth, as something higher than mere blind submission to conventional morality, which is based upon a recognition of human selfishness. Further, from this study we derive the lesson of universal toleration and brotherly love. And above all, it teaches us the sublime doctrine of Renunciation and unselfish devotion to the cause of Humanity, a doctrine which the greatest teachers of all time and every country have preached and realized, which the great good men of every age and every land have worshipped and followed, and which it is the greatest glory of mankind to have the ability to receive.