

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

"There is no Religion higher than Truth"

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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THE POWER OF IDEAS	1
SELF-EDUCATION AND SELF-GROWTH	5
DIVINE WISDOM AND ITS KNOWERS	12
THE DIGNITY OF WORK	18
THE KEY OF HARMONY	23
THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVITY	26
IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY	29

### THE POWER OF IDEAS

Plato was right: *ideas* rule the world, and, as men's minds will receive *new* ideas, laying aside the old and effete, the world will advance: mighty revolutions will spring from them; creeds and even powers will crumble before their onwards march crushed by the irresistible force. It will be just as impossible to resist their influx, when the time comes, as to stay the progress of the tide. But all this will come gradually on, and before it comes we have a duty set before us; that of sweeping away as much as possible the dross left to us by our pious forefathers. New ideas have to be planted on clean places, for these ideas touch upon the most momentous subjects. It is not physical phenomena but these universal ideas that we study, as to comprehend the former, we have to first understand the latter. They touch man's true position in the universe, in relation to his previous and future births; his origin and ultimate destiny; the relation of the mortal to the immortal; of the temporary to the eternal; of the finite to the infinite; ideas larger, grander more comprehensive, recognizing the universal reign of Immutable Law, unchanging and unchangeable in regard to which there is only an ETERNAL NOW, while to uninitiated mortals time is past or future as related to their finite existence on this material speck of dirt.

—FROM A MASTER'S LETTER

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IN times of crisis, in the outside world or in our inner world, people are apt to become impatient and to exclaim: "This is no time for

philosophy; this is the time for action!” But can right action ever be divorced from philosophy, the love of wisdom? Are we to cease being lovers of wisdom because we must act?

As has been so aptly said: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.” Those defences must be in the nature of great ideas capable of inspiring men and women to noble action. Yes, it is ideas that are the movers of our minds and it is the quality of their energy that in turn determines human behaviour. We speak of the “influence” of an idea. We say that ideas are “contagious.” We know that when the ripening of an idea is due, when its hour strikes, so to speak, that idea will spread with a force that nothing can resist. The power of an idea for weal or for woe is a factor to be reckoned with and modern psychology has come to accept it.

The silent magic inherent in great and universal ideas was recognized since the remotest antiquity. Such grand and noble ideas have a magnetism all their own through which they exercise their own beneficent influence and spread far and wide.

The very polarity of man can be changed through the ideas he holds and lives by, and no idea has greater power for good than that of the existence in every human being of a Divine Ego. This forms the basis of all spiritual philosophy and of all spiritual discipline. It will regenerate and transform the person. It will inspire and heal him.

The Spiritual Leaders of the World are true Psychologists. They know that Plato was right and that ideas do rule the world. They make use of this basic law in their compassionate service of humanity. Cycle after cycle they set in motion true and sublime ideas for the benefit of humanity. These ideas once set in motion move on, influencing the minds of men and women for good, reawakening in their consciousness the memory of their essential divinity, their divine origin, their divine destiny. Again and yet again, do the Great Enlightened Ones strike the keynote of Truth and, reaffirming the Eternal Verities, generate a spiritual current for the elevation of humanity. It is thus that are born all spiritual movements intended to free the human mind from the dominion of ignorance

and selfishness, of prejudice and superstitions, and to direct it towards “the kingdom, the power, and the glory” of Brotherhood.

Thus was born in our world on the 17th of November 1875 the Theosophical Movement of our era. Conceived in the realm of the Spirit, in line with all previous efforts to free the human mind, it was launched through the instrumentality of that valiant woman, H. P. Blavatsky, in the city of New York. This month of November marks, therefore, the 127th Birth Anniversary of the present Theosophical Movement. It was launched into the world for the healing of nations and the redemption of Man. The great Truths it set in motion pertaining to the Immortal Spirit are charged with magnetic currents of healing power. They call men and women away from creedal exclusiveness, as from gross materialism, and reveal the blessings of a life of service as opposed to the life for self. Says Madame Blavatsky:

The love of truth is inherently the love of good; and so predominating over every desire of the soul, purifying it and assimilating it to the divine, thus governing every act of the individual, it raises man to a participation and communion with Divinity, and restores to him the likeness of God.

The long-exiled Spirit of man must be given its rightful place, and this can be achieved only by asserting man’s divine nature. We must endeavour to gain conviction of this mightiest of all truths and then learn to eradicate in ourselves all desires that are selfish and separative, making our minds pure and clean and worthy to be instruments of the Divine. The Future Man is like unto a God, a creative builder, a wise educator, a compassionate healer. The Theosophical Movement was started to lighten the way to the “new order of ages” and to make easier the travail of its birth. To this task each and every one can bring his own contribution. Our epoch is a great challenge. Let us meet it with understanding and with resourcefulness. Let us ideate on the Eternal Verities, those archetypal ideas which belong to the realm of the Spirit Immortal, and which possess the power to liberate our minds from the bondage of sense and lift them to the region of pure thought, to the vision of

truth, goodness, and beauty. Thus purified and regenerated, let us translate our vision into wise and self-sacrificing action.

Let us take courage then and have full confidence that if we remain true to the higher moral and spiritual ideas and values one day we shall witness the full victory of the Spirit. Have not the Sages of old proclaimed: “By unrighteousness man prospers, gains what appears desirable, conquers enemies, but perishes at the root”?

Our reverential salutations to the Blessed Ones whose benediction sent H. P. Blavatsky to our world to restate those Sublime Truths for the benefit of all humanity.

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UNITY of everything in the universe implies and justifies our belief in the existence of a knowledge at once scientific, philosophical and religious, showing the necessity and actuality of the connection of man and all things in the universe with each other; which knowledge, therefore, becomes essentially RELIGION, and must be called in its integrity and universality by the distinctive name of WISDOM-RELIGION.

It is from this WISDOM-RELIGION that all the various individual “Religions” (erroneously so called) have sprung, forming in their turn offshoots and branches, and also all the minor creeds, based upon and always originated through some personal experience in psychology. Every such religion, or religious offshoot, be it considered orthodox or heretical, wise or foolish, started originally as a clear and unadulterated stream from the Mother-Source. The fact that each became in time polluted with purely human speculations and even inventions, due to interested motives, does not prevent any from having been pure in its early beginnings. There are those creeds—we shall not call them religions—which have now been overlaid with the human element out of all recognition; others just showing signs of early decay; not one that escaped the hand of time. But each and all are of divine, because natural and true origin; aye—Mazdeism, Brahmanism, Buddhism as much as Christianity.

—H. P. BLAVATSKY

## SELF-EDUCATION AND SELF-GROWTH

THAT life is educative is a very common idea. Everyone talks about learning the lessons of life, about gaining experience, and so forth. But there is a great deal of confusion because people, generally speaking, do not know *what* it is they are supposed to learn. A boy at school or a young man in college knows *why* he is there and *what* he is learning. When a young man or woman specializes in any subject, he or she knows the purpose and has some idea of what future awaits him or her. But how many are aware of the nature of their studies in the School of Life? How many can answer the questions: “What is the purpose of this School of Life? When shall I graduate from here?” We are here to learn; but learn what, and for what purpose? Are people fitted for gaining knowledge from the experiences of day-to-day existence? Has their ordinary school and college education equipped them to live in peace and to grow in rhythm? Has their knowledge of science brought to them tranquillity of mind? Has their understanding of philosophy enabled them to face with equipoise the anguish of the heart? Has their study of poetry humanized and beautified their character?

In the struggle of existence, the learned and the unlearned pass through similar experiences of joy or sorrow, with more or less the same reactions to them. For example, in meeting frustrations in life, the learned graduate, even the expert scientist or the scholarly metaphysician, reacts more or less in the same manner as the unlearned peasant. Nay more, the unlearned poor often have a philosophy of life, however crude and simple, that enables them to face their troubles with a sturdier resignation than is displayed by the rich and the scholarly. Truly, the spiritual path is often easier to the poor and the guileless than to the cultured and the rich.

There is another view connected with the concept of self-education. It is said that a self-made man is a graduate of the School of Life. In the world of competition, in the race of life, the self-made man is one who has achieved success, one who has been able to amass wealth. But can such a man bear his misfortunes more stoically than the ordinary man? Is he master of his passions,

his anger, greed, etc.? If he has educated himself and made himself, can he teach others to attain what they are longing for—contentment with life, which is ever progressing?

In the same way, what is ordinarily known as self-education is not education of the self, in the self, about the self, or by the self; it only means the effort to get ordinary knowledge about one subject or another, which is often unrelated to life and its actual problems. So also, growth and progress mean growth in the worldly sense, progress in the social set. Progress is generally understood as moving on from poverty to wealth; and often that progress includes the gratifying of sense-life, of lust and greed. Thus common terms like self-education, progress, growth, etc., are loosely used, and neither in our numerous educational institutions, nor in our social order and the civilization of today, is there real Self-education and Self-growth.

Theosophy teaches that just as the human body is built on a pattern and evolves according to a plan, so also the Self in man unfolds according to pattern and plan. Modern science is unaware of that pattern, though along many lines, especially in chemistry, physiology and embryology, it is nearing the view that nature moves according to design. The human body with its definite number of organisms expresses a pattern, and the way in which that pattern grows indicates a plan. Theosophy teaches that the fundamental law of growth, from within without, in the human kingdom, is the Law of Self-Redemption. As Madame Blavatsky states in her *Secret Doctrine*:

There is one Eternal Law in nature, one that always tends to adjust contraries and to produce final harmony. It is owing to this law of spiritual development superseding the physical and purely intellectual, that mankind will become freed from its false gods, and find itself finally—SELF-REDEEMED. (II, 420)

This is a very significant statement and contains some basic ideas that we have to use for educating ourselves: (1) Man has to redeem himself; no one else can redeem him. In redeeming himself, he educates himself. (2) This redemption or self-education has a

dual aspect: We have to give up something, and we have to acquire something. We have to discard our false gods and we have to cooperate with the spiritual law of our own soul which is superior to both body and mind. This education leads to real growth by overcoming the conflict caused by body and mind.

Let us study these principles.

(1) *Man has to redeem himself.* Applied to our subject of educating ourselves, this principle indicates that we begin by acquiring the right attitude to all knowledge. That right attitude is not to accept anything on blind faith, without investigation and without reason. In the modern world, true science possesses that attitude, but in the ancient world the practice of testing and checking and verifying was cultivated in every department of knowledge. This is so important that even today the Chelas of the Great Gurus are taught to check by their reason and intuition the postulates and axioms of soul-science; further, they learn to check by actual experience and experiment what their reason has accepted as true.

As in the past, so today, students of Theosophy are advised to check in the same manner all they hear or read, beginning with simple and basic facts of Theosophy. The mental habit necessary consists in examining the propositions of Theosophy, not doubtingly to find flaws, but patiently trying to understand those propositions. This is important because most people today live blindly accepting what they hear or what they read. The human soul cannot redeem itself when its chief instrument of mind is allowed to be exploited by priest or politician, by scientist or sociologist. Even for boys and girls Theosophy advocates the cultivation of reason and intuition and the habit of inquiry and examination, patient and thorough. Theosophy does not favour what is ordinarily called religious education, *i.e.*, cramming into the heads of boys and girls religious beliefs which their own reason cannot accept, a method which, moreover, fosters the spirit of sectarianism. So every man and every woman must some day take the first step in self-education and begin to examine by the light of reason his or her own beliefs, customs and habits. In this examination each one needs the guidance of knowledge, and the sincere individual soon

finds that there *is* real guidance in the ancient *Brahma-Vidya*, which in modern times we call Theosophy.

(2) *The task of self-redemption has a dual aspect.* Man must become free from his false gods, and, next, he must find the spiritual Law working within himself.

What are false gods? We are not using the words “god” and “gods” merely in the religious sense, though the god of the religion into which one is born is accepted blindly by most people. It is said that Hindus are polytheists because they believe in many gods, while Muslims, Christians and Jews are monotheists, *i.e.*, believers in only one god. But when we analyse their beliefs, customs and habits, we find that *all* of them worship different kinds of gods. The Muslim does not only worship Allah, or the Jew only Jehovah; all worship also the god of wealth, the god of fame, the god of power, the god of happiness, and so on. There are many gods a person has.

First, there is the god of one’s own creed. The Muslim believes in Allah, the Parsi in Ahura Mazda, the Christian in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

Then there is the god of society to which that Muslim or Parsi or Christian belongs. In our civilization, we are influenced by what other people say and do. For instance, the Parsi is afraid of public opinion and will ask, “What will my community say?” Often he is more afraid of his community than even of Ahura Mazda! Similarly, the church-going Christian is more anxious about the good opinion of his priests and prelates and fellow religionists than the good opinion of Jesus the Christ!

Next, the same person who follows one god in religion, another god in society, adopts still another god in the shape of the programme of his political party and that party’s leaders. Here we come across people who follow the god of nationalism.

Then, the same person who has religious, social and political gods adopts still another from science. He supports his questionable habits, his own likes and dislikes, by quoting what he believes to be facts of science. A meateater, for instance, may quote scientific authorities against vegetarianism, because he likes meat! One fond

of alcoholic beverages may quote some “authority” who says that alcohol in small doses can do no harm and even does good!

We could go on quoting many more “gods” that ordinary men and women worship blindly. Everyone has to learn to put away these “gods” of blind belief and to seek the Light of the Spirit, of the one true God. That true God is our own Divine Self who is capable of enlightening our own reason. And more—the way in which that soul functions, enables us to adjust all contraries and to produce harmony.

In each one of us the body, the mind and the spirit have come together. We may or may not recognize this, but our recognition or non-recognition does not make any difference to the fact. In each one of us the Law of Spirit operates; just as laws of body govern the body, and laws of mind govern the mind, so also the laws of soul and spirit govern their workings. Physiology teaches us a great deal about the laws of the body, and psychology teaches us that the mind moves according to its own laws. While physiology is on surer ground, modern western psychology is a young and halting science and the actual knowledge it offers is meagre. When we come to soul and spirit, we find that modern science does not even recognize them. Theosophy reverses the process and begins with the soul as an independent entity using the mind and the body. All of us know that body and mind are two of the constituents of man, but most people are vague and indefinite about the soul.

The maxim, “a sound mind in a sound body,” is accepted by all. But the combination is somewhat rare. Who has not experienced the conflict of mind and body within himself? Illness of body disables the mind; mental moods affect the body. And because there is conflict within us, we find ourselves in conflict with other people. This internal conflict is the greatest problem for healers of body and of mind. How to reduce the conflict to a minimum and establish harmony to the maximum degree? We cannot fully succeed till we recognize that there is the spiritual Law of the Soul, which alone is capable of resolving this conflict. Self-education consists in establishing rhythm and harmony within ourselves by not allowing the pairs of opposites to arise in the life of body and mind.

Theosophy teaches that the soul in us is alone capable of establishing harmony between the conflicting factors of our own nature. Our senses and our reason often advise contrary actions; our body and our mind are in conflict; our likes are selfish and our aspirations are unselfish; as long as the soul, as the supreme and final judge, will not act, so long conflict and warfare will continue. And as long as the conflict between the members of our own constitution continues, so long shall we find opponents and enemies in the world. For this reason, we find that such scriptures of the soul as the *Gita*, the *Gathas*, the *Dhammapada*, the *Tao Te King* refer to the pairs of opposites. Zoroaster begins his great sermon by announcing that there are two spirits opposed to each other. In the *Gita*, over and over again we are called upon to rise above the pairs of opposites. Chapter IV says about the wise man:

He is contented with whatever he receives fortuitously, is free from the influence of “the pairs of opposites” and from envy, the same in success and failure; even though he act he is not bound by the bonds of action. (IV, 22)

We find an identical teaching in the passage from *The Secret Doctrine* we have considered above. The spiritual man is full of contentment with his lot—with his environment, with his Karma—but he has first to go beyond the pairs of opposites.

There are many pairs of opposites, but their main divisions are three: heat and cold in reference to the body; pain and pleasure in reference to feelings and emotions; fame and ignominy in reference to the mind. These three are further summed up in one supreme pair of opposites—*raga-dvesha*, attraction and aversion. A truly spiritual person is full of contentment with whatever comes, by the power of rising above attractions and aversions; and because he has done so, he is without envy. There are many people who seem resigned to their lot, but it is a false kind of contentment; they are content because there is nothing else to do. Their disposition has become sour and bitter. That is not true resignation; they speak of the “good luck” of others, and even though they may not be envious, they do wish that good luck for themselves. This

false contentment and resignation has a corroding influence; it weakens the mind, narrows the heart, and dulls the very vitality, *Prana*, of the body. In daily life, we have to act; in the battles of existence we have to accept a failure here and a defeat there, but we must do so by rising above the pairs of opposites, so that we face with equal-mindedness success as well as failure, and face them with cheer and not with a whine.

Thus, to face the events of life is to learn the lessons they bring. Let us overcome the two main obstacles: First, do not be passively resigned and repeat, “This is my Karma”; but say cheerfully, “Now let me learn what this particular Karma has to teach. Next, do not be afraid to act; do not try to run away from the field of duty. The *Gita* teaches that by acting, by doing our duties, the fetters of destiny, the bonds of fate, the chains of Karma, fall away. A truly spiritual man is not bound and feels not the good or evil effects of Karma, yet he lives and labours. Though acting, he is not bound.

All of us ordinary mortals are crushed by the many pairs of opposites; nowhere can we be free from their deadening effects. After the birth of the body, the infant learns to gain the sight of the eyes. At school, in college, in the struggles of life, the young man or woman gains the sight of mind; but very few obtain the sight of the heart, because they do not educate themselves. Heart-perception is what we have to obtain, and growth of the self is marked by that perception of the heart. As long as we do not obtain heart-perception, we are infants crying in the night, crying for the light, and the end of life comes ere we have found that light. Metaphorically speaking, men and women are dead units; it is said that in the midst of life we live in death. Theosophy says to the student who has awakened himself by self-education: Behold, you live in the midst of the dead. The truly living are men and women of heart-perception, and the mark of that heart-perception is joyous contentment which energizes them to fear not the evils of life but to conquer them. Such Conquerors of Life and Death are the Perfected Souls who act as Teachers to all who are pupils in the School of Life.

## DIVINE WISDOM AND ITS KNOWERS

THE first essential point that a beginner in Theosophy needs to grasp is that the Ancient Wisdom, a portion of which has been revealed to us today and which goes by the name of Theosophy, is a definite system of thought or of knowledge, to which additions cannot be made and from which nothing can be subtracted. That knowledge has been arrived at by a definite method, and both the knowledge and the method are invariable. Why that particular method was employed rests on the fact that all other methods were tried out and were found wanting; that method which has proved itself is the Theosophical method.

The Ten Items of *Isis Unveiled* (II, 587-89) contain a hint as to the nature of this method. The first three items deal with the system of knowledge—with the assertion of the reign of law in everything and with the triune aspect of Nature and of Man. Then we are told that there is a right method of using knowledge and a wrong one, one leading to Adeptship and the other to mediumship. The Adept, by using his spiritual vision, can know all that has been known or can be known. Adepts belong to a race of Seers. Seeing is a spiritual act, and even the organs of physical sight, our eyes, are sometimes spoken of as the windows of the soul. What does an Adept or a true Seer see? *That which exists*. And that which exists is always and invariably the same; it is the same from immemorial time and never varies or changes one hair's breadth. Therefore, this method of "seeing" brings to the Adept the vision of the Truth which is precise, which is definite, and which has its own code of laws, as has any physical science.

Theosophy is an evolved and not an evolving or progressive system of thought. Nor is it a revelation. In *The Key to Theosophy* this statement is made: "Theosophy, in its abstract meaning, is Divine Wisdom, or the aggregate of the knowledge and wisdom that underlie the Universe." How, then, can anything be added to it? *Our* insight into the knowledge might increase, but the knowledge itself cannot increase. It cannot undergo any change. The Theosophy of 1875, or even of five thousand or five million

years ago, cannot progress and become something different today. To take an analogy: there are seven notes in the musical scale, and no musician can invent an eighth note, though he may make endless permutations and combinations of those seven. So also there are seven prismatic colours, and no painter can bring into existence an eighth colour, though he can create an endless variety of shades by combining those seven. Likewise, everything in the universe, including man, is composed of seven principles; those seven can yield many permutations and combinations, but there cannot be an eighth principle.

The Knowers of wisdom are the true Scientists who have based their system on universal principles; they know the source of all sciences, all philosophies, all religions, all arts, all branches of knowledge, and all permutations and combinations of these. Therefore, their code of knowledge, their system of thought, their aggregate of the wisdom that underlies the Universe, is complete, in which nothing whatsoever is left out.

If it is true that that system of thought which is the source and synthesis of all knowledge is complete, it is also true that that knowledge which does not derive from that source cannot be precise or complete. Ignorance is of two kinds: ignorance which is absence of true knowledge and ignorance which is knowledge of the false. One may be very learned, but learned about things that are not true. While on the one hand there are in the world men of great learning but little knowledge, on the other hand there are Those Who Know. The first Item of *The Secret Doctrine*, known to students as "The Ancient Source," explains the method by which "the accumulated Wisdom of the Ages" was arrived at. What is said there might appear rather dogmatic when first read, but once the fact that all life is evolving is admitted, one is led to the conclusion that "there must be beings in the universe whose intelligence is as much beyond ours as ours exceeds that of the black beetle," and who know all that needs to be known. These Knowers of Wisdom whom we call Masters assert that in Their Philosophy there is no problem that remains unsolved. Problems may remain unsolved for those who do not know where to look,

but the solutions to all problems are within the reach of those who seek for them in Masters' Philosophy.

Evolution implies the gradual solution of problems. To each student of the Ancient Wisdom certain truths are apparent, have become matters of inner conviction. If the new knowledge he gains conforms with and completes that which he has proved for himself already, then he is on the right track. That is what is meant by each student coming into the possession of the method whereby he can check and verify for himself.

Where does he begin? At the place where he finds himself now. Everyone has spiritual powers, mental powers, sense powers. The senses of some are keener than those of others; the minds of some are sharper and more profound than the minds of others, and so with soul powers. Each must begin to find out, with the help of the powers that are already his, whether the knowledge he possesses is true knowledge, is part of the aggregate of the wisdom that underlies the Universe. So the student encounters knowledge that is true, ignorance that is the absence of knowledge, and ignorance that is the presence of false knowledge. A student of Theosophy can and has to be excused for not possessing knowledge which is true in its entirety; but there is no excuse for him to hold knowledge which is false. The erasing from the mind of false knowledge is the starting point of inquiry into the system of knowledge which is the aggregate of wisdom, precise and complete in itself, and which is called Theosophy today.

It is necessary to get a clear perception that Truth is a definite thing. For the ordinary mind it is difficult to conceive that all that it is possible for the human soul to know is, so to speak, codified, systematized, brought together. This might seem a startling proposition, but there is not a philosopher worthy of the name in the West, not to speak of the East, who has not proceeded on that basis. This conception of knowledge which is absolute, from which nothing can be taken away without distorting the whole and to which nothing can be added, is found in Pythagoras and in Plato; nay, more, in the modern philosophers, in the very concepts of time, space and motion which Kant and those who followed him

presented. What Kant states in a speculative way, Theosophy puts forth as a fact: that there is a code of knowledge, tabulated and complete, which can be used as a criterion to judge any other code or system.

As all forms of life are synthesized in the One Life, so all forms of knowledge, religions, sciences and philosophies are synthesized in the one root from which they proceeded. In *The Key to Theosophy* (pp. 2-3), H.P.B. says: "The chief aim of the Founders of the Eclectic Theosophical School was one of the three objects of its modern successor, the Theosophical Society, namely, to reconcile all religions, sects and nations *under a common system of ethics, based on eternal verities*" (italics ours). So this system is one of eternal verities, verities on which are based the ethics which enable one to establish an intelligent relationship between oneself and Nature as a whole.

Further on in *The Key to Theosophy* (p. 4) H.P.B. says:

The "Wisdom-Religion" was one in antiquity; and the sameness of primitive religious philosophy is proven to us by the identical doctrines taught to the Initiates during the MYSTERIES, an institution once universally diffused. "All the old worships indicate the existence of a single Theosophy anterior to them. The key that is to open one must open all; otherwise it cannot be the right key." (Eclect. Philo.)

As stated above, this key enables one to find out whether a particular system that arises today is right or wrong; and, if right, how far right, wholly or partly, in reference to those verities which are eternal. On pages 7-8 of the *Key* we read: "The WISDOM-RELIGION was ever one, and being the last word of possible human knowledge, was, therefore, carefully preserved. It preceded by long ages the Alexandrian Theosophists, reached the modern, and will survive every other religion and philosophy." Again, in the Introductory to *The Secret Doctrine* (p. xxxiv) H.P.B. says:

The Secret Doctrine was the universally diffused religion of the ancient and prehistoric world. Proofs of its diffusion, authentic records of its history, a complete chain of documents,

showing its character and presence in every land, together with the teaching of all its great adepts, exist to this day in the secret crypts of libraries belonging to the Occult Fraternity.

In *Lucifer* for October 1889 Madame Blavatsky stated:

What I do believe in is: (1) the unbroken oral teachings revealed by living *divine* men during the infancy of mankind to the elect among men; (2) that it has reached us *unaltered*; and (3) that the MASTERS are thoroughly versed in the science based on such uninterrupted teaching.

In H.P.B.'s article, "Is Theosophy a Religion?" (reprinted in *U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 1* from *Lucifer* for November 1888), we read: "Tearing off with no uncertain hand the thick veil of dead-letter with which every old religious scripture was cloaked, scientific Theosophy, learned in the cunning symbolism of the ages, reveals to the scoffer at old wisdom the origin of the world's faiths and sciences." Further on in the same article she speaks of "the existence of a knowledge at once scientific, philosophical and religious." So, again and again one comes upon the idea that there is this record. Mr. Judge speaks of it in the very first chapter of *The Ocean of Theosophy*, where he says that the Wisdom-Religion is "complete in itself and sees no unsolvable mystery anywhere." Why? Because it is "the last word of possible human knowledge." He speaks of it as the mathematics of the soul. He mentions the one single Brotherhood of Adepts, whose members all profess and practise the one Doctrine.

Where is this single Doctrine to be found? It is in two places: First, there are the actual objective records which are always available to him who can read the language of signs, of symbols, of glyphs. As H.P.B. points out in the First Item of *The Secret Doctrine* (I, 272):

Such is the mysterious power of Occult symbolism, that the facts which have actually occupied countless generations of initiated seers and prophets to marshal, set down and explain, in the bewildering series of evolutionary progress, are all recorded on a few pages of geometrical signs and glyphs. The

flashing gaze of those seers has penetrated into the very kernel of matter, and recorded the soul of things there, where an ordinary profane, however learned, would have perceived but the external work of form.

From time to time, portions of the record are made public or semi-public. *The Secret Doctrine* is a public exposition of the record; all the sacred scriptures of the world are a public exposition of the selfsame record. Most of these are symbolical representations of the knowledge. Then, too, there are different methods whereby those symbols are put forward at different times. Today, the record that is made public is set down in words, because we use that method of expression. In other days and other places knowledge was conveyed differently; *e.g.*, through pictorial representations. Ancient temples and caves had carvings or paintings, which depicted in detail the whole scheme of evolution. To give but one example, in one single picture all the steps of reaching Buddhahood are given.

Besides the objective records, there is still another place where the true doctrine is preserved:

Events which were never written outside the human memory, but which were religiously transmitted from one generation to another, and from race to race, may have been preserved by constant transmission "within the book volume of the brain," and through countless aeons, with more truth and accuracy than inside any written document or record. (*S.D.*, II, 424)

This is the living record that the Masters of Wisdom carry "within the book volume of the brain," from where it can never be effaced. One cannot understand the record, whether a written work, a pictorial or dramatic representation, or a symbolic teaching, put forward by Them or Their Messengers, without the key; and the key in the final analysis is—the Masters. The Teaching and the Teacher are always one; never can they be separated.

## THE DIGNITY OF WORK

WHILE it is true that India continues to ail from the disease of untouchability, in spite of official steps to eradicate it, the roots of the evil, in one form or another, are present everywhere. The race problem and the class distinctions that exist in other parts of the world are but types of the disease of caste.

Ordinarily, socialism deals with the economic and political aspects of human society; the moral basis of socialism is neglected and that neglect is, in a great measure, responsible for the failure of socialism. Everyone talks of Brotherhood, and even of Universal Brotherhood, but how many accept the full implications of the qualifying adjective “universal”? Capitalists and those who advocate capitalism are looked upon as enemies, actual or potential, by every budding socialist! Workers everywhere are fighting those for whom they work. The philosophy of socialism, its metaphysical foundation, is rarely considered.

A single glance at Nature reveals the variety of forms of life: stars and star dust; layers of atmosphere, proceeding from unimaginable rarity to suffocating density; under the earth many minerals; on its surface countless varieties of plants, insects, reptiles, birds, beasts; and human beings from the abject savage to the sage whose knowledge encompasses the ultimate divisions of Time itself. This stupendous variety is persistent. Geology, botany, zoology, have not discovered and never will discover an epoch when variety of species is absent. Anthropology and history, the latter aided by archaeology, reveal that savage tribes and civilized clans have ever been in existence, and they ever will be. Differences cannot be done away with, and least of all by political legislation. Inequality of mental capacity and of moral stamina is a persisting factor in human evolution, and these mental and moral inequalities reflect themselves in economic and environmental inequalities.

Is there, then, no hope for the realization of Universal Brotherhood?

There is, but we must first abandon two false ideas: (1) That

differences are detrimental to Brotherhood. (2) That equality is Brotherhood—men will not be brothers because they are equals; equals *do* quarrel.

The metaphysical foundation of true Spiritual Socialism is to be found, not in Marx, but in the philosophy of the Buddha, of the Sages of the Upanishads, whose doctrines were carried to the Western world by their devotees, and among the latter by Pythagoras. The Greek doctrine of “the Many in the One, the One in the Many,” was but an echo of the Upanishadic teaching of a single substance-principle from which the myriad forms of Life emerge.

To quote but one passage out of scores from the Upanishads:

As from a blazing fire, sparks by the thousand issue forth,  
and they all are of like form, so from the Imperishable, my  
friend, many beings are produced, manifold in nature.

The Buddhistic view that the entire manifested universe is composed of a milliard beings, all of one substance, *svabhavat*, is again the same teaching.

These ancient philosophers did not reject the differences and inequalities among people. They accepted them as necessary factors in human progression and perfection. But they proceeded to point to the Source, the One Life, which did make all humans brothers and sisters because they had a common spiritual origin; but this did not mean that all had an equal mental capacity, or an equal moral stamina.

This is not the occasion for a philosophical disquisition on this intricate principle of metaphysics; but unless our legislators study it and grasp the proposition to some extent, they will be lured by the false dicta of materialistic socialism or be caught up in other false political theories.

One of the thorny problems that confront every individual in his own life, and every legislator as he thinks about improving the status of the “factory-hand” and the farmer, the “wage-slave” and the servant, is also rooted in this metaphysical doctrine of “the Many in the One.” The dignity of labour is being preached, but

unless its other aspect, reverence for life, is also taught, that dignity will not be recognized and accepted.

All work is important. Differences of work there must be; all cannot perform the same duty. Yet each organ in the human body has its own importance. In the olden days in India, the difference between the four castes was recognized, but there was no feeling of superiority or inferiority. That objectionable distinction came only with the corruption of caste.

All useful professions are of equal value to the State, however different they may be in their function. The basic idea of right education, of the young or of the adult, should be to teach reverence for all forms of life and to look upon all types of work as equally sacred. The way to promotion should not be necessarily through a change of profession; there is promotion too in the improving of the function one is already engaged in, and such promotion is open to all. A clerk by becoming more efficient grows in his own position and is superior to a manager neglectful of his duties. And there are inner contentment and mental satisfaction to be taken into account along with the economic advantages. In our civilization we are apt to overemphasize the value of the coin, forgetting that its real value lies in our own capacity to use it in the right way. While it is imperative that the rich be taught—it would seem as if it would have to be almost compulsorily—to use their wealth properly for the uplift of society, we should not neglect to teach the poor to respect all work, and to uphold the dignity of all labour.

The moral of this principle which we have just pointed out is admirably brought out in a poem which deserves to be better known for its philosophy. In “Stradivarius,” George Eliot puts great spiritual truths in the mouth of that superb craftsman-creator of violins. Antonio Stradivari “cherished his sight and touch by temperance,” and possessing the sense which loves perfectness, “made perfect violins.”

...he never cried,

“Why was I born to this monotonous task  
Of making violins?” or flung them down

To suit with hurling act a well-hurled curse  
At labour on such perishable stuff.

Naldo, a painter, weary of his labours at the age of thirty-one, has a conversation with Stradivari who was sixty-nine; Naldo teases the violin-maker to tell his aims—whether he was after gold or after fame—and wonders: “Why work with painful nicety?” Stradivari’s explanation contains a highly practical philosophy of life:

“I like the gold—well, yes—but not for meals.  
And as my stomach, so my eye and hand,  
And inward sense that works along with both,  
Have hunger that can never feed on coin.  
Who draws a line and satisfies his soul,  
Making it crooked where it should be straight?”

... God be praised,

Antonio Stradivari has an eye  
That winces at false work and loves the true,  
With hand and arm that play upon the tool  
As willingly as any singing bird  
Sets him to sing his morning roundelay,  
Because he likes to sing and likes the song.”

He adds that God gives skill to those who play his violins, but he, Stradivari, provides the instruments to play upon, whereupon Naldo sarcastically asks:

“What! were God  
At fault for violins, thou absent?”

“Yes;

He were at fault for Stradivari’s work.”

“Why, many hold Giuseppe’s violins  
As good as thine.”

“May be: they are different.

His quality declines: he spoils his hand  
With over-drinking. But were his the best,  
He could not work for two. My work is mine,  
And, heresy or not, if my hand slacked  
I should rob God—since He is fullest good—

Leaving a blank instead of violins.  
 I say, not God Himself can make man's best  
 Without best man to help Him. I am one best  
 Here in Cremona, using sunlight well  
 To fashion finest maple till it serves  
 More cunningly than throats, for harmony.  
 'Tis rare delight: I would not change my skill  
 To be the Emperor with bungling hands,  
 And lose my work, which comes as natural  
 As self at waking."

The closing touch of the poem is fine. Says the great creator of magnificent violins:

"...'Tis God gives skill,  
 But not without men's hands: He could not make  
 Antonio Stradivari's violins  
 Without Antonio. Get thee to thy easel."

It is this spirit of self-respect, of reverence for one's own tasks, which endows all work with superb dignity. The scavenger and the sweeper are as important to society as the lawyer and the engineer—from one point of view even more important, for the sweeper can do without the lawyer, but can the lawyer do without the scavenger?

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WISDOM as well as virtue is needed in him who aspires to the "highest development." Virtue leads only to heaven, wisdom leads to union with the whole. But wisdom must at last have virtue as companion. Virtue pursued and practised through many lives will lead at last to wisdom, yet wisdom first attained makes the cultivation of virtue easier. The highest development cannot be attained in any single incarnation. The teachers say that we must seek the company of those who are pure and wise, who lead holy lives, and that we must look for knowledge with persistency, humbleness, and faith, and that thus setting our feet upon the path the goal will loom in sight after many weary struggles.

—W. Q. JUDGE

## THE KEY OF HARMONY

FROM the foundation of *Dana*, love for all because of the oneness of essence, begins the approach to *Shila*, "harmony in word and act." If we have really grasped the idea that what affects one affects all, this harmony should not be difficult of achievement. But the apparently simple may in fact be very abstruse!

*Shila* is the key that "counterbalances the cause and the effect." What does this mean? We are all the time reaping the effects of prior causes and creating new causes that will bear fruit later on. Why should harmony in word and act counterbalance the cause and the effect? Why is *thought* not mentioned, though thought is the originator of causes? If we have learnt already to "thrill in response to every sigh and thought of all that lives and breathes," why are we now asked, as a further step, to practise harmony in word and act?

What has been learnt by the mind and heart has to be translated into words and acts, and it is the effort to do so that makes life difficult. Though we may agree with what the key of *Dana* teaches us, yet when difficulties arise we do not act as we know we should, because, for generations, we have been used to another line of life—that of self-preservation. It takes time to get accustomed to a new life, and though the performance of right action often gives us difficulty, yet continuity of effort will eventually bring success.

The passage on page 56 of *The Voice of the Silence* helps us to understand the real meaning of harmony and why it is necessary for us to establish it or, rather, take our part in it. Just as *Light on the Path* asks us to "listen to the song of life" and learn from it that we are "a part of the harmony," so here we are given the analogy of a *Vina*; its strings are likened to disciples, and its sounding-board to mankind. The hand that "sweeps it" is the GREAT WORLD-SOUL. Each string must be in harmony with all the other strings; if not, it will break and be cast away.

Harmony is needed everywhere, between all. Nature may seem harsh when it destroys temporarily those units which fail to be in harmony with cyclic law and evolution, and which disturb the

equilibrium of the Whole; but the time must come when for the sake of the Whole the single unit must be sacrificed—not for ever, but till it learns the lesson of harmony. It is not an easy lesson to learn and trial and error there needs must be at first. The goal is only reached by succeeding in a series of examinations, and even if there is failure there has to be the determination to try again. The trial run of a vast ocean liner affords an illustration of this point. The individual screws, nails, pegs, planks and all parts of the machinery have to “learn” to move together and make the ship carry on as a unit. So with the running in of a new car. Time and care have to be expended at first so that there is no undue strain on the parts as they learn to run as a unit, each one performing its own function perfectly. If any part is found defective, then that unresponsive part has to be changed. The law of the eternal fitness of things is universally operative. So all disciples have to become attuned to the Master-Mind, the Over-Soul.

During the first stage of the Path between *Dana* and *Shila*, while we are still novices, all seems well. Love, indeed, is the fulcrum that moves the world, and filled with the love of *Dana*, we pass on through green vales. The nightingales sing to us their glorious song of hope, and birds of radiant plumage chant our success. They sing of the fivefold Bodhisattva virtues—the *panchashila*—and of the seven steps in Knowledge: (1) Mindfulness or attentiveness or self-possession, (2) Wisdom or investigation of the Doctrine (*Dhamma*), (3) Energy, (4) Joyousness or Rapture, (5) Serenity, (6) Concentration or Meditation, (7) Equanimity.

We are supposed to have progressed in these directions to some extent in order to pass through the gate of *Dana* and be on the way to *Shila*. This way is verdant, too, but it winds uphill towards a rocky top. As with all mountain tops, this one also is hidden in mists, and all is dark beyond. Now it is, when we cannot see the way ahead, that we begin to feel unsteady. We forget the melody of hope we had heard earlier, and doubt begins to assail us.

Why does doubt arise? Because, lacking clear vision of the path ahead, we begin to fear. This fear comes from no definite point and, before we are overwhelmed by it, we must find out what it is

we are fearing. It is not so much fear of consequences as of the unknown, for the immediate goal is hidden in mists and the going is hard. Without the sunlight of the heart we seem to be surrounded by darkness, and we see nothing and hear nothing. If we have not developed, at least to some extent, the *Shila* virtue of harmony in word and act, then we trip, and the Karmic consequences bruise our feet. Only when our feet are firmly planted in *Dana* can they be steady on the rocky path, so that those rocks do not harm us. With doubt killing out hope we begin to get into a condition where we do not know what to do; we cannot see straight; doubt makes us hesitate and, unless conquered, in time roots our feet to the spot and we cannot go ahead.

At this stage we have to begin the practice of *Kshanti* and be patient. But we are apt to cry out: “How can one be patient when all around is dark and treacherous?” Only the reawakening of *Dana*, love immortal, gives a meaning to our journey, *i.e.*, the helping of others, and can enable us to gain fortitude and thus to practise patience. Judge, the victorious disciple, tells us that “the way gets clearer as we go on, but as *we* get clearer we get less anxious as to the way ahead.” When the fog descends and we cannot see ahead, we ought to sit down and wait.

Let us always remember that “Man has never been without a Friend.” Men never will be without a friend, for there is the Silent Watcher who never quits his self-chosen post as the guide and protector of weary pilgrims. Why? “Because the lonely, sore-footed pilgrims on their way back to their *home* are never sure to the last moment of not losing their way in this limitless desert of illusion and matter called Earth-Life” (*The Secret Doctrine*, I, 208). We are not alone any more. This will keep us going until we reach the gate which opens for us the *Kshanti* Path.

It is, again, the indestructibility of Spirit, the SELF, Love immortal, which gives us the solid foundation of hope turned to fortitude, and the necessary patience and quietude to reach the final goal.

## THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVITY

IN the chapter on “What Is Practical Theosophy?” in *The Key to Theosophy*, Madame H. P. Blavatsky names reincarnation as one of the four links of the Golden Chain that should bind humanity into one family, one Universal Brotherhood.

The practical application of the teaching about reincarnation is something that each of us should consider, especially if we are interested in the amelioration of such social conditions as are adverse to the healthy and harmonious development of our fellow beings.

First, let us consider the relationship that exists between ourselves as reincarnating entities or egos and all the other egos whom we meet in our present incarnation and who collectively form the brotherhood that we refer to as the human family. Intellectually, we may perceive this Brotherhood to be a fact, but full realization of it can only come when we live as brothers in our daily life.

As reincarnating egos we have been in many bodies of flesh before, and the thoughts, feelings and actions generated in past lives have combined to lay the foundation for the type of body with its various characteristics that we inherit and use in this present life. The ideas we accept today as a basis for our thinking, feeling and action will in a future life be the foundation for the inner environment of thoughts and feelings that will mould a form through which these inner forces will find appropriate expression in the outer world of action.

Race, nation and family provide the necessary channels through which we acquire knowledge, by experience and observation, to accomplish the work for which we originally incarnated on earth. This work is the full acceptance of our responsibility as soul entities, and the discharging of all our daily duties from this viewpoint. It is because in our past lives our thoughts, feelings and actions affected other egos making up the race, nation and family to which we belonged that we are magnetically drawn to them again in this life, and they become our family and friends in the present and

reap with us the effects of the causes sown. Under the Law of Karma, a law which balances the cause and the effect, outer circumstances and conditions are seen to be the effects and reflections of the collective thoughts, feelings and actions of all the egos making up the race, nation and family in which we reincarnate. Our intellectual, psychic and physical progress is, therefore, intimately connected with that of the collectivity of which we are a part.

The social conditions and environment we perceive around us are, from this point of view, partially of our own making, and so efforts at reform must be individual as well as collective. How this type of reform, culminating in true freedom on the intellectual, psychic and physical planes of being, can be achieved, may next be considered.

How can we think, feel and act in this present body so that our instruments may be attuned to the Great World-Soul, and in that attunement, find the power and knowledge to work intelligently with Nature’s laws, and the capacity to help our brothers and sisters to accomplish a similar task? This question is clearly answered by Madame Blavatsky in *The Key to Theosophy*, where, in answer to the questions about Karma and Reincarnation and the individual’s responsibilities to others, she says:

The individual cannot separate himself from the race, nor the race from the individual. The law of Karma applies equally to all, although all are not equally developed. In helping on the development of others, the Theosophist believes that he is not only helping them to fulfil their Karma, but that he is also, in the strictest sense, fulfilling his own....If our present lives depend upon the development of certain principles which are a growth from the germs left by a previous existence, the law holds good as regards the future. Once grasp the idea that universal causation is not merely present, but past, present and future, and every action on our present plane falls naturally and easily into its true place, and is seen in its true relation to ourselves and to others. Every mean and selfish action sends us backward and not forward, while every noble thought and

every unselfish deed are stepping-stones to the higher and more glorious planes of being.

These words are self-explanatory. Our task as individuals and Theosophists is simple: it is the acquisition, through study and application of the teachings of Theosophy, of the necessary knowledge by which we can promote true social co-operation and real efforts for social amelioration, with a view to the ultimate social emancipation of all such souls as are caught up in the web of Karma, helping them to understand and develop that sense of duty which a thorough understanding of the twin doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation alone can bring.

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WE have to go behind any idea of *a* Being, to the source of *all* being—to a basis common to the highest and to the lowest being. That basis and source is not to be found by looking *outward* at all, but *is* the very power to perceive, wherever there is life. Spirit, Life, Consciousness are the same in every being—undivided, however many and varied the perceptions. Evolution is not a compelling force from *without*, but the *impelling* force of Spirit from *within*, urging on to better and better expression. All advancement is from *within*. All the knowledge that we gain, all the experience that we obtain, is obtained and held *within*. Each one, then, is the Seer; all the rest are seen. So, the knowledge that we have to obtain is not information from without, not the thoughts of other men, but an understanding of our own essential nature, which represents every element in the great universe, from the basis of all life to every outward expression, and every possibility of further expression—just as each drop of water contains in itself everything existing in the great ocean from which it came. Nor does Law exist outside of us. Law is always *inherent* in Spirit; it is the action which brings reaction in every individual case, and to the collective mass of humanity. We are here under law and under justice. There is no such thing as injustice in the universe.

—ROBERT CROSBIE

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

In recent times, experts have been redefining the theory of evolution. Darwin's theory—that evolution proceeds by a process of natural selection—is being challenged even now, 140 years after the publication of *The Origin of Species*. The recent emergence of the intelligent design theory, which has received much attention, has raised further doubts about Darwinism.

J. Scott Turner, associate professor of biology at the State University of New York's College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, says that evolution is much more complex than Darwinism or even neo-Darwinism makes it out to be. In his essay in *The World and I* (July 2002) he writes:

The world seems perfused with “designedness”—a harmonious match between structure and function—that could mean only one thing: the world had a designer. The 19th-century logic prevailing when Darwin introduced his radical alternative is embodied in William Paley's famous simile: a watch implies a watchmaker, a designer.

Darwin cut the stays of this confining worldview. In his eyes, designedness—what we now call adaptation—was not evidence of an intelligent designer but of the perfecting power of natural selection. In this view...there is no intelligence or purpose guiding the process. To use another famous simile (that of Richard Dawkins), evolution is the product of a blind watchmaker.

Darwin's assertions were controversial from the start. The most serious criticisms came not from the conservatively religious but from many of the most respected biologists of his day. Their problem stemmed from Darwin's inability to explain how heredity—crucial to his theory—actually worked...

Much of 20th-century biology was driven by the search for the nature and structure of the gene, which culminated in 1953 with the discovery by Francis Crick, James Watson, Maurice Wilkins, and Rosalind Frankin of the double-helical structure of DNA.... In its obsession with genes as the centre of evolution, modern biology has been led away from the phenomenon of

adaptation—designedness—that is evolution’s foundation....Genes cannot be the whole show.

In other words, neither Darwin’s natural selection, nor the emphasis on genes that permeates neo-Darwinism, can offer a satisfactory explanation.

The challenging of old theories in the light of new evidence is one of the distinct signs of the times. As in many other branches of knowledge, so in the field of evolution, this trend is to be seen. *The Secret Doctrine* stated that while the Darwinian hypothesis is *partially* correct, as the Occultists are ready to concede (I, 187), the *true* doctrine of evolution will remain an enigma to the human mind “until metaphysical as well as physical inquiries are much more advanced” (I, 600). What scientists are now contending, *The Secret Doctrine* posited as far back as 1888, that “natural selection,” or the survival of the fit and the elimination of the unfit in the struggle for existence, cannot be credited with the power of *originating* species. *The Secret Doctrine* (II, 648-49) states:

The truth is that the differentiating “causes” known to modern science only come into operation after the *physicalization of the primeval animal root-types out of the astral*. Darwinism only meets Evolution at its midway point—that is to say when astral evolution has given place to the play of the ordinary physical forces with which our present senses acquaint us. But even here the Darwinian Theory, even with the “expansions” recently attempted, is inadequate to meet the facts of the case. The underlying physiological variation in species—one to which all other laws are subordinate and secondary—is a sub-conscious intelligence pervading matter, ultimately traceable to a REFLECTION of the Divine and Dhyan-Chohanian wisdom. A not altogether dissimilar conclusion has been arrived at by so well known a thinker as Ed. von Hartmann, who, despairing of the efficacy of *unaided* Natural Selection, regards evolution as intelligently guided by the UNCONSCIOUS (the cosmic *Logos* of Occultism). But the latter acts only mediately through FOHAT, or Dhyan-Chohanian energy, and not quite in the direct manner which the great pessimist describes.

Organized religions started deteriorating a long time back, when the Living Wisdom of the Prophet was forgotten and the priests took over. Every religion that begins as a liberating agency ends as a vast prison-house. Built on the renunciation of its founder, it becomes a possessive institution in the hands of its priests, and an active centre of schism and strife.

The need of religion in this troubled world is, however, keenly felt by the masses, and new religious movements are springing up everywhere, writes Toby Lester in his article in *The Atlantic Monthly*:

Contemporary theories of social and political behaviour tend to be almost willfully blind to the constantly evolving role of religion as a force in global affairs. The assumption is that advances in the rational understanding of the world will inevitably diminish the influence of that last, vexing sphere of irrationality in human culture: religion. Inconveniently, however, the world is today as awash in religious novelty, flux, and dynamism as it has ever been—and religious change is, if anything, likely to intensify in the coming decades....

It’s tempting to conceive of the religious world—particularly when there is so much talk of clashing civilizations—as being made up primarily of a few well-delineated and static religious blocs: Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and so on. But that’s dangerously simplistic. It assumes a stability in the religious landscape that is completely at odds with reality. New religions are born all the time. Old ones transform themselves dramatically. Schism, evolution, death, and rebirth are the norm. And this doesn’t apply only to religious groups that one often hears referred to as cults. Today hundreds of widely divergent forms of Christianity are practised around the world. Islam is usually talked about in monolithic terms (or, at most, in terms of the Shia-Sunni divide), but one almost never hears about the more than 20 million members of various schismatic Muslim groups around the world....Buddhism, far from being an all-encompassing glow radiating benignly out of the East, is a vast family of religions made up of more than 200 distinct bodies, many of which don’t see eye-to-eye at all.

Major strands of Hinduism were reshaped in the 19th century, revealing strong Western and Christian influences.

The fact is that religion mutates with Darwinian restlessness. Take a long enough view, and all talk of “established” or “traditional” faith becomes oxymoronic; there’s no reason to think that the religious movements of today are any less subject to change than were the religious movements of hundreds or even thousands of years ago. History bears this out....

Secularization of a sort certainly has occurred in the modern world—but religion seems to keep adapting to new social ecosystems, in a process one might refer to as “supernatural selection.” It shows no sign of extinction, and “theodiversity” is, if anything, on the rise.

Whether called “cults” or “sects” or “new religious movements” (the expression now in vogue), can their mushrooming in the modern world be called the sign of a genuine religious revival? Are they not rather the symptoms of a deep-seated psychic disorder which is manifesting upon the surface? The remedy is to implant in people’s consciousness ideas of true religion and ethics. If there is to be a genuine religious revival—and this is an urgent necessity—what is required is a religion which preaches and shows the way to practise the gospel of Universal Brotherhood; a religion which recognizes the inherent divinity of man and the possibility of his growth to perfection without the mediation of salaried priests; a religion which does not carnalize, anthropomorphize and caricature the conception of God, who is in reality an Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless and Immutable Presence; a religion which does not depend upon rituals or ceremonies, paraphernalia or pageantry, for its existence; a religion which encourages and teaches man to face the results of his own actions, and thus create a worthy future for himself by letting the light of Spirit guide him in the present.

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Paleontologists say that dinosaurs lived on Earth for some 160 million years. Why they perished has been a subject of investigation

in recent years, and the general belief is that an asteroid that struck the Earth abruptly ended their reign. However, fossils found in Montana’s Hell Creek Formation, the graveyard of a host of prehistoric reptiles, tell a different and more complex story. (*Discover*, June 2002)

Jack Horner and other senior scientists exploring Hell Creek are not only unearthing fossils but also re-creating the environment in which the dinosaurs lived.

The events recorded in this suite of sedimentary rock suggest that the common explanation for the extinction of the dinosaurs—a massive asteroid impact—doesn’t fully account for their undoing. What’s more, the Hell Creek Formation may tell us something about the fragility of life today....

The extinction pattern that has emerged was not expected. Whereas the last of the nonavian dinosaurs certainly perished 64.5 million years ago, many other animals survived....Frogs and salamanders, crocodiles, turtles, mammals, and birds, survived the asteroid impact, suggesting that the mass extinction at the time may not have been as massive as previously thought....One of the many insights that conservation biologists have gleaned from their study of living ecosystems is that different organisms respond differently to environmental stress. Certain fauna went extinct while others evolved into new forms....

The project findings indicate that the Hell Creek Formation represents a time of widespread ecological disturbance. “What we’re seeing,” Hartman says, “is major environmental destabilization before the planet got hammered with an extraterrestrial object.”...The asteroid may well have been the knockout blow in a fight the dinosaurs had already lost.

Constraints of the environmental conditions is only one of the factors on which the existence—or disappearance—of species depends. There is more to it than mere physical causes. How did the dinosaurs, or for that matter any other species, appear on Earth in the first place? H.P.B. stated that “to draw any analogy between the highly metaphysical teaching” of the Secret Doctrine and

modern theories of physical evolution “would, in itself, seem rather a hopeless task.” For, the esoteric teaching is that it is an invisible intelligence *outside* the vast multiplicity of forms which has guided the differentiation and evolution of species in the lower kingdoms of nature. The process of differentiation of species is explained by Mr. Judge in Chapter XV of *The Ocean of Theosophy*.

Theosophically speaking, one could say that the same law of Evolution that brings species into existence also causes their extinction—that is, when they die a natural death and man is not responsible for their extermination. No more than science does esoteric philosophy accept anything outside the uniform and immutable laws of Nature. But it teaches a cyclic law, a double stream of spirit and of matter, which, starting from the neutral centre of Being, develops in its cyclic progress and incessant transformations. *The Secret Doctrine* speaks of “designers” and “builders,” “working under the impulse given them by the ever-to-be-unknown (on our plane) Master Mason—the ONE LIFE AND LAW... That they work in cycles and on a strictly geometrical and mathematical scale of progression, is what the extinct animal species amply demonstrate.” (*S.D.*, II, 732)

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Are some people inherently evil? Three experts discuss the question in *Psychology Today* (October 2002). A point of agreement among them is that to damn a person completely for some evil acts is to falsely overgeneralize. This is what the experts have to say:

ALBERT ELLIS, Ph.D. (President, Albert Ellis Institute): No, we cannot accurately say that some people are essentially evil. Even those who commit many immoral acts would have to do so all the time to be evil people....Invariably, those who steadily commit some of the worst crimes, also do a number of good and kind deeds. Humans are fallible—and changeable.

ELIZABETH RADCLIFFE, Ph.D. (Executive Director, The American Philosophical Association): I believe that we develop good or evil characters through our choices. While individual dispositions and environmental factors influence our choices,

we can only make sense of our lives by rising above these features. We develop vices, or virtues, by choosing. The more lies we tell, the easier it becomes; and demeaning others becomes easier the more we disrespect them. Those who develop a habit of choosing badly may lose all sense of the good, and this is what we call an evil character.

PHILIP ZIMBARDO, Ph.D. (President, American Psychological Association): It is easy to identify individuals who willfully degrade and destroy other human beings as “evil.”... However, as a social psychologist I prefer to identify situational conditions that can facilitate or seduce good people into becoming perpetrators of evil, such as adherence to destructive ideologies, rules, roles, group norms, along with processes of dehumanization, deindividuation and moral disengagement.

“Painful is the accumulation of evil conduct,” says the *Dhammapada*; for, sooner or later, if not in this life then in the next, evil deeds must ripen and bring their consequences to their perpetrator. Nothing can annihilate deeds once they have been done. To seek to have their consequences washed away by any magic or by any prayers is merest superstition, but even so, no one is ever fettered utterly. In everyone shines the free *Atman*, and where That exists no bondage can be absolute. Always a person *can* turn and climb the upward path, for the Divine Freedom that is in his heart can never be annulled. (*Cf. The Bhagavad-Gita*, IX, 30-31)

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The American Psychological Association says that even if people are not aware of them, negative thoughts about ageing that they pick up from society may be cutting years off their lives. A study by Yale University’s Department of Epidemiology and Public Health found that older people with more positive self-perceptions of ageing, measured up to 23 years earlier, lived 7.5 years longer than those with less positive self-perceptions of ageing. (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*)

According to the study authors, the effect of more positive self-perceptions of ageing on survival is greater even than physiological

factors such as low blood pressure and cholesterol, no history of smoking, average body weight, and a tendency to exercise, each of which has been associated with a longer lifespan.

Negative views of ageing can operate without older people's awareness, say the researchers, because they are thought to be internalized at an early age and are unlikely to be consciously evaluated as we get older.

The study carries the message: mental attitudes and positive thoughts about life and living matter more to our health and well-being than mere physiological measures. Although in the ultimate analysis the *quality* of life lived counts more than its longevity, yet it is the duty of each to keep the body in a good working condition for as long as possible through appropriate measures. For, death, we are told, "disappoints the soul."

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SHOULD we be concerned about the current spasm of extinction, which has been accelerated by the inexorable expansion of agriculture and industry? Is it necessary to try to slow down a process that has been going on forever?

I believe it is. We know that the well-being of the human race is tied to the well-being of many other species, and we can't be sure which species are most important to our own survival...

A major challenge for the 21st century is to preserve as much of our natural estate as possible. Let us resist with all our efforts any moves to reduce the amount of wild land available for wild species. And let us call upon the world's richest nations to provide the money to make that possible. That would not be a contribution to charity; it would be an investment in the future of humanity—and all life on Earth.

—RICHARD LEAKEY