

The Theosophical Movement

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Theosophy and Politics

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The recognition of pure Theosophy—the philosophy of the rational explanation of things and not the tenets—is of the most vital importance...inasmuch as it alone can furnish the beacon-light needed to guide humanity on its true path.

—H. P. Blavatsky

One of the illusions from which a very large number of people suffer is that of overestimating the power of politics in promoting general well-being and improving national life and international relationships. The place accorded to politics is so high as to be out of all proportion to its actual influence. It may be well to consider why its influence must necessarily remain limited and why it is incapable of tackling successfully the problem of human advancement.

First, political methods, even when applied with the best of intentions, aim generally at superficial changes and do not go to the root of the problems of modern society. As H.P.B. observes:

To seek to achieve political reforms before we have effected a reform in human nature, is like putting new wine into old bottles. Make men feel and recognize in their innermost hearts what is their real, true duty to all men, and every old abuse of power, every iniquitous law in the national policy, based on human, social or political selfishness, will disappear of itself. Foolish is the gardener who seeks to weed his flower-bed of poisonous plants by cutting them off from the surface of the soil, instead of tearing them out by the roots. No lasting political reform can be ever achieved with the same selfish men at the head of affairs as of old. (The Key to Theosophy, p. 229)

No lasting change or reform can be brought about without an inner change in the individual himself, a new psychological attitude, followed by a psychical transformation. Such a change is not possible through political action only. In fact, people in general are so immersed in mundane affairs that they find little if any time for the supreme task of changing their hearts.

Not only does it need to be reiterated that by making a fetish of political reform, as if all our happiness depended upon it and as if it were the one and only panacea for all our ills, we fail to trace those ills to their real causes; but more—the corrupting influence of and in politics needs to be brought out. It is not recognized, as it should be, that taking sides politically casts a dangerous and degrading glamour on life. It needs to be perceived that politics is only the body and that, without true philosophy and culture, it becomes a soulless institution, potentially the worst kind of machine, which can grind human character to animality. For, without real culture and philosophy, a man is in danger of becoming worse than a beast. Very many political leaders have no time to study philosophy and thus to cultivate the mental detachment so very necessary

to solve the problems which their dossiers contain from day to day. They find time to feed their bodies three times a day or more, but how many of them make time to nourish the mind or to sustain the soul? They need as a background to their political life that soul-culture which not only lights up the mind with the knowledge of first principles and makes it detached so that it has the power of insight and evaluation, but also purifies and ennobles the character so that heart-contentment and active service of one's fellow men invariably result.

It may also be pointed out that party-politics tends towards making people rely blindly on their leaders; puts a curb on individual thinking; increases passivity. No people or community can prosper if they lack the virtues of self-help and self-reliance.

*There are numerous unequivocal statements of H.P.B. which go to show that neither the Theosophical Adepts nor Theosophical aspirants nor the Society she founded can attach undue importance to political activity. In the very first number of the first volume of her magazine, *The Theosophist*, that for October 1879, in the article "What Are the Theosophists?" (reprinted in U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 22) we find the following:*

Unconcerned about politics; hostile to the insane dreams of Socialism and of Communism, which it abhors—as both are but disguised conspiracies of brutal force and sluggishness against honest labour; the Society cares but little about the outward human management of the material world. The whole of its aspirations are directed towards the occult truths of the visible and invisible worlds. Whether the physical man be under the rule of an empire or a republic, concerns only the man of matter. His body may be enslaved; as to his Soul, he has the right to give to his rulers the proud answer of Socrates to his Judges. They have no sway over the inner man.

*All that the Adepts can do in this direction was indicated by H.P.B. in an Editor's Note in *The Theosophist* of December 1883 (reprinted in *THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT*, January 1937), which also holds a hint for the aspirant:*

Neither the Tibetan nor the modern Hindu Mahatmas for the matter of that, ever meddle with politics, though they may bring their influence to bear upon more than one momentous question in the history of a nation—their mother country especially.

*In the Supplement to *The Theosophist* for July 1883 can be found a very important pronouncement by Col. H. S. Olcott, the co-founder and President of the Theosophical Society, against mixing Theosophy and politics. This statement, which H.P.B. endorsed, reads:*

The tenacious observance by the Founders of our Society of the principle of absolute neutrality, on its behalf, in all questions which lie outside the limits of its declared "objects," ought to have obviated the necessity to say that there is a natural and perpetual divorce between Theosophy and Politics. Upon a hundred platforms I have announced this fact, and every other practicable way, public and private, it has been affirmed and reiterated. Before we came to India, the word

*Politics had never been pronounced in connection with our names; for the idea was too absurd to be even entertained, much less expressed. But in this country, affairs are in such an exceptional state, that every foreigner, of whatsoever nationality, comes under Police surveillance more or less; and it was natural that we should be looked after until the real purpose of our Society's movements had been thoroughly well shown by the developments of time. That end was reached in due course; and in the year 1880, the Government of India, after an examination of our papers and other evidence, became convinced of our political neutrality, and issued all the necessary orders to relieve us from further annoying surveillance. Since then, we have gone our ways without troubling ourselves more than any other law-abiding persons, about the existence of policemen or detective bureaux. I would not have reverted to so stale a topic if I had not been forced to do so by recent events. I am informed that in Upper India, some unwise members of the Society have been talking about the political questions of the hour, as though authorized to speak for our organization itself, or at least to give to this or that view of current agitations the imprimatur of its approval or disapproval. Again, it was but a fortnight or so ago that one of the most respectable and able of our Hindu fellows strongly importuned me to allow the Theosophical Society's influence—such as it may be—to be thrown in favour of Bills to promote religious instruction for Hindu children, and other "non-political" measures. That our members, and others whom it interests, may make no mistake as to the Society's attitude as regards Politics, I take this occasion to say that our Rules, and traditional policy alike, prohibit every officer and fellow of the Society, **AS SUCH**, to meddle with political questions in the slightest degree, and to compromise the Society by saying that it has, **AS SUCH**, any opinion upon those or any other questions. The Presidents of Branches, in all countries, will be good enough to read this protest to their members, and in every instance when initiating a candidate to give him to understand—as I invariably do—the fact of our corporate neutrality. So convinced am I that the perpetuity of our Society depends upon our keeping closely to our legitimate province, and leaving Politics "severely alone," I shall use the full power permitted to me as President-Founder to suspend or expel every member, or even discipline or discharter any Branch which shall, by offending in this respect, imperil the work now so prosperously going on in various parts of the world.*

The greatest of the tragedies of the Theosophical Movement occurred when, after the passing of H.P.B., there was a departure from the original lines and the original programme of the Masters and Their Messenger. What was originally intended to be a cosmopolitan, spiritual movement became degraded into a nationalistic, religious one, for in the Theosophical Society of later years there was the mixing of Theosophy with orthodoxy on the one hand and with politics on the other. As a result many were led astray, and the serious business of the spiritual life was given a secondary importance when not quite forgotten.

The United Lodge of Theosophists with its centres all over the world does not participate in political activity of any kind because it was established for the specific purpose of studying and promulgating Theosophy. The work it has on hand and the end it keeps in view are too

absorbing and too lofty to leave it the time or inclination to take part in side issues: and to it politics is a side issue. Furthermore, the organic unity of the Lodge depends on mutual respect, tolerance and brotherliness subsisting between all its Associates. Now, political action varies with the circumstances of the time and with the idiosyncrasies of the individuals; while from the very nature of their position as students of Theosophy the Associates and friends of U.L.T. are agreed on the principles of Theosophy, it does not thereby follow that they agree on every other subject. As Theosophist, H.P.B. wrote in The Key to Theosophy, "they can only act together in matters which are common to all"—that is, in connection with or relation to Theosophy itself; "as individuals, each is left perfectly free to follow out his or her particular line of political thought and action, so long as this does not conflict with Theosophical principles" or hurt the Theosophical Movement.

It should not be lost sight of that though Theosophy has no part to play in politics as such, it being an all-embracing philosophy of life which repudiates narrowness of every kind and provides the key to the unravelling of every problem, Theosophists cannot refuse to notice present-day social issues or the problems of national and international politics. But the solutions to these problems that Theosophy would offer would, in many cases, be almost entirely at variance with those proposed by men of the world. With politics divorced from morality Theosophy has nothing to do; it seeks rather to effect a reform in the outlook of the individual. All that there is of good and of evil in the world has its roots in human character. It follows, therefore, that once men recognize in their hearts what their duty to all men is, "every old abuse of power, every iniquitous law in the national policy, based on human, social or political selfishness, will disappear of itself."

Application of such Theosophical principles as Universal Unity and Causation, Human Solidarity, the Law of Karma, and Reincarnation would give such a turn to all problems of the time as would make easier their practical solution. The attempt to apply these principles to the conduct of public affairs might be dubbed "impractical" by the so-called "practical" men of the world, but it is to such application alone that we must look to bind humanity into one family and to make social amelioration possible and lasting.

So, if students of Theosophy seem to some to have an unusual way of reforming the world, if they seem overmuch engaged in abstract pursuits, it is because they see the dire need for guiding principles, without which all efforts at reform are likely to make things worse than before. Aspiration is not enough; there must be knowledge to direct it.

The Three Fundamentals and the Upanishads

Their Practical Application

Familiarity with the Three Fundamental Propositions of Theosophy is essential for understanding the Perennial Philosophy. Hence, H.P.B. says, "no apology is required for asking the reader to make himself familiar with them."

The entire philosophy of Theosophy is based on the solid foundation of the Three Fundamentals. They have to be viewed as three in one, one in three, and not as separate from one another—God, Law and Being; Spirit, Matter and Mind, Mind linking Spirit and Matter. They can be looked upon as abstract Spirit—the One Reality; differentiated Spirit—its immanent aspect in the manifested universe; and embodied Spirit—Kshetrajna in every being undergoing evolution. In other words, they are the one Eternal Reality and its manifesting aspect, *i.e.*, Life, Law and Evolution, as the universe exists for the evolution and emancipation of the Soul. The Three Fundamentals underlie the entire system of thought we know as Theosophy, and should be considered as three facets of one unity. Many students of Theosophy look upon the Fundamentals as difficult to understand; this is because of our tendency to view them separately.

The late Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has stated:

The consubstantiality of the spirit in man and God is the conviction fundamental to all spiritual wisdom. It is not a matter of inference only. In the spiritual experience itself, the barriers between the self and the ultimate reality drop away....We belong to the real and the real is mirrored in us. The great text of the Upanishad affirms it—*Tat tvam asi*(That art thou). It is a simple statement of an experienced fact...."I and my Father are one." "All that the Father hath are mine," is the way in which Jesus expressed the same profound truth.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the teachings of the Upanishads on the nature of man and his ultimate goal culminate in such startling *Maha Vakyas*—Great Utterances—four in number:

Ayam Atma Brahma—This Atma (Self) is Brahman.

Prajnanam Brahma—Brahman is pure Consciousness.

Tat tvam asi—That thou art.

Aham Brahmasmi—I am Brahman.

These Great Affirmations clearly mean that the Self of man, when the limitations of his personality, *i.e.*, lower perishable self, are removed, is the same as the Universal Self. They teach that there is one Ultimate Reality called Brahman, which is none other than Atman in man.

H.P.B. is at pains to explain this: There is only one ever-living Reality which the Hindus call Parabrahman or Paramatman. This eternal and living Reality is the Root Essence of all. Although It is not perceptible to our physical senses, It is manifest and perceptible to our spiritual nature. Once imbued with this idea, and if we posit that It is omnipresent, then it is easy to understand that we must be in It, from It, and must go back to It some day.

As per Kena Upanishad, "It cannot be seen, or touched, or heard—sense of sight, sense of touch, sense of hearing, represented by Vayu, Agni and Indra—Vedic deities standing for the powers of speech, mind and individual soul, even beyond the mind. Our understanding of the First Fundamental is at best at the intellectual level, which we do not apply and see in everything in life.

There is a story in Chandogya Upanishad in which Narada approaches Sanatkumara and says that he knows all the scriptures and all the sciences, but has no knowledge of the Self: *Mantravideva asmi na atmavit*—I know only the *mantras*, but not the Self. It is not the knowledge of scriptures or of the First Fundamental, but the realization of the One Self that can liberate the spirit of man. This idea is echoed in the Seventh Chapter of the Gita where Krishna speaks of knowledge coupled with its realization. The difficulty arises because we function on the plane of duality of mine and thine. Only when we start functioning from the plane of unity of Reality and enter into It without any intermediate condition (Chapter XVIII) that we can say, as Arjuna did, "My delusion is destroyed."

It is difficult for some people to appreciate the Third Fundamental, for it deals a deathblow to the idea that man is born in sin. It points out that our evolution is in our hands, implying that perfectibility is inherent in us, as we are emanations from divinity and are going back to the same source through a series of metempsychoses and reincarnations. Perfectibility can be acquired by each one by his self-effort and by his own ways and means, checked by his Karma; and thus one can reach the state of the highest Dhyani Buddha. The Third Fundamental is absolutely logical; it tells us about the non-separateness of all beings, and also that once we attain self-consciousness, the power of choice, we evolve by our self-effort.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad has eloquent passages on the Absolute. Yajnavalkya says:

For when there is duality, then one smells another, one sees another, one thinks of another, one understands another. But when everything has become the Self, then by what and whom should one smell, by what and whom should one see, hear, speak, think, understand? By what should one know that by which all this is known? By what, my dear, should one know the knower?

He is the unseen seer, the unheard hearer, the unthought thinker, the unknown knower. There is no other seer but he, no other hearer but he, no other thinker but he, no other knower but he. He is your Self, the inner controller, the immortal, the imperishable. Everything else is evil.

In Katha Upanishad we have the story of Nachiketas (which means not perceived—mysticism). He spends three days without food at the house of Yama—*i.e.*, he enters into the third spiritual plane, a plane where the light of Spirit shines with unfading glory, to meet Yama, who offers him three boons.

As to the third boon, Nachiketas asks Yama: What exists after death, what is death and immortality? Yama tries to evade him and tells him that he would make him the Lord of the

world, he could have all his desires fulfilled, enjoy all the pleasures of the world, etc. But Nachiketas replies: "Transient are all these, O Yama, and *they wear out the vigour of all the senses*. Keep all these with you." He did not want anything except to know "what there is in the great hereafter." That phrase, "they wear out the vigour of all the senses," refers to the three e's *i.e.*, entertainment, excitement and exhaustion. When we make our minds a playground of our senses, we seek entertainment which leads to excitement; then our vital powers are completely drained and we feel totally exhausted.

Then Yama tells him about the one universal, imperishable, changeless Self. He says: "That which is without sound, without touch, without form, without decay, and likewise without taste, without change, without smell, without beginning, without end, beyond the great and ever-abiding—by realizing it one is freed from the jaws of death."

In this verse we have the secret of death communicated by *Atman*. The secret of death held by *mind* relates only to "after-death states," not its meaning of *discontinuity*, not in continuity of Time, *i.e.*, not the clumsy words we use for Time—past, present, future, as the Mahatma says—but the Eternal Present. This means that when we are acting on the plane of duality we will be devoured by the illusion of Time. Only when we start functioning from the plane of unity we can reach beyond Time, *i.e.*, the plane of "SAT," Beness—Duration, as H.P.B. says: the "*great beyond*" of the Upanishads.

"I am Time matured, come hither for the destruction of these creatures," says Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita (XI, 32). "Time was not, for it lay asleep in the infinite bosom of Duration," says the Stanza of Dzyan. Time, continuity, are limitations. Hence we have the statement: "Parabrahm (the One Reality, the Absolute) is the field of Absolute Consciousness, *i.e.*, that Essence which is out of all relation to conditioned existence" (S.D., I, 15). Relationships relate only to the plane of duality, where we use words such as karma, reincarnation, principles, higher, lower, etc; whereas on the plane of unity these disappear. There is only one divine principle. In fact, H.P.B. states that there is only one Principle—LIFE. All other principles are modifications of this One Principle. "In occultism every qualificative change in the state of our consciousness gives to man a new aspect, and if it prevails and becomes part of the living and acting Ego, it must be (and is) given a special name" (The Key to Theosophy, Indian ed., p. 116). In fact, we are seven in One.

As we function on this plane of duality, how do we get to the plane of unity? As man is indissolubly linked to the Whole and as he is a direct ray of the Absolute, this union is possible for him by cultivating unselfishness and universal love for all that lives and breathes. When his consciousness is turned inwards, there is a conjunction between *Manas* and *Buddhi*. In a spiritually regenerated man this conjunction is permanent and *Manas* clings to *Buddhi* beyond the threshold of *Devachan*, when it is said that his third eye is active.

As the Bhagavad-Gita points out (XVIII, 4): "Deeds of sacrifice, of mortification, and of charity should not be forsaken." They purify our mind, although they do not make us spiritual. Once the mind becomes pure, it becomes like an alabaster vase, reflecting the radiance of *Atma-Buddhi*.

This "Mind" is *manas*, or rather its lower reflection, which whenever it disconnects itself, for the time being, with *kama*, becomes the guide of the highest mental faculties, and is the organ of free will in physical man. (H.P.B. in "Psychic and Noetic Action")

When *Manas* is freed from lower *Kama*, the *pavamana* fire (fire by friction) is activated and *Buddhi* is cemented with *Manas*. Then man is in a high spiritual state and able to sense the Reality. This is what is meant by saying that his third eye is active.

In order to live in Spirit while in a body, a clean life, a pure heart and an eager intellect, coupled with a life of high morality and purity of soul, is a must. Then it is possible to attain to a state where one can have, as described by Iamblichus: (1) ecstasy or illumination, when one is able to use his spiritual vision and see the truth, (2) prophetic visions, (3) action of Spirit through Will, and (4) control over lower elementals. This is Divine Theurgy and it has to be preceded not only by the training of one's inner senses but also by a knowledge of the personal self and its relationship with the Divine Self. Then one becomes like Prospero, the magician "Man-spirit proves God-spirit."

H.P.B. states: "With *each* morning's awakening try to live through the day in harmony with the Higher Self" (She Being Dead Yet Speaketh, p. 12). In this statement we have a hint as to how we can apply the Fundamentals in every aspect of our daily life.

Glimpses of an Inner World

Know the Atman as Lord of the Chariot, the body as the Chariot itself: know the *Buddhi* to be the Charioteer, and the mind (*Manas*) as the reins.

The senses, they say are the Horses, the sense-objects the path on which they run. The Atman united to senses and mind is said by the wise to be the Experiencer.

He who is without intuitive judgement and whose mind is not constantly controlled, his senses become unmanageable like the vicious horses of a charioteer.

But he who has intuitive judgement, whose mind is ever held firm, his senses are controllable like the good horses of a charioteer.

—Kathopanishad, III, 3-6

Everyone who is not a rank and brutal materialist has experienced at one time or another an awareness of a world which transcends that of the outer senses. While such an experience may be prompted, and often is, by sensuous perception, and originates in let us say, a beautiful sight—the starry firmament, a lovely sunset, a flowing river—the intense emotional response

soon induces a higher state which satisfies a deeper aspect of one's consciousness. The occasions of such experiences are many and varied and come to different people in different ways. If genuine, they have one common factor: they bring a perception of something which transcends the senses and opens up a vista of a sphere of reality beyond the outer world of objective phenomena.

If we pause and analyse these moments of greater awareness, we find that they become possible when we forget our little selves. A beautiful sight, a melody, a poem, to which we respond intensely, momentarily enables us to forget the personal ego, *ahamkara*, and it is this self-forgetfulness that in turn enables us to reach a deeper level of consciousness. This indicates the need for detachment and impersonality, and explains why unselfishness has been emphasized by all the great teachers as a *sine qua non* condition for the spiritual aspirant.

But, while many have such glimpses of an inner world, they too often fail to take much notice of them and do not question to ascertain the meaning of the experience. If asked about it, they would likely agree that they derived joy and satisfaction from such touches of a transcendental reality. Soon, however, even the memory of the experience begins to fade away and the humdrum of the outward life once more claims and fully absorbs the mind's attention. The fact is, most people are "externally oriented." The mind is turned outwards, aware only of the external world, and does not easily turn inwards. Many ignore and even deny the inner world. And some who sense its reality are not always willing to explore it within themselves. And there are those who do *not* want to know it, rightly suspecting it might make demands that would result in a voluntary renunciation of much they now hold dear and which gives them sensuous pleasure.

And thus it is that men and women live lives hemmed in by the senses, unaware of the treasures hid within their own consciousness. While everyone is a potential mystic, most people never unfold their inner faculties, never become acquainted with their larger selves, and remain content to live prosaic and narrow lives.

The genuine mystic is one who recognizes the reality of "the other world," who, perceiving the existence in him, as in all men, of a divine spark, deliberately endeavours to explore his inner self in search of it. Mystic awareness changes, therefore, the orientation of the mind. Instead of remaining externally oriented, it becomes inwardly oriented. Withdrawn from the world of external perception and turned inwards, the mind is gradually transformed. It transcends the limitations of the personal and gains a deeper insight into the Impersonal Reality.

Danger, however, lurks at the initial stages. For, when the mind is turned within, unless the little self is forgotten, the state it enters will be psychic, not spiritual. The glamour of psychic experiences is great. The psychic state brings strange experiences that fascinate and intoxicate and prevent further progress.

We witness today an unhealthy curiosity which drives many to experiment with drugs or other physical means to induce abnormal trances and thereby experience strange "new" psychic states. On some future occasion we may revert to the misuse of such drugs. Here let us only

point to this alarming and growing menace and submit that it is a symptom of the diseased state in which the mind of man finds itself, the only cure for which lies in restoring to man faith in an awareness of the Divine Presence, thus leading him to accept the need for self-discipline.

Modern therapy is usually understood as a system to mend or repair the mind. The patient goes to the psychiatrist to have his mind fixed, as he would go to the orthopaedist to have his broken leg set right. In ancient psychology the word had a deeper meaning, and therapy meant making the man whole. It demanded the inner integration of the man himself; the establishing of the right relationship among the different aspects of his being. In the image of the Kathopanishad, it is the restoring to the Spirit or the Atman his rightful place as the Lord of the Chariot, to *Buddhi* paralysed, while the passionate mind, *Kama-Manas*, leads an independent life and, enslaved by the senses, leads the Chariot astray.

It is high time we should set things right! Let us look within for the Divine Charioteer and behind him to the Lord of Light. This will demand the eradication of selfishness and the unfoldment of the faculty to think away from the personal. We must learn to cultivate the inner, spiritual man by meditation, by reaching to and communion with the Divine, for

unless the flesh is passive, head cool, the Soul as firm and pure as flaming diamond, the radiance will not reach the *chamber*, its sunlight will not warm the heart, nor will the mystic sounds of the Akasic heights reach the ear, however eager, at the initial stage. (The Voice of the Silence)

May we make haste to prepare our consciousness to receive the Light of the Spirit!

Do Myths have Meaning?

When we read myths, we feel they are good stories, though some of these stories, we feel, could never have happened literally. But we all love to read good stories. The word for story or tale in Greek is *mythos*, from which myth is derived. A myth, however, is not just *any* story but a fabulous statement (story) containing some important truth. It is a story about things that happened a long time ago. It might appear fantastic, the product of erratic fancy at time, and that is why after the fourth century B.C. the word *mythos* came to mean "fiction" or even falsehood, as distinct from *logos*, the "word for truth." As per Robert Graves' definition, "Mythology is the study of whatever religious or heroic legends are so foreign to a student's experience that he cannot believe them to be true. Hence the English adjective 'mythical,' meaning 'incredible'."

H.P.B., on the other hand, approvingly quotes Gerald Massey:

For thirty years past Professor Max Müller has been teaching...that mythology is a disease of language, and that the ancient symbolism was a result of something like

a primitive aberration. They [Max Müller, Cox, etc.] have misrepresented primitive or archaic man as having been idiotically misled from the first by an active but untutored imagination into believing all sorts of fallacies....My reply is....the origin and meaning of mythology have been missed altogether....Mythology was a primitive mode of *thinking* the early thought. It was founded on natural facts, and is still verifiable in phenomena. There is nothing insane, nothing irrational in it, when considered in the light of evolution, and when its mode of expression by sign-language is thoroughly understood. Mythology is the repository of man's most ancient science....When truly interpreted once more, it is destined to be the death of false theologies....(The Secret Doctrine, I, 303-304)

It is pointed out that when the Egyptians represented the moon as a cat, they did not think that the moon was a cat, nor did they mean to puzzle people. They simply saw that the cat sees in the night, and in the dark her eyes become luminous. In the heavens, the moon is the seer by night, reflecting the sunlight, and so the cat was adopted as a representative of the moon.

Luckily, not all authors regard myths as mere fanciful stories. Joseph Campbell writes that any good story would enchant us and teach us something, but myths are distinct in that they are potent, timeless tales which inspire and have the power to shape and control our lives. (World Mythology)

Myths, folktales, legends, epics, fairy-tales, all tend to shade into one another and are a little difficult to distinguish.

To comprehend the whole subject we must recognize that myths convey cosmic and anthropological facts just as fables convey truths about the social behaviour of men and women. Similarly, fairy tales reveal one aspect of the human subconscious, the psychic nature of every man. (The Theosophical Movement, Vol. 26, p. 5)

There are various kinds of myths: myths of creation, myths of human evolution, myths of heroes, myths of cosmic disasters, myths of supernatural beings.

Myths of creation speak of the origin of the world. A well-known one is the Hindu myth of the churning of the ocean. The *devas* and *asuras* gathered on Mount Meru and decided to churn the ocean to obtain *amrita* or the elixir of immortality. For this purpose, they uprooted Mount Mandara and used the snake Vasuki as the rope to twirl the mountain around, so that the sap of the plants that grew on it flowed into the ocean, and the ocean turned to milk and then to butter. Then slowly came out of it the Sun, the Moon, also Surabhi, the cow of plenty, other treasures, and finally *amrita*, the elixir of life. This is a myth of creation. The origin of the world, in Indian thought, is not creation, but it is seen as the emergence of cosmos out of chaos. In other words, as the churning of the butter-milk gives rise to butter, which comes to the surface, so also the churning of the ocean represents the differentiation of primordial, homogeneous matter, which results in the formation of the universe with its Milky Way, Sun, Moon, etc. Cow and bull are seen as productive and generative powers in nature, as well as solar and cosmic deities. The

meaning and occult properties of the 14 things which came out as the result of the churning are explained only at the final initiation.

Through deceit, Vishnu gave the *amrita* to the *devas*, so there started the War in Heaven between the gods and *daityas*. "War in Heaven" has several meanings. It refers to the struggles and trials which a candidate has to pass through, on his way to becoming an Adept. This is the war between his higher and lower natures, in which the disciple either succeeds or fails. If he succeeds, he is called a "dragon-slayer," or even a "Serpent." As a serpent casts off its old skin, so the candidate is born in a new body—a spiritual rebirth. The War in Heaven also represents the war between the Aryan Adepts of the Fifth Race and the Atlantean sorcerers.

So also there is another myth in the Puranas regarding the War in Heaven. When Soma (moon) elopes with Tara, wife of Brihaspati (Jupiter), it causes a War in Heaven—a war between gods and demons. Usanas (Venus) or Shukracharya (leader of the *danavas*) is on the side of Soma, Brihaspati or Jupiter is the symbol of exoteric or dead-letter form of worship, or ritualistic worship. Soma is the mystery god and presides over the mystic and spiritual nature in man and universe. He is concerned with rebirth of man as a spiritual being. Tara, wife of Brihaspati, is shown as one who is wedded to dogmatic worship, yet longs for true wisdom. Thus, she represents spiritual aspiration. Soma eloping with Tara implies Soma initiating her into the occult mysteries, and their union leads to the birth of Budha, or Mercury, or Hermes in Greek mythology, which represents esoteric Wisdom.

Talking of Hermes, we find that in Egypt, especially, there are many gods with heads of birds or animals. Thus, Hermes, the God of Wisdom, is also associated with Hermanubis and Anubis.

Thoth: He is the god of wisdom and of authority over all other gods. He is the recorder and the judge. His ibis-head, the pen and tablet of the celestial scribe, who records the thoughts, words and deeds of men, and weighs them in the balance, liken him to the type of esoteric *Lipikas*. Thoth carries the serpent-rod, emblem of Wisdom....He is the Greek Hermes, the god of learning....Hermes was the serpent itself in a mystical sense. But he is the foe of the bad serpent, for the ibis devoured the snakes of Egypt. (The Theosophical Glossary)

All of this also applies to Ganesa, the elephant-headed god. He and all of the above are presiding deities over birth and death and guide human beings to their spiritual goal. He is the scribe of the gods. Also the separation of the sexes, during the Third Root Race, was presided over by Ganesa or Hermanubis. The animal head is the occult symbology followed by the ancients. One explanation for this is given by Mr. Judge in Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita (p. 41) where he says that the animal head (or beast) signifies strength, and the man symbolizes wisdom. These two must go hand in hand. For, strength without wisdom can only cause confusion, and so also when one needs to take action, mere intellect is useless without strength.

The other meaning is suggested in a note on Hermanubis:

The fact is that, esoterically, Adam and Eve while representing the early *third* Root Race—those who, being still mindless, imitated the animals and degraded themselves with the latter—stand also as the dual symbol of the sexes. Hence Anubis, the Egyptian god of generation, is represented with the head of an animal, a dog or a jackal. (Glossary)

So also there are myths relating to the evolution of man. One such myth is that of Prometheus. There was a time in human evolution when man was so only in form but was really no better than a beast. The myth says that Prometheus stole fire from heaven and brought it to earth; for this, Zeus punished him by tying him to a rock and sending a vulture every day to peck at his liver. Every time the bird tore out the organ, a new one would grow, and once again the vulture would peck and the torture would continue. This agony lasted for long, until he was freed by Herakles or Hercules.

Prometheus bringing fire to earth refers to the light of mind given to man by solar deities or *manasaputras*, who endowed him with the power to choose and to think and reason. At incarnation, this mind becomes dual. The aspect of mind which is entangled with *kama* (passions) represents the eternal vulture of unsatisfied desires, despair and regret. Zeus represents the Host of primeval progenitors, or "Fathers," who created senseless men without mind, while the divine Titan (Prometheus) stands for spiritual creators. This drama is enacted every day within us, where the lower passions chain, or obstruct, the higher aspirations to the rock of matter and give rise to the vulture of pain, sorrow and repentance.

Prometheus also represents fire by friction. The name Prometheus is related to the Sanskrit word *Pramantha*, *i.e.*, the instrument used for kindling the fire. H. P. Blavatsky points out that this myth of Prometheus bringing fire to earth does not represent man's first discovering the fire, because fire was never discovered but existed on earth from the beginning. This relates to the opening of man's spiritual perception (The Secret Doctrine, II, 523). In the Vedic *sutras* we are told that by rapidly rotating the stick in the socket, first heat and then fire was produced. The stick was called *Pramantha*, the disc was called *Arani*. Thus, Prometheus represents fire by friction or *Pavamana* fire, which cements *Manas* with *Buddhi*. The gift of mind was given so that man could become as a god. But man can become so only when his terrestrial and divine natures are in harmony, or the animal element is controlled and subdued.

This whole process of freeing the mind from the passional nature so that it can reflect the light from the higher nature is a long one involving one's going through trials and struggles. This is depicted by the 12 labours of Hercules, who finally frees Prometheus. Even these 12 labours are very allegorical. The first is the killing of the Nemean lion, for which he had to fashion a special weapon. The second is the slaying of the nine-headed water-snake. But whenever he cut off a head two more grew in its place. He was helped in this task by his nephew, who used to cauterize the decapitated neck with a burning torch, so that new heads would not grow. This reminds us of the statement in The Voice of the Silence: "Kill out desire; but if thou killest it, take heed lest from the dead it should again arise." Kill out from the very roots. The last labour is where he had to go to Hades, and bring up a fierce three-headed dog, Cerberus.

We are given a similar account in Homer's *Odyssey*, which speaks of the wanderings of Ulysses. Mr. Judge mentions that reading the interpretation of the wanderings of Ulysses had an ennobling effect on him (*Letters That Have Helped Me*, Vol. I, No. 11). One of the interpretations given by Thomas Taylor is very enlightening. After the Trojan war was over, Ulysses, or Odysseus, with 600 others set sail for home, but the direction of the wind took him in a different direction and he met with 12 mythical adventures. These adventures are symbolic of the soul's journey through temptations of earthly life, and its gradual progress till it reaches its true spiritual home.

His first adventure or trial is that he forgets his mission and joins the company of Lotus-eaters. This shows our intoxication with false views. Then he and his companions come across an island where the latter are swayed by the enchantress Circe, are given a magic drink and turned into swine. Here, Ulysses is helped by Hermes-Mercury (or the power of discrimination), who gives him a herb. This saves him from falling prey to sense-attraction. Next he is asked to go to Hades, which represents sense-life or earth-life; we need to wake up from its illusion and be born into the world of Spirit. Going to Hades or Hell implies that, in the trials of initiation, the candidate has to look deep into his consciousness and face the whole of his lower nature without getting disturbed. Candidates are literally made to sit in a dark room, all alone. Descent into the lower worlds means touching the lowest levels of consciousness, facing them, purifying them, and then rising with fully purified consciousness. Then there is the blinding of the one-eyed Cyclopean giant, which means turning away from one's own Cyclopean or lower nature. The next adventure is spending seven years on an island with the goddess Calypso.

The "one-eyed" Cyclopes,,three in number, according to Hesiod—were the last three sub-races of the Lemurians, the "one-eye" referring to the Wisdom eye; for the two front eyes were fully developed as the physical organs only in the beginning of the Fourth Race. The allegory of Ulysses, whose companions were devoured while the King of Ithaca was saved by putting out with a fire-brand the eye of Polyphemus [the Cyclope], is based upon the psycho-physiological atrophy of the "third" eye. Ulysses belongs to the cycle of the heroes of the Fourth Race....His adventures with the latter [Cyclopes]...is an allegorical record of the gradual passage from the Cyclopean civilization of stone and colossal buildings to the more sensual and physical culture of the Atlanteans, which finally caused the last of the Third Race to lose their all-penetrating *spiritual* eye. (*The Secret Doctrine*, II, 769-770)

We may still ask, do myths have meaning? The term "meaning" is used in many different senses. "Meaning" is often defined as the practical consequence of a thing in our future experience. Thus, to understand a myth is to understand its purpose, its significance. Now, we can grasp the significance of it only when we understand its relation to other things, or its place in the system as a whole. It also means becoming aware of its practical consequences. A myth in the true sense is inspiring.

Prof. C. S. Lewis points out that a myth makes what was merely a principle imaginable. That is the beauty of the myth; it makes use of symbols and conveys psychological facts and truths in a

tangible manner. He also says that when myth is translated, innumerable abstractions or truths arise from it. "Myth is the mountain, whence all the different streams arise which become truths, down here in the valley." ("Myth Became Fact," in *The Grand Miracle*, pp. 40-41)

...the so-called "myths," in order to be at least approximately dealt with in any degree of justice, have to be closely examined from all their aspects. In truth, every one of the *seven Keys* has to be used in its right place....(*The Secret Doctrine*, II, 517)

Thus, whether any truth comes across to a person, or he finds the myth meaningless, all depends upon how it is read.

Human “Principles”

It is often experienced by students of Theosophy that the more they study, the more difficult the study seems to get, and what seemed simple yesterday seems complicated today!

The key ideas in our teachings must be studied and meditated upon, not just for the solution of one particular difficulty, but as aids to the comprehension of other difficulties as well. This is the way to synthesize our knowledge, and, without synthesizing as we go along, the teachings become meaningless for us. We need to widen and deepen our thinking. When we act, we do not think of the reaction; and when the effect comes, we cry out against life! Just as our thinking is shallow, so is our study. A key sentence in our teachings may clear up one particular problem, but we must not stop there. We must pursue the teaching mentally until we find further applications of it, to as many other problems as we are capable of understanding now. The key sentences are like our mathematical tables. Without knowing the tables we cannot do even the simplest sum! And, if we have learnt the table wrongly, our answer too will be wrong.

One difficulty students face is understanding what the human "principles" mean. Is a "principle" a form? We can see the physical body and we are told of an astral body. But what of the Kamic principle, the mind principle, the Buddhi principle?

H.P.B. in her *Key to Theosophy* gives us the definition of a "principle." This should be learnt by heart and meditated upon. New aspects of it will strike us in time. She writes:

Every qualificative change in the state of our consciousness gives to man a new aspect, and if it prevails and becomes part of the living and acting Ego, it must be (and is) given a special name, to distinguish the man in that particular state from the man he is when he places himself in another state.

What does "qualificative change" mean? What does "consciousness" mean? How can anything become part of the living and acting Ego? Have we here a hint of the evolutionary journey of

man? Do we find another hint when it is said that one can change one's state of consciousness? Let us work that out for ourselves. What stops man from placing his consciousness in the state of the higher Ego? Himself. How can he place it there? By making his efforts towards this end prevail and become part of the living and acting Ego. Try, try and try again should be our battle-cry. Effect follows cause. Patient effort brings success. The effort must be continued till we succeed.

We can understand the physical and astral bodies as vehicles for the consciousness to act through, but how can the Mind or Kama, both without form, be used as vehicles?

What is a qualificative change? What can change the state of our consciousness, *i.e.*, our awareness, except the matter-vehicle it is working with and through? Look at a page of print; then put on coloured glasses and look again. It does not look the same; the impressions we get are different. Now think of the subject-matter of the print. Our consciousness is no longer concerned with colour but with ideas. In other words, our consciousness or awareness has ceased to function on the physical plane and focuses itself on the mental plane. If our emotions are aroused by the ideas presented, our consciousness or awareness begins to act on the plane of Kama. So the awareness functions at times on the physical plane, at times on the mental plane, at times on the Kamic plane. Let us go further and lift the mind higher than the ideas we hold, to the universal aspect of those ideas, and our consciousness shifts to the Buddhic state—though we are so unpractised in this that the influence emanating from that state is rarely felt by us.

The consciousness itself does not change; it only becomes aware of the state it is in, in terms of the vehicle it uses. It itself is the Thinker, the Perceiver. Go further—it is an Entity. An "entity" is immortal only in its ultimate essence. "Its immortality as a form is limited only to its life-cycle or the *Mahamanvantara*; after which it is one and identical with the Universal Spirit, and no longer a separate Entity" (The Key to Theosophy, p. 106). Let us remember that "that alone which is indissolubly cemented by *Atma* (*i.e.*, *Buddhi-Manas*) is immortal" (*Ibid.*)

The Secret Doctrine II, 110) speaks of "the Monad and its conscious principle, Manas," dwelling in the physical tabernacle of man. This is important for us to note. But, just as fruit must be eaten to be enjoyed, medicine taken to do good, so this idea must be thought over, assimilated and used.

In The Key to Theosophy (p. 101 fn.) we are told: "Buddhi, receiving its light of Wisdom from *Atma*, gets its rational qualities from *Manas*."

We have much to learn. It sounds as if we have to ask ourselves all the time, "What does this mean? What is the meaning of that word?" etc., etc. It seems as if throughout the teachings are scattered phrases and sentences that illuminate one another.

Let us consider these further key sentences to apply always:

Our philosophy teaches us that as there are seven fundamental forces in nature, and seven planes of being, so there are seven states of consciousness in which man can live, think, remember and have his being. (Key, p. 88)

Occult Science has its *changeless* traditions....It may err in particulars; it can never become guilty of a mistake in questions of universal laws. (S.D., I, 516)

Learn that no efforts, not the smallest—whether in right or wrong direction—can vanish from the world of causes. (The Voice of the Silence, p. 37)

Thou canst create this "day" thy chances for thy "morrow." (*Ibid.*)

Even now, while we cannot master these high themes, we can have a patient trust in the processes of evolution and the Law, blaming and judging no man, but living up to our highest intuitions ourselves. *The real test of a man is his motive*, which we do not see, nor do his acts always represent it.

—W. Q. Judge

The Sleep Cycle

Sleep is a most common phenomenon of life; and, though every human being goes through the experience from birth to death, few have any correct knowledge as to the cause of sleep, the nature and purpose of sleep, and how the consciousness functions during those hours of sleep. Some consider sleep to be a waste of time, others indulge in it even beyond the proverbial eight hours. Why is it that some get the needed refreshment in fewer hours than others get in a much longer period? Why do children need more sleep? Why is sleep considered to be a prime necessity during an illness? Theosophy gives definite and precise knowledge on the subject of sleep, and students would be really benefited by a thorough study of the Appendix on Dreams in Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge, where Madame Blavatsky herself answers a number of important questions put to her. Various aspects of this practical subject are also taken up in U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 11.

Madame Blavatsky in her first monumental work, *Isis Unveiled*, makes an important statement which at once points out the purpose of sleep: "Night rests humanity from the day's activity, and restores the equilibrium of human as well as of cosmic nature." (I, XXVI)

So the function of sleep is to restore the broken equilibrium, not only in the human kingdom but in the whole of cosmic nature as well. Night is the time for rest after the day's activity. All beings and creatures in Nature's lower kingdoms rest during this period. Only human beings go against

the law and turn night into day and spend their time in theatres, cinemas and night clubs till the late hours, missing the advantage that the nightly rest affords. The alternation of day and night, waking and sleeping, activity and rest, is a common fact, and each human being has to make practical application of the great Law of Cycles or Periodicity in his daily life if he would live in harmony with Nature. It operates in the whole of cosmos, and so there is an active period of manifestation followed by the sleep of *Pralaya* or non-manifestation.

Krishna speaks of it in the Eighth Discourse of the Bhagavad-Gita: "Those who are acquainted with day and night know that the day of Brahma is a thousand revolutions of the yugas, and that his night extendeth for a thousand more." The very first verse of the Stanzas of Dzyan states: "The Eternal Parent wrapped in her ever invisible robes had slumbered once again for seven eternities."

So, from the highest spiritual to the gross material and physical plane, waking and sleeping is the rule of life.

In the Sixth Discourse of the Bhagavad-Gita, Krishna instructs Arjuna in the Divine Discipline:

This divine discipline, Arjuna, is not to be attained by the man who eateth more than enough or too little, nor by him who hath a habit of sleeping much, nor by him who is given to overwatching. The meditation which destroyeth pain is produced in him who is moderate in eating and in recreation, of moderate exertion in his actions, and regulated in sleeping and waking.

So it is essential to be regular in the observance of the hours of sleep and to be moderate—not too much or too little. Rest after a day's work is a necessity. It alone can restore the broken equilibrium. How is it broken? From the moment of waking, every individual receives within himself different types of lives which are but different aspects of the One Life—airy, watery, earthy and fiery lives; mineral, vegetable and animal lives. There is a constant interchange of lives between human beings. Each influences and affects the others and is influenced and affected by those others. Each receives impressions from outside *via* the senses, and past recollections and future anticipations make him see pictures within himself. So, towards the close of the day he becomes more full of life than on waking and Nature compels him to have a change of polarity. His senses can no longer function, so he is unable to have any objective contacts or objective impressions and is turned within himself, thinking the same thoughts, generating the same kind of desires and feelings on higher or lower plane as during his waking life. But the body and the senses are absolutely quiet, therefore restful. Each human being is born with a certain quality of *prana* or vitality, weak or strong, pure or impure, and a certain rate of vibration. So each one is able to do only a certain amount of work, receive a certain number of impressions and no more, and the overbalance that takes place must be restored.

Two statements from Transactions will clear the point:

As a man exhausted by one state of the life fluid seeks another; as, for example, when exhausted by the hot air he refreshes himself with cool water; so sleep is the shady nook in the sunlit valley of life. (p. 71)

When questioned as to the process of sleep, H.P.B. answered:

It is said by Occultism to be the periodical and regulated exhaustion of the nervous centres, and especially of the sensory ganglia of the brain, which refuse to act any longer on this plane, and, if they would not become unfit for work, are compelled to recuperate their strength on another plane or *Upadhi*. (pp. 70-71)

It is this alternate condition of the sunshine of wakeful life and the cool shade of sleep that enables each one to go through his embodied existence for a shorter or longer span of life, determined by the quality of *prana* or vitality that is his under Karma. That vitality can be changed for better or worse, in terms of his own ideation, habits and mode of existence, and to the extent to which his personal life is harmonized with the spiritual principles. As the One Life is made up of infinitesimal lives, each one can attract to himself those lives that are consubstantial with his own nature. Herein lies the mystery of sleep.

While the body sleeps and rests and recuperates, the thinker within the body carries on his own activity on his own plane. H.P.B. makes an important statement:

Occultism teaches that physical man is one, but the thinking man septenary, thinking, acting, feeling, and living on seven different states of being or planes of consciousness, and that for all these states and planes the permanent Ego (not the false personality) has a distinct set of senses. (Transactions p. 73)

So there are different states through which each thinker passes during sleep, but mainly there are two—the dream or *swapna* state and the deep-sleep or *sushupti* state. The thinker works through the inner senses, just as during waking life he uses the physical senses. As each one's mind is occupied during the day, so will it be at night. Therefore it is essential to be vigilant during waking life so that the sleeping hours may be more fruitful, yielding more beneficial results. If the personal consciousness is predominant along one or another line during the day, so will it be at night. If the mind remains on higher level during the day, so will it be at night. Everyone experiences both these states, but for longer or shorter periods according to one's nature. It is really the deep-sleep state that produces refreshment and recuperation when, minus his fleshly appetites and worldly desires and passions, the unworldly soul partakes of the "banquet of the gods" because he has become like unto a god. It is in this state that poets and writers, artists and musicians, are inspired. It is in this state that prophetic or warning dreams are had. It is in this state that difficult problems are solved. It is a state free from the fetters of earthly existence.

So there are three main states of consciousness, all interdependent. Between waking and deep sleep is the borderland of *swapna*, which is to be crossed both ways, from waking to deep sleep and from deep sleep to waking; and the less one gets involved in that dream state the better for

him. Theosophy recommends purification of heart and mind and brain so that one may not loiter and linger in the dream state but may quickly cross over and plunge into deep sleep. It is also necessary, before putting the body to sleep, to ideate on an inspiring subject so that the thread of ideation may be continued in sleep. Each one is a musician and strikes his notes softly or harshly, harmoniously or discordantly. He has to have his instrument in perfect tune. So also the Divine Ego needs a perfect instrument to sing the song of Life, which is for most individuals not a song but a cry. Theosophy teaches and encourages man to live in harmony with the whole of Nature, to try to make of his body a living temple, so that the Living God may, waking or sleeping, sing the Divine Melody to inspire and uplift all fellow beings.