

Lesson 11

PRACTICAL THEOSOPHY

Helena P. Blavatsky
Condensed from *The Key to Theosophy*

DUTY

Our philosophy teaches us that the object of doing our duties to all men and to ourselves the last, is not the attainment of personal happiness, but of the happiness of others; the fulfilment of right for the sake of right, not for what it may bring us. Happiness, or rather contentment, may indeed follow the performance of duty, but is not and must not be the motive for it.

Duty is that which *is due* to Humanity, to our fellow-men, neighbors, family, and especially that which we owe to all those who are poorer and more helpless than we are ourselves. This is a debt which, if left unpaid during life, leaves us spiritually insolvent and moral bankrupts in our next incarnation. Theosophy is the quintessence of *duty*.

I say — *action*, enforced action, instead of mere intention and talk. A man may be what he likes, the most worldly, selfish and hard-hearted of men, even a deep-dyed rascal, and it will not prevent him from calling himself a Christian, or others from so regarding him. But no Theosophist has the right to this name, unless he is thoroughly imbued with the correctness of Carlyle's truism: "The end of man is an *action* and not a *thought*, though it were the noblest" — and unless he sets and models his daily life upon this truth. The profession of a truth is not yet the enactment of it; and the more beautiful and grand it sounds, the more loudly virtue or duty is talked about instead of being acted upon, the more forc-

ibly it will always remind one of the Dead Sea fruit. *Cant* is the most loathsome of all vices.

ENQUIRER. What do you consider as due to humanity at large?

THEOSOPHIST. Full recognition of equal rights and privileges for all, and without distinction of race, color, social position, or birth.

ENQUIRER. When would you consider such due not given?

THEOSOPHIST. When there is the slightest invasion of another's right — be that other a man or a nation; when there is any failure to show him the same justice, kindness, consideration or mercy which we desire for ourselves. The whole present system of politics is built on the oblivion of such rights, and the most fierce assertion of national selfishness. The French say: "Like master, like man"; they ought to add, "Like national policy, like citizen."

POLITICS

ENQUIRER. Do you take any part in politics?

THEOSOPHIST. As a Society, we carefully avoid them, for the reasons given below. 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 RELATIONS OF THE T. S. TO POLITICAL REFORMS.

ENQUIRER. The Theosophical Society is not, then, a political organization?

THEOSOPHIST. Certainly not. It is international in the highest sense in that its members comprise men and women of all races, creeds, and forms of thought, who work together for one object, the improvement of humanity; but as a society it takes absolutely no part in any national or party politics.

As a society they can only act together in matters which are common to all — that is, in 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 Society.

FOUR LINKS OF THE GOLDEN CHAIN

ENQUIRER. How, then, should Theosophical principles be applied so that social co-operation may be promoted and true efforts for social amelioration be carried on?

THEOSOPHIST. Let me briefly remind you what these principles are — universal Unity and Causation; Human Solidarity; the Law of Karma; Re-incarnation. These are the four links of the golden chain which should bind humanity into one family, one universal Brotherhood.

ENQUIRER. How?

THEOSOPHIST. In the present state of society, especially in so-called civilized countries, we are continually brought face to face with the fact that large numbers of people are suffering from misery, poverty and disease. Their physical condition is wretched, and their mental and spir-

itual faculties are often almost dormant. On the other hand, many persons at the opposite end of the social scale are leading lives of careless indifference, material luxury, and selfish indulgence. Neither of these forms of existence is mere chance. Both are the effects of the conditions which surround those who are subject to them, and the neglect of social duty on the one side is most closely connected with the stunted and arrested development on the other. In sociology, as in all branches of true science, the law of universal causation holds good. But this causation necessarily implies, as its logical outcome, that human solidarity on which Theosophy so strongly insists. If the action of one reacts on the lives of all, and this is the true scientific idea, then it is only by all men becoming brothers and all women sisters, and by all practicing in their daily lives true brotherhood and true sisterhood, that the real human solidarity, which lies at the root of the elevation of the race, can ever be attained. It is this action and interaction, this true brotherhood and sisterhood, in which each shall live for all and all for each, which is one of the fundamental Theosophical principles that every Theosophist should be bound, not only to teach, but to carry out in his or her individual life.

ENQUIRER. All this is very well as a general principle, but how would you apply it in a concrete way?

THEOSOPHIST. All good and evil things in humanity have their roots in human character, and this character is, and has been, conditioned by the endless chain of cause and effect. Progress can be attained, and only attained, by the development of the nobler qualities. Now, true evolution teaches us that by altering the surroundings of the organism we can alter and improve the organism; and in the strictest sense this is true with regard to man. Every Theosophist, therefore, is bound to do his utmost to help on, by all the means in his power, every wise and well-considered social effort which has for its object the amelioration of the condi-

tion of the poor. Such efforts should be made with a view to their ultimate social emancipation, or the development of the sense of duty in those who now so often neglect it in nearly every relation of life.

THE TEST OF WISE ACTION

ENQUIRER. Agreed. But who is to decide whether social efforts are wise or unwise?

THEOSOPHIST. No one person and no society can lay down a hard-and-fast rule in this respect. Much must necessarily be left to the individual judgment. One general test may, however, be given. Will the proposed action tend to promote that true brotherhood which it is the aim of Theosophy to bring about? No real Theosophist will have much difficulty in applying such a test; once he is satisfied of this, his duty will lie in the direction of forming public opinion. And this can be attained only by inculcating those higher and nobler conceptions of public and private duties which lie at the root of all spiritual and material improvement. In every conceivable case he himself must be a center of spiritual action, and from him and his own daily individual life must radiate those higher spiritual forces which alone can regenerate his fellow-men.

ENQUIRER. But why should he do this? Are not he and all, as you teach, conditioned by their Karma, and must not Karma necessarily work itself out on certain lines?

THEOSOPHIST. It is this very law of Karma which gives strength to all that I have said. 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. It is the development of humanity, of which both he and they are integral parts, that he has always in view, and he knows that any failure on his part to respond to the highest within him retards not only himself but all, in their progres-

sive march. By his actions, he can make it either more difficult or more easy for humanity to attain the next higher plane of being.

ENQUIRER. How does this bear on the fourth of the principles you mentioned, viz., Re-incarnation?

THEOSOPHIST. The connection is most intimate. If our present lives depend upon the de-

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velopment 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. If this life were all, then in many respects it would indeed be poor and mean; but regarded as a preparation for the next sphere of existence, it may be used as the golden gate through which we may pass, not selfishly and alone, but in company with our fellows, to the palaces which lie beyond.

ON SELF-SACRIFICE

ENQUIRER. Is equal justice to all and love to every creature the highest standard of Theosophy?

THEOSOPHIST. No; there is an even far higher one.

ENQUIRER. What can it be?

THEOSOPHIST. The giving to others *more* than to oneself — *self-sacrifice*. Such was the standard and abounding measure which marked so pre-eminently the greatest Teachers and Masters of Humanity — *e. g.*, Gautama Buddha in History, and Jesus of Nazareth as in the Gospels. This trait alone was enough to secure to them the perpetual reverence and gratitude of the generations of men that come after them. We say, however, that self-sacrifice has to be performed with discrimination; and such a self-abandonment, if made without justice, or blindly, regardless of subsequent results, may often prove not only made in vain, but harmful. One of the fundamental rules of Theosophy is, justice to oneself — viewed as a unit of collective humanity, not as a personal self-justice, not more but not less than to others; unless, indeed, by the sacrifice of the *one* self we can benefit the many.

ENQUIRER. Could you make your idea clearer by giving an instance?

THEOSOPHIST. There are many instances to illustrate it in history. Self-sacrifice for practical good to save many, or several people, Theosophy holds as far higher than self-abnegation for a sectarian idea, such as that of “saving the heathen from *damnation*,” for instance. In our opinion, Father Damien, the young man of thirty who offered his whole life in sacrifice for the benefit and alleviation of the sufferings of the lepers at

Molokai, and who went to live for eighteen years alone with them, to finally catch the loathsome disease and die, *has not died in vain*. He has given relief and relative happiness to thousands of miserable wretches. He has brought to them consolation, mental and physical. He threw a streak of light into the black and dreary night of an existence, the hopelessness of which is unparalleled in the records of human suffering. He was a *true Theosophist*, and his memory will live for ever in our annals. In our sight this poor Belgian priest stands immeasurably higher than — for instance — all those sincere but vain-glorious fools, the Missionaries who have sacrificed their lives in the South Sea Islands or China. What good have they done? They went in one case to those who are not yet ripe for any truth; and in the other to a nation whose systems of religious philosophy are as grand as any, if only the men who have them would live up to the standard of Confucius and their other sages. And they died victims of irresponsible cannibals and savages, and of popular fanaticism and hatred. Whereas, by going to the slums of Whitechapel or some other such locality of those that stagnate right under the blazing sun of our civilization, full of Christian savages and mental leprosy, they might have done real good, and preserved their lives for a better and worthier cause.

ENQUIRER. But the Christians do not think so?

THEOSOPHIST. Of course not, because they act on an erroneous belief. They think that by baptizing the body of an irresponsible savage they save his soul from damnation. Had we the means to do so, we would raise a statue to Father Damien, the true, practical saint, and perpetuate his memory for ever as a living exemplar of Theosophical heroism and of Buddha- and Christ-like mercy and self-sacrifice.

ENQUIRER. Then you regard self-sacrifice as a duty?

THEOSOPHIST. We do; and explain it by showing that altruism is an integral part of self-development. But we have to discriminate. A man has no right to starve himself *to death* that another man may have food, unless the life of that man is obviously more useful to the many than is his own life. But it is his duty to sacrifice his own comfort, and to work for others if they are unable to work for themselves. It is his duty to give all that which is wholly his own and can benefit no one but himself if he selfishly keeps it from others. Theosophy teaches self-abnegation, but does not teach rash and useless self-sacrifice, nor does it justify fanaticism.

ENQUIRER. But how are we to reach such an elevated status?

THEOSOPHIST. By the enlightened application of our precepts to practice. By the use of our higher reason, spiritual intuition and moral sense, and by following the dictates of what we call “the still small voice” of our conscience, which is that of our EGO, and which speaks louder in us than the earthquakes and the thunders of Jehovah, wherein “the Lord is not.”

ENQUIRER. If such are our duties to humanity at large, what do you understand by our duties to our immediate surroundings?

THEOSOPHIST. Just the same, *plus* those that arise from special obligations with regard to family ties.

ENQUIRER. Then it is not true, as it is said, that no sooner does a man enter into the Theosophical Society than he begins to be gradually severed from his wife, children, and family duties?

THEOSOPHIST. It is a groundless calumny, like so many others. The first of the Theosophical duties is to do one’s duty by *all* men, and especially by those to whom one’s *specific* responsibilities are due, because one has either voluntarily undertaken them, such as marriage ties, or because one’s destiny has allied one to them; I mean those we owe to parents or next of kin.

DUTY TO ONESELF

ENQUIRER. And what may be the duty of a Theosophist to himself?

THEOSOPHIST. To control and conquer, *through the Higher, the lower self*. To purify himself inwardly and morally; to fear no one, and nought, save the tribunal of his own conscience. Never to do a thing by halves; *i.e.*, if

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he thinks it the right thing to do, let him do it openly and boldly, and if wrong, never touch it at all. It is the duty of a Theosophist to lighten his burden by thinking of the wise aphorism of Epictetus, who says: “Be not diverted from your duty *by any idle reflection the silly world may make upon you*, for their censures are not in your power, and consequently should not be any part of your concern.”

ENQUIRER. But suppose a member of your Society should plead inability to practice altruism by other people, on the ground that “charity begins at home”; urging that he is too busy, or too poor, to benefit mankind or even any of its units — what are your rules in such a case?

THEOSOPHIST. No man has a right to say that he can do nothing for others, on any pretext whatever. “By doing the proper duty in the proper place, a man may make the world his debtor,” says an English writer. A cup of cold water given in time to a thirsty wayfarer is a nobler duty and more worth, than a dozen of dinners given away, out of season, to men who can afford to pay for them. No man who has not got it in him will ever become a *Theosophist*; but he may remain a member of our So-

ciety all the same. We have no rules by which we could force any man to become a practical Theosophist, if he does not desire to be one.

ENQUIRER. Then why does he enter the Society at all?

THEOSOPHIST. That is best known to him who does so. For, here again, we have no right to pre-judge a person, not even if the voice of a whole community should be against him, and I may tell you why. In our day, *vox populi* (so far as regards the voice of the educated, at any rate) is no longer *vox dei*, but ever that of prejudice, of selfish motives, and often simply that of unpopularity. Our duty is to sow seeds broadcast for the future, and see they are good; not to stop to enquire *why* we should do so, and how and wherefore we are obliged to lose our time, since those who will reap the harvest in days to come will never be ourselves.

ON CHARITY

ENQUIRER. How do you Theosophists regard the Christian duty of charity?

THEOSOPHIST. Act individually and not collectively; follow the Northern Buddhist precepts: "Never put food into the mouth of the hungry by the hand of another"; "Never let the shadow of thy neighbor (*a third person*) come between thyself and the object of thy bounty"; "Never give to the Sun time to dry a tear before thou hast wiped it." Again "Never give money to the needy, or food to the priest, who begs at thy door, *through thy servants*, lest thy money should diminish gratitude, and thy food turn to gall."

ENQUIRER. But how can this be applied practically?

THEOSOPHIST. The Theosophical ideas of charity mean *personal* exertion for others; *personal* mercy and kindness; *personal* interest in the welfare of those who suffer; *personal* sympathy, forethought and assistance in their troubles or needs. We Theosophists do not believe in giving money (N. B., if we had it) through other people's hands or organizations. We believe in

giving to the money a thousandfold greater power and effectiveness by our personal contact and sympathy with those who need it. We believe in relieving the starvation of the soul, as much if not more than the emptiness of the stomach; for gratitude does more good to the man who feels it, than to him for whom it is felt.

THEOSOPHY FOR THE MASSES

ENQUIRER. And you think that Theosophy would, by stepping in, help to remove these evils, under the practical and adverse conditions of our modern life?

THEOSOPHIST. Had we more money, and had not most of the Theosophists to work for their daily bread, I firmly believe we could.

ENQUIRER. How? Do you expect that your doctrines could ever take hold of the uneducated masses, when they are so abstruse and difficult that well-educated people can hardly understand them?

THEOSOPHIST. You forget one thing, which is that your much-boasted modern education is precisely that which makes it difficult for you to understand Theosophy. Your mind is so full of intellectual subtleties and preconceptions that your natural intuition and perception of the truth cannot act. It does not require metaphysics or education to make a man understand the broad truths of Karma and Reincarnation. Look at the millions of poor and uneducated Buddhists and Hindoos, to whom Karma and re-incarnation are solid realities, simply because their minds have never been cramped and distorted by being forced into an unnatural groove. They have never had the innate human sense of justice perverted in them by being told to believe that their sins would be forgiven because another man had been put to death for their sakes. And the Buddhists, note well, live up to their beliefs without a murmur against Karma, or what they regard as a just punishment; whereas the Christian populace neither lives up to its moral ideal, nor accepts

its lot contentedly. Hence murmuring, and dissatisfaction, and the intensity of the struggle for existence in Western lands.

ENQUIRER. But this contentedness, which you praise so much, would do away with all motive for exertion and bring progress to a stand-still.

THEOSOPHIST. And we, Theosophists, say that your vaunted progress and civilization are no better than a host of will-o'-the-wisps, flickering over a marsh which exhales a poisonous and deadly miasma. This, because we see selfishness, crime, immorality, and all the evils imaginable, pouncing upon unfortunate mankind from this Pandora's box which you call an age of progress, and increasing *pari passu* with the growth of your material civilization. At such a price, better the inertia and inactivity of Buddhist countries, which have arisen only as a consequence of ages of political slavery.

ENQUIRER. Then is all this metaphysics and mysticism with which you occupy yourself so much, of no importance?

THEOSOPHIST. To the masses, who need only practical guidance and support, they are not of much consequence; but for the educated, the natural leaders of the masses, those whose modes of thought and action will sooner or later be adopted by those masses, they are of the greatest importance. It is only by means of the philosophy that an intelligent and educated man can avoid the intellectual suicide of believing on blind faith; and it is only by assimilating the strict continuity and logical coherence of the Eastern, if not esoteric, doctrines, that he can realize their truth. Conviction breeds enthusiasm, and "Enthusiasm," says Bulwer Lytton, "is the genius of sincerity, and truth accomplishes no victories without it"; while Emerson most truly remarks that "every great and commanding movement in the annals of the world is the triumph of enthusiasm." And what is more calculated to produce such a feeling than a philosophy so grand, so consistent, so logical, and so all-embracing as our Eastern Doctrines?

ENQUIRER. And yet its enemies are very numerous, and every day Theosophy acquires new opponents.

THEOSOPHIST. And this is precisely that which proves its intrinsic excellence and value. People hate only the things they fear,

In our opinion, Father Damien, the young man of thirty who offered his whole life in sacrifice for the benefit and alleviation of the sufferings of the lepers at Molokai, and who went to live for eighteen years alone with them, to finally catch the loathsome disease and die, has not died in vain. . . . He was a true Theosophist, and his memory will live for ever in our annals.

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and no one goes out of his way to overthrow that which neither threatens nor rises beyond mediocrity.

ENQUIRER. Do you hope to impart this enthusiasm, one day, to the masses?

THEOSOPHIST. Why not? since history tells us that the masses adopted Buddhism with enthusiasm, while, as said before, the practical effect upon them of this philosophy of ethics is still shown by the smallness of the percentage of crime amongst Buddhist populations as compared with every other religion. The chief point is, to uproot that most fertile source of all crime and immorality — the belief that it is possible for them to escape the consequences of their own actions. Once teach them that greatest of all laws, *Karma* and *Re-incarnation*, and besides feeling in themselves the true dignity of human nature, they

will turn from evil and eschew it as they would a physical danger.

HOW MEMBERS CAN HELP THE SOCIETY

ENQUIRER. How do you expect the Fellows of your Society to help in the work?

THEOSOPHIST. First by studying and comprehending the theosophical doctrines, so that they may teach others, especially the young people. Secondly, by taking every opportunity of talking to others and explaining to them what Theosophy is, and what it is not; by removing misconceptions and spreading an interest in the subject. Thirdly, by assisting in circulating our literature, by buying books when they have the means, by lending and giving them and by inducing their friends to do so. Fourthly, by defending the Society from the unjust aspersions cast upon it, by every legitimate device in their power. Fifth, and most important of all, by the example of their own lives.

ENQUIRER. But all this literature, to the spread of which you attach so much importance, does not seem to me of much practical use in helping mankind. This is not practical charity.

THEOSOPHIST. We think otherwise. We hold that a good book which gives people food for thought, which strengthens and clears their minds, and enables them to grasp truths which they have dimly felt but could not formulate — we hold that such a book does a real, substantial good. As to what you call practical deeds of charity, to benefit the bodies of our fellow-men, we do what little we can; but, as I have already told you, most of us are poor, whilst the Society itself has not even the money to pay a staff of workers. All of us who toil for it, give our labor gratis, and in most cases money as well. The few who have the means of doing what are usually called charitable actions, follow the Buddhist precepts and do their work themselves, not by proxy or by subscribing publicly to charitable funds. What the Theosophist has to do above all is to forget his personality.

WHAT A THEOSOPHIST OUGHT NOT TO DO

ENQUIRER. Have you any prohibitory laws or clauses for Theosophists in your Society?

THEOSOPHIST. Many, but, alas! none of them are enforced. They express the ideal of our organization, — but the practical application of such things we are compelled to leave to the discretion of the Fellows themselves. Unfortunately, the state of men's minds in the present century is such that, unless we allow these clauses to remain, so to speak, obsolete, no man or woman would dare to risk joining the Theosophical Society. This is precisely why I feel forced to lay such a stress on the difference between true Theosophy and its hard-struggling and well-intentioned, but still unworthy vehicle, the Theosophical Society.

ENQUIRER. May I be told what are these perilous reefs in the open sea of Theosophy?

THEOSOPHIST. Well may you call them reefs, as more than one otherwise sincere and well-meaning F.T.S. has had his Theosophical canoe shattered into splinters on them! And yet to avoid certain things seems the easiest thing in the world to do. For instance, here is a series of such negatives, screening positive Theosophical duties: —

No Theosophist should be silent when he hears evil reports or slanders spread about the Society, or innocent persons, whether they be his colleagues or outsiders.

ENQUIRER. But suppose what one hears is the truth, or may be true without one knowing it?

THEOSOPHIST. Then you must demand good proofs of the assertion, and hear both sides impartially before you permit the accusation to go uncontradicted. You have no right to believe in evil, until you get undeniable proof of the correctness of the statement.

ENQUIRER. And what should you do then?

THEOSOPHIST. Pity and forbearance, charity and long-suffering, ought to be always

there to prompt us to excuse our sinning brethren, and to pass the gentlest sentence possible upon those who err. A Theosophist ought never to forget what is due to the shortcomings and infirmities of human nature.

ENQUIRER. Ought he to forgive entirely in such cases?

THEOSOPHIST. In every case, especially he who is sinned against.

ENQUIRER. But if by so doing, he risks to injure, or allow others to be injured? What ought he to do then?

THEOSOPHIST. His duty; that which his conscience and higher nature suggests to him; but only after mature deliberation. Justice consists in doing no injury to any living being; but justice commands us also never to allow injury to be done to the many, or even to one innocent person, by allowing the guilty one to go unchecked.

ENQUIRER. What are the other negative clauses?

THEOSOPHIST. No Theosophist ought to be contented with an idle or frivolous life, doing no real good to himself and still less to others. He should work for the benefit of the few who need his help if he is unable to toil for Humanity, and thus work for the advancement of the Theosophical cause.

ENQUIRER. This demands an exceptional nature, and would come rather hard upon some persons.

THEOSOPHIST. Then they had better remain outside the T. S. instead of sailing under false colors. No one is asked to give more than he can afford, whether in devotion, time, work or money.

ENQUIRER. What comes next?

THEOSOPHIST. No working member should set too great value on his personal progress or proficiency in Theosophic studies; but must be prepared rather to do as much altruistic work as lies in his power. He should not leave the whole of the heavy burden and responsibility of the

Theosophical movement on the shoulders of the few devoted workers. Each member ought to feel it his duty to take what share he can in the common work, and help it by every means in his power.

ENQUIRER. This is but just. What comes next?

No Theosophist ought to be contented with an idle or frivolous life, doing no real good to himself and still less to others.

THEOSOPHIST. No Theosophist should place his personal vanity, or feelings, above those of his Society as a body. He who sacrifices the latter, or other people's reputations on the altar of his personal vanity, worldly benefit, or pride, ought not to be allowed to remain a member. One cancerous limb diseases the whole body.

ENQUIRER. Is it the duty of every member to teach others and preach Theosophy?

THEOSOPHIST. It is indeed. No fellow has a right to remain idle, on the excuse that he knows too little to teach. For he may always be sure that he will find others who know still less than himself. And also it is not until a man begins to try to teach others, that he discovers his own ignorance and tries to remove it. But this is a minor clause.

ENQUIRER. What do you consider, then, to be the chief of these negative Theosophical duties?

THEOSOPHIST. To be ever prepared to recognize and confess one's faults. To rather sin through exaggerated praise than through too little appreciation of one's neighbor's efforts. Never to backbite or slander another person.

Always to say openly and direct to his face anything you have against him. Never to make yourself the echo of anything you may hear against another, nor harbor revenge against those who happen to injure you.

ENQUIRER. But it is often dangerous to tell people the truth to their faces. Don't you think so? I know one of your members who was bitterly offended, left the Society, and became its greatest enemy, only because he was told some unpleasant truths to his face, and was blamed for them.

THEOSOPHIST. Of such we have had many. No member, whether prominent or insignificant, has ever left us without becoming our bitter enemy.

ENQUIRER. How do you account for it?

THEOSOPHIST. It is simply this. Having been, in most cases, intensely devoted to the Society at first, and having lavished upon it the most exaggerated praises, the only possible excuse such a backslider can make for his subsequent behavior and past short-sightedness, is *to pose as an innocent and deceived victim*, thus casting the blame from his own shoulders on to those of the Society in general, and its leaders especially. Such persons remind one of the old fable about the man with a distorted face, who broke his looking-glass on the ground that it reflected his countenance crookedly.

ENQUIRER. But what makes these people turn against the Society?

THEOSOPHIST. Wounded vanity in some form or other, almost in every case.

ENQUIRER. What would you do with such characters?

THEOSOPHIST. Leave them to their Karma. Because one person does evil that is no reason for others to do so.

ENQUIRER. But, to return to slander, where is the line of demarcation between backbiting and just criticism to be drawn? Is it not one's duty to

ON EDUCATION

If we had money, we would found schools which would turn out something else than reading and writing candidates for starvation.

Children should above all be taught self-reliance, love for all men, altruism, mutual charity, and more than anything else, to think and reason for themselves. We would reduce the purely mechanical work of the memory to an absolute minimum, and devote the time to the development and training of the inner senses, faculties and latent capacities. We would endeavor to deal with each child as a unit, and to educate it so as to produce the most harmonious and equal unfoldment of its powers, in order that its special aptitudes should find their full natural development.

We should aim at creating free men and women, free intellectually, free morally, unprejudiced in all respects, and above all things, unselfish. And we believe that much if not all of this could be obtained by proper and truly theosophical education.

— H.P. BLAVATSKY

warn one's friends and neighbors against those whom one knows to be dangerous associates?

THEOSOPHIST. If by allowing them to go on unchecked other persons may be thereby injured, it is certainly our duty to obviate the danger by warning them privately. But true or false, no accusation against another person should ever be spread abroad. If true, and the fault hurts no one but the sinner, then leave him to his Karma. If false, then you will have avoided adding to the injustice in the world. Therefore, keep silent about such things with every one not directly concerned. But if your discretion and silence are likely to hurt or endanger others, then I add: *Speak the truth at all costs*, and say, with Annesly, "Consult duty, not events." There are cases when one is forced to exclaim, "Perish discretion, rather than allow it to interfere with duty."

ENQUIRER. Methinks, if you carry out these maxims, you are likely to reap a nice crop of troubles!

THEOSOPHIST. And so we do. We have to admit that we are now open to the same taunt as the early Christians were. "See, how these Theosophists love one another!" may now be said of us without a shadow of injustice.

ENQUIRER. Admitting yourself that there is at least as much, if not more, backbiting, slandering, and quarreling in the T. S. as in the Christian Churches, let alone Scientific Societies —

At present, the main, fundamental object of the Society is to sow germs in the hearts of men, which may in time sprout, and under more propitious circumstances lead to a healthy reform, conducive of more happiness to the masses than they have hitherto enjoyed.

What kind of Brotherhood is this? I may ask.

THEOSOPHIST. A very poor specimen, indeed, as at present, and, until carefully sifted and reorganized, *no* better than all others. Remember, however, that human nature is the same *in* the Theosophical Society as *out* of it. Its members are no saints: they are at best sinners trying to do better, and liable to fall back owing to personal weakness.

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Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*. Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai, India.

Questions for Review:

1. What is the attitude of theosophists towards political reform?
2. What are four major teachings that need to be disseminated to promote social amelioration?
3. What is the primary duty of a theosophist to oneself?
4. How should theosophists engage in charitable activities?
5. What are the duties of a theosophist as a member?
6. What are the basic principles of theosophical education?