

Theosophy and Dogma

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THEOSOPHY has many aspects, and derives its inspiration not from one source only, not from one teacher merely, or from one set of sacred writings, but from all.

This is a fact which it appears most difficult to impress upon the world at large, and upon the opponents of Theosophy in particular. Men are so accustomed to regulate their opinions by some particular creed or dogma, which they suppose to rest upon some *authority* beyond which there is no appeal, that they cannot grasp the wider aspect of human duty and human destiny which Theosophy presents.

If we examine any of those exclusive and contradictory religious systems on which, in some form or another, men blindly rely, we find at once a broad distinction drawn between believers and unbelievers, between those who are within and those who are without the favour of God, between the lost and the saved. But Theosophy knows no such distinctions as these, neither any difference of race, colour or creed.

The spiritual sun shines alike on the good and on the evil, and the water of life descends both on the just and on the unjust. It rests with each individual to make the proper use of those spiritual forces which are ever emanating from the divine source of our being.

We must do this first by faith, and secondly by knowledge. If we have no faith in the divine spark that burns within us, we shall make no efforts to let that spark illumine and guide our life; and on the other hand, if we have faith without knowledge, we shall still be groping in the dark, and will surely mistake the false light of some earth-born system of religion, for the divine light that burns only in the innermost sanctuary of our own hearts.

We must use the spiritual forces in nature in the same way that we make use of physical forces. If a man does not work in harmony with the laws of nature, he will find opposition instead of help; if he sow not in accordance with nature's law, he will reap naught but disappointment and pain. We need faith in the first place, faith in the unity and continuity [Page 18] of natural laws, and faith in our own divine nature, but no amount of faith will enable us to produce the desired result if we do not add to faith knowledge. Theosophy carries this principle right up to the highest spiritual plane, and does not recognise at any point the intervention of an arbitrary personal will, which can make a man other than that which he himself chooses. All are subject to the law of Karma, but Karma is that which each individual makes for himself; it is the law of cause and effect in relation to his own free will.

The will of man is as free as the will of God, and becomes, indeed, that will itself when the man has realised his divine nature, and by crucifying his lower principles has effected the at-one-ment.

It is the most common misconception, then, and the hardest to eradicate, that Theosophy consists in a belief in certain doctrines; that it is in fact nothing more or less than a religious creed.

What then we shall be asked are those doctrines which Theosophists everywhere profess to hold, and which they appear most anxious to teach the world ? What is Esoteric Buddhism and the Secret Doctrine, or Reincarnation and Karma, if not a body of doctrines which are intended to supplant other religious creeds and dogmas ?

The answer to this is, that these doctrines are the embodiment of certain broad generalisations concerning the history and evolution of humanity; that they are the key which enables us to harmonise certain facts which would otherwise appear isolated and antagonistic. They are in no way analogous to the dogmas and creeds of the religious sects, but answer more nearly to such generalisations, of science as the laws of gravity or the conservation of energy. It is not claimed for them that they are necessary articles of belief, neither that they are in their present form accurately and literally true. They are stepping-stones to a higher knowledge of the divine element in human nature, and of the laws physical, psychical, and spiritual by which we are conditioned. If we ask a scientific man what gravity or energy are, he cannot tell us, but no one will deny that the laws which have been formulated respecting their action of manifestation have been most powerful aids in scientific investigations. Now, it is precisely thus with the doctrines of Theosophy. Once these doctrines are understood they give a man an immensely wider view of humanity, and raise him above those narrow and limited conceptions of God and his dealings with individuals, of which so many contradictory assertions are made by various religions, and the innumerable sects into which they are split up.

What practical relation then has Theosophy to our everyday life ? We reply that practical Theosophy is identical with practical religion. **[Page 19]** It comes from the heart and not from the head. It is the spontaneous love for one's fellow-creatures, which, taking possession of a man, leads to noble acts of self-sacrifice; to right action done simply because it is right, and without any reference to the merit of the act, or any thought of recognition or reward.

Theosophy aims at nothing short of perfection of character; but character as expressed in outward acts is the result of an inward condition. The root of action lies deep down in the inner consciousness. It is the man's thoughts, desires, and innermost convictions which give rise to action. Act does not produce character, is not even a true indication of it, for a right action may be done from a wrong motive. Act is the result of character.

Right action must be based upon right thought, right motive, and right knowledge, and it is just here that the study of the doctrines of Theosophy is of such value to those who are seeking for firm ground to stand upon amid all the conflicting dogmas and controversies of the age, for it provides a basis which is independent of any religious system, and yet includes them all in their inner or esoteric meaning. There is not much difficulty in distinguishing between a right and a wrong action *per se*, but there is a great difference between the man who is merely moral through habit or temperament, and one who is actively

beneficent because of the love for humanity which animates him. Moreover, there will be a great difference in the actions of a man who believes in the doctrine of original sin and the atonement, and one who believes in reincarnation and Karma.

Theosophy, therefore, as a system, seeks to influence men by giving them a right basis of thought. It seeks to counteract on the one hand, the materialistic and atheistic teachings of modern science, and on the other hand, the narrow, exclusive, and demoralising teachings of dogmatic and formal religion.

But Theosophy as a system is something even more than this. Theosophy does not seek merely to destroy superstition, but it seeks to build up a new edifice constructed of those very materials which have been so perverted in their uses by centuries of priestcraft and ecclesiasticism. Theosophy is based upon a deeper wisdom, a more interior meaning of those sacred books of all nations, which form the foundation of so many religious systems.

Each one must verify the doctrines of Theosophy for himself, and in doing so will probably find new light and fresh inspiration in those particular records which he has been accustomed to regard as the basis of his faith; and he will also be able to recognise the same meaning in the [Page 20] sacred books of other faiths, which hitherto he may have been accustomed to regard as "heathen", and as being contradictory and opposed to his own.

Theosophy, then, has two main aspects, the theoretical and the practical. These two must harmonise: practice must be based upon theory, and if the theory has been rightly understood, the practice can hardly fail to be in accord with it. Theosophy offers a motive and a moral stimulus free from fear, superstition, or lip worship, but full of divine love. It is practice that makes a Theosophist, and not profession. The Theosophical Society as a body and an organisation seeks to teach the theory, while each individual member must practise so much of the theory as he has been able to assimilate, in his every-day life, in his relations with his fellow-men, and in his inmost thoughts and desires.

Standing free from fear or superstition, let each one make obeisance only to the dim star that burns within. "Steadily, as you watch and worship, its light will grow stronger. Then you may know you have found the beginning of the way. And when you have found the end its light will suddenly become the infinite light."

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The article on the "Tarot" in T.P.S., volume 3, No. 10, was inserted by the printers in error, after proofs were passed and too late for, correction.