

# Theosophy

by Allen Griffiths, F.T.S.

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DURING the last few years there has been evinced a growing interest by the general public in the subject of Theosophy. The word Theosophy is derived from the Greek Theo, God; Sophia, Wisdom — God Wisdom. Wisdom Religion is the term most commonly used among the Theosophists.

The Theosophical Society was founded at New York City, November 17th , 1875. Its founders were Colonel H. S. Olcott and Madame H. P. Blavatsky. Since that time there have been formed numerous branches of the Society in different cities of the United States, Europe, India and other parts of the world, and the number is continually increasing.

Colonel Olcott, the President, prior to the founding of the Theosophical Society, was known as a man of the world, easy-going, philosophical, and taking life as that class do — somewhat sceptical, pretty well balanced, even to stoicism, not easily carried away by new innovations or startling discoveries of whatever character. After a series of experiences, extraordinary in their nature and appealing directly to his Higher Self, hitherto lying dormant and inactive, a complete change in his life took place. Formerly, inert and inactive as to what touches the deeper concerns of men, he now became imbued with that interest and love for all mankind, which called him into their service upon practical and higher planes, where, for the past fourteen years, he has laboured untiringly, unflaggingly and unselfishly, with no reward but the knowledge that he was attaining for himself that which constitutes the higher man in so much as he gives his life and labour for the greatest good of others.

Madame Blavatsky, the late Corresponding Secretary, a Russian by birth, an American by adoption, but by life and education, a citizen of the world; a traveller and observer; a student of life in all its phases; possessing a mind keen, comprehensive, and analytical; knowing men and nations to the core, because having identified herself with them by a life of unremitting toil actuated by a pure and unselfish motive to elevate and upraise them to the conception and realisation of a higher life. For over thirty years she has thus laboured and is now still devoting the remnant of her useful life to that end. Often misunderstood, traduced, maligned, yet holding on her course with an unswerving zeal born of that holy desire to aid mankind. She presents to all who know her life an example to be patterned after and [Page 15] followed. Being but human, she is not perfect, and her failings and imperfections have been multiplied and magnified by ignorant and venomous tongues, actuated by little and mean minds which can perceive the mole-hills of human failings, but lack the largeness to sight the mountain of noble and useful life which fills the horizon.

Although the Theosophical Society was founded and organized as above, yet it must not be understood

that Theosophy owes its origin to that time and event. Theosophy has an age equal to the age of man himself, dating from the period when he first became a dweller on the planet. It is not only the Wisdom Religion of all times, but, also, the true Knowledge and Science of all ages, often buried beneath the crustations of form, ceremony, superstition and mythology, it is true, yet for all that, existing and telling of that vitalizing force and power which, not only imparts the life that inheres and moves within all forms and causes them to be, but possesses of itself the native power of constant growth and progress.

Theosophy is not the only name by which the, Wisdom Religion has been known; at different periods and by various peoples it was known and recognised under many names, but the truth itself was and is ever the same, and will always remain unchanged and unchangeable, though man's conception of it may continually alter and enlarge according to his stage of progression. Buddhism figures largely as a factor in it, and is by some supposed not only to embody all of Theosophy, but that Theosophy owes its origin to it entirely. This is not strictly true. Neither Buddhism or any other one religion, philosophy or belief, constitutes all of Theosophy, any more than Catholicism, or any one Protestant denomination constitutes the whole of Christianity. Theosophy includes much of Buddhism, as it does much of every other religious belief, and claims for itself superiority over all, in this, — that it is not all of any one religion, but is the essence of that which is wise, true, and good of all religions. From its very nature, it supersedes in excellence and wisdom the religion of any one time or people, in that it is the concentrated and refined wisdom of all peoples and of all ages.

Not only is this true, but it claims emanation originally from a source higher than man, and also that all religions have had their origin in it.

Theosophy may appear to partake more largely of the principles of Buddhism than of any other religion, and probably does. That condition is due to the fact that Buddhism, *esoterically*, is identical with Theosophy to a large extent. The fact that Buddhism, even in its exoteric sense, holds sway over about one-third of the world's population today, after the lapse of a time greater by six hundred years than the age of Christianity, is forcible proof of its inherent truth and wisdom. That some of the principles of esoteric Buddhism have permeated many religions, and are now leavening [Page 16] the whole world of religious thought, is not because it is Buddhism, but *because it is Truth*, which knows no time, nor place, nor people, but is universal and all-including, and when the time arrives for its reception, it recognises no obstacles in the way of its progress.

One of the characteristic ideas of Theosophy is the supremacy of spirit over matter. It is this difference which constitutes them two; if no difference existed, there would be but one. As no two things are exactly alike, neither are they exactly equal. Theosophy asserts the existence of both spirit and matter, and their relationship, but claims the superiority of the former over the latter; in fact, spirit manifests itself through and by the agency of matter. Spirit uses matter; matter never uses spirit, but is always subservient to it. Without matter in some form, though so ethereal that to man's material sense it appears to be more of spirit than matter, spirit could not manifest or have knowledge of itself objectively. Spirit is ever the intelligence that manipulates matter for its own ends and uses.

The object of Theosophy is to enlighten man and enable him to so understand and locate himself, with relation to the laws that govern him, as will best restore that harmony and union with nature and the Absolute, which conduces to his highest happiness and unfoldment, looking toward perfection.

Theosophy has no set creed or dogma, written or verbal, to the conformance of which it imperatively demands belief or submission, but rather teaches that each individual should cultivate that manner of life which will best lead him towards the attainment of his own highest aspirations. No one is expected to accept anything of whatever nature blindly, or upon any authority except that vested in his own highest reason and intuition; test all things according to the conditions of their alleged existence and truth alone, not by the conditions governing something else, and abide by the result. It teaches the presence of the Divine in every human breast, which, if heard and heeded, uplifts and brings him into communion with the Absolute, the Absolute to *him*, the Absolute of *his* highest conceptions, and that the higher and farther he progresses, the greater will be his conceptions of that Absolute. It also teaches that to know, man must learn, and that, learning is, at first, a process of close application and deep study, and that he will be rewarded only in the exact ratio of his conformance to the conditions. It teaches that the spirit is an eternal entity, whose history covers the great, silent past, and whose heritage is the illimitable future; that its journey through eternity has for its object and purpose the fulfilment of an immeasurable capacity; that all eternity is but a continuous possibility for achievement and unfoldment; that the innumerable avenues of knowledge leading to infinite wisdom are its chosen walks. It discourages the cultivation of any one talent at the expense of [Page 17] all or any of the others, but encourages the development of the *whole man*, so that each chord in his entire nature shall be attuned in harmony with the whole. Desires of an earthly or perishable nature, that glow and burn with the fierce violence of a consuming fire; passions that seam the face, blear the eye, and bend the form; the silent and suppressed fungus growths of the lower nature, which fester and poison, all must be allowed to die out and disappear. Purity, love, truth, and wisdom are the touchstones of success, being at once the means and object of attainment.

Theosophy has no controversy with the Truth as embodied in Spiritualism, or any other religious belief, nor with that of any science or philosophy, but does take issue with those arrogant exponents of any religion, belief, philosophy or science; who dogmatically assert their conclusions, founded upon the basis of partial knowledge only, to be final and absolute. It exercises toward *all* that spirit of charity and fellow-feeling which is born of the broadest liberality, and which recognizes good in all. Theosophy holds that any given 'ism or 'ology that influences or leads man to higher conceptions of truth, and is conducive to purer individual life, is sacred, and is serving higher ends. It may not agree that the truths, as seen and striven for on a particular line, are the highest truths, for it recognises that truth is many-sided, but to obtain a view even from one side is deemed an upward step. In this sense, Theosophy feels an interest and sympathy in every work which has for its object the elevation of humanity, and never attempts to obstruct or retard, but rather in its own way, aids and assists.

Re-incarnation and Karma are two principal and important features, for the full understanding of which those who desire Theosophical knowledge should study. To those who would know the truth upon these subjects, it may be said that there is quite an extensive and explicit literature extant and accessible, bearing upon Re-incarnation and Karma, the study of which will enable them to obtain correct and reliable information. Hear-say and partial knowledge cannot be depended upon to give exact truth in this matter. Re-incarnation is a subject that has been closely looked into, studied and accepted by too many keen and critical minds to be idly considered. No one, from the stand-point of partial knowledge, is qualified to accept or reject it; — it may be found, upon study and investigation, to be more plausible of belief than would appear at first glance.

Theosophy asserts that upon no other known theory can the apparently unjust conditions and inequalities of individual life be accounted for than upon that of re-incarnation. Re-incarnation rests entirely and solely

upon the law of cause and effect, asserting that a given cause produces, sooner or later, an effect of the same nature upon the same plane, always, however, attended by an impulse which imparts an upward tendency. The existence of man [Page 18] upon earth, with all his physical, mental, moral and spiritual characteristics, is the effect of previous causes, that effect itself, in turn, assuming the phase and action of causes, which, at subsequent time, shall work his further growth and development.

Man is dual in his nature. The spirit, which is the eternal ego, eternal as having had no beginning in the past, and as having no ending in the future, is the real true self, and manifests in many personalities, each personality constituting a distinct life on this earth. Every incarnation or manifestation of the ego as a personality is an advance along the spiritual line, as compared with the previous one: and each individual re-incarnates many times on the earth-plane.

At death, or within a comparatively short time after, the personality, which is not the spirit or ego itself, but merely a vehicle it utilizes for the purpose of growth, and which at death it is done with, perishes. All that the spirit, the eternal ego, has acquired in any way which is of necessity of a lasting and imperishable nature, is stored up for subsequent use in its next incarnation, so that a new re-birth is begun upon the basis of the highest development attained in its previous incarnation. There is no retrogression, but always advance. The personality, the vehicle, perishes when its usefulness is ended; the spiritual ego continues to exist, and utilizes again and again that phase of manifestation in matter which is best adapted to its growth, and which ultimately enables it to merge into the Infinite.

To enable one to grasp and understand these ideas, it is necessary to realize the difference between the true and the false, the real and the unreal — that which is eternal as compared with that which is temporary and perishable. The spiritual ego being eternal is concerned with the eternal, not with the transient and passing.

If the attempt be made to square the principles of re-incarnation with preconceived ideas of what should be according to man's finite conceptions, failure may attend the effort; but if a sincere and earnest desire to know the unknown and to solve the mysteries of being is felt, most satisfactory results may be obtained. Man is, to a degree, the arbiter of his own destiny. The road along which he is to journey is inexorably marked out, but whether he will hasten or loiter on the way; whether he enjoys or suffers, depends largely upon himself. Theosophy teaches that the individual is superior to time, place or circumstance, if he so wills; that the door of universal knowledge is open for the attainment of wisdom to him who earnestly and devoutly seeks admission to the Temple of Truth. For the idle and indolent wisdom exists not, but attends upon honest effort.

There are orders variously known as Arhats, Adepts, The Brothers, [Page 19] The Masters, Mahatmas, etc., which exist in the regular line of progression leading to the Absolute. In all nature the lower leads up to the higher in methodical gradations. In the human race there are at the lower end of the scale the most inferior grades, and immediately above them exist men of more average intelligence, and so on up the scale till is reached the highest order of minds. Between the lowest and the highest are the intermediate links which connect the extremes. Now, above the highest developed class of men and impinging upon them, are orders of intelligences which connect the most advanced minds of the human family with yet still higher orders. That these refined and exalted Ones are not accessible to ordinary men is self-evident, nor will it become possible for man to contact them unless he rises to their plane. Their state and

condition being the result of the refining and purifying processes of ages, their plane of thought and action is so far above ordinary earthly levels that only the very exceptional and sublimated soul can possibly rise to a height that will bring him within their notice — and to have progressed so far as to be able to communicate directly with the Masters, indicates a degree of altruism and self-conquest rarely met with.

Man, in his great egotism and self-conceit, imagines his own sphere of action the highest that exists, little realizing that his is only one of the steps leading to yet higher states, and that in those higher realms are intelligences which act upon their respective superior planes quite as naturally as he does upon his lower one; and furthermore, that to them man's estate may appear an inferior condition in comparison. The Brothers are the graduates, so to speak, of humanity, they have by effort and actual experience attained all that is held within the scope of human endeavour as now known to man, and have, by virtue of that attainment, risen to act upon higher planes of existence, where their developed super human powers have larger field for still further attainment. Now, because they have thus attained, it does not follow that their interest in humanity has ceased, or that they are helpless to cause that feeling to act in a practical and efficient manner to the great benefit of the race; on the contrary, having risen to that state from which they view human affairs in a purely impersonal light, they can now the better influence and assist mankind as a whole, to progress toward their own advanced state, in fact, that is one of their chief offices. From their superior stand-point of observation and experience, they fully realize that only by his own exertion and desire should man advance and they act in accordance with that fact. Were they by their own strength to urge and push an individual or a race beyond the self-sustaining point, it could but prove disastrous. That would be much like inducing or causing a boy to climb a tree, who, when he had made the ascent, not having the strength to maintain his place, loosens his [Page 20] hold and falls to the ground, mangled or dead. He did not attempt the feat because of native resolution and strength, but because of having been induced to attempt more than he could successfully perform under pressure of some outside influence, and when foreign aid is withdrawn, he naturally becomes the victim of his own weakness.

The wisdom of the Masters is emphatically evinced by the course they pursue toward humanity. While the race as a whole pursues its regular way along the slow and sure road of evolution, receiving now and then at the needed time, impulses which call out its own inherent strength and thus insures advance with no back-sets, still there are a few who, by extra effort and charged with higher motives than actuate mankind in general, and inspired by glimpses of what their higher nature is capable, "Live the Life" pushing on ahead of the plodding race: and after a time spent in illuminating the earthy nature and cultivating and expanding the higher, attract the attention of the Masters and receive from them aid and encouragement.

The Masters would take each one by the hand and lead him upward if it were best, but they are what they are because they have subordinated self and act from great knowledge, not sentiment and emotion, and the greatest good both of humanity as a whole and the individual as a unit, is their object. No one who is worthy, who is entitled to recognition, is ever passed unnoticed by them, but *they* are the judges of merit, unless the aspiring one attains to their standard of worthiness he shares with the race the common lot. Purity of life, not alone according to the customs and standards of one's own time, but as embodied in the wisdom of all times and as spoken by the Masters themselves, is absolutely necessary to entitle one to recognition. It may require the training of many lives before one becomes fit; but what is time to him who knows himself to be one with the Eternal!

[The foregoing excellent sketch of Theosophy is taken from The Evening Item of Martinez, California.—  
Ed.]