

Theosophy in Home Life

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AMONG many erroneous ideas that are held regarding Theosophy is one very frequently met with, *viz.*, that the practical carrying out of Theosophical teaching involves a life not far short of absolute asceticism, and that family life interferes with it, and renders much of it impossible. That, in fact, working for humanity at large involves the sacrifice of those more private and nearer duties inseparable from domestic life.

Though this may be true in the case of some few highly-developed people, it is by no means true of the mass; for it is only by diligent application of the teachings of Theosophy to every small detail of daily life that those higher steps on the ladder of progress are to be reached. It is by showing people how it may be made a part of their daily lives, and by putting them in touch with some of these divine truths, that the first beginning of spiritual progress is to be made; and instead of these ties and claims upon us being hindrances, they may be great aids to growth and will once more enforce that best of all truths, that the Divine ways are those of Love. We have not to do now with those high souls who have learnt all that life, in its selfish aspect, can teach, and also the further lesson of renouncing all that life can give, but with the great working struggling mass of ordinary everyday men and women, fighting the battle of life, burdened with care for themselves and others dear to them — it is for these, if they will rightly understand it, that Theosophy in its practical and ethical teaching may be so valuable.

For until these apparently smaller and more trivial lessons are learnt, no real good on a larger scale can be done. Many people are carried away in a gush of philanthropic emotion; it seems a large wide work to throw ourselves entirely into the cares and sorrows of toiling humanity, to lighten the burdens of the masses by our world-wide sympathy and heroic deeds, our hearts are stirred by the thought of the magnitude of the task we would undertake — but subtly underlying all this fine emotion, can we truly say there is no atom of selfish love of ourselves? Do we not secretly crave to be known and blessed for our efforts, are we not in this also working for the praise of men, that we may be a centre of attraction and a person to be noted? And when our motives are analysed in this way, can we say that at the root of them lies true Theosophy? Theosophy, which necessitates forgetfulness and denial of self, not a change from one kind of selfishness to another, but a casting out of self altogether. [Page 14]

As every man's spiritual growth has to begin within and not outside of himself, so must the progress of the race begin inside the family, that lesser wheel within the larger circle, which widening outwards will carry its good influence abroad, and these duties and claims should be first in our thoughts, that we may use them as means to a higher life, not as an end, but as a means only; for as Theosophical writers have over and over again insisted, no single perfection of one soul can be accomplished till the unity of the kingdom is reached; the higher a soul has attained, the more it sees need to stoop and give the hand to those lower down the ladder, so that self-development kills and destroys itself if the effort is made for self alone. Asceticism therefore in its lowest aspect is the acme of selfishness, just as in its highest it is the

perfection of selflessness. Much too of the value of asceticism may be learnt in the *temperate* use of those natural pleasures and privileges which domestic life gives, and here is great opportunity for self-denial and self-control — to use and not abuse — to enjoy and yet see the higher duty of putting aside enjoyment and standing above it, master of and not slave to material pleasures. In family life are many constant opportunities for practising this, and indeed the results are in the end higher — for those who can refrain and deny themselves when what they desire is within reach, must necessarily have greater self-control than those who have deliberately put it out of their own power to indulge themselves at all. Either extreme is really easier than the middle course of *temperate use*.

Of all domestic ties that of husband and wife may be turned to the greatest power for good or ill. A union which is more than a mere community of material interests, which is founded on pure love, self-denying on both sides, a joining of hearts as well as hands in effort to help others — how much may be made of it — what a power for good it may be. Whilst on the other hand the attraction that is based on selfish indulgence will bring its inevitable Karma of hate and misery and produce the hydra-headed brood of selfishness — not to speak of the evil spread abroad from a centre of strife — poisoning first the home atmosphere, and then slowly widening outwards and working evil on others.

There is a fair field for the sowing of Theosophical seeds in the sacred relation of husband and wife, so easy and yet so difficult, a duty lying ever ready, bringing forth its results so immediately in the atmosphere of home life; the greater and sharper the angles in each one's character, the more need for the gentle yielding on each side which will round off these angles and prevent friction. Constant contact accentuates these points of difference, which if turned against each other, wound and destroy love, but if united and made complementary the one to the other become a great power for good. The necessity for united effort and its immense force can [Page 15] hardly be too much insisted upon in Theosophical teachings. Two people working together have more than double the power of two working apart, no matter how good the intention of each. And when these two have learnt first to forget themselves in each other, the larger and more important lesson of forgetting self for *all* others is made easier to learn and practise.

But here some will say, "Oh! but my husband (or wife as the case may be) is so unsympathetic, he does not care for Theosophy, takes no interest in spiritual development, that portion of my mind is a sealed book to him — how therefore can we be thoroughly united?"

To such we would answer — surely there is some common ground, some one subject on which you are united? Make this the starting point from which to enlarge sympathy — do not take up a position apart, as one who has larger, higher aims, for nothing is more alienating than a supposed *superior* point of view; true sympathy is not conscious stooping down in mere patronage, but a very real standing with and entering into the feelings of those we would help and comfort. Let us see to ourselves and our own yielding, be quite sure that we are ready for self-denial and that our love is pure and true, and wait patiently for that atmosphere of love which is around us to penetrate the selfishness of those we would influence. Even if it produces no outward effect, and if for years we continue our striving without seeing any result, still we must believe and trust that there is more done than we can see, remembering always that no loving and unselfish effort is ever left or wasted, it may not bring forth the fruit for which we look, but it will return in blessing where we least expect.

We are a great deal more responsible for others than most of us realize. Every ill thought, every cross mood, every selfish desire emanates invisibly from us, poisoning and contaminating our surroundings, just as every good thought and desire and intention to bless and help has its corresponding effect. To those who do not believe this we can only say, "Try it". Try the spirit of love and calm faith and self-forgetfulness when you are in the midst of evil and irritating circumstances, and you will find, no matter how slight it may be, a certain definite amelioration. You will cease to feel irritated yourself, then by degrees as you are calmed and strengthened will the feeling spread; and this silent endeavour has two great advantages — no energy is wasted in wordy argument, which *never* does any good, and secondly, the good that you do is known only to yourself, and cannot therefore claim the praise of others, which weakens and spoils all spiritual effort. So you kill in yourself that subtle enemy Pride, which is never so dangerous as when robed in spiritual and apparently unselfish garb.

Married life is often a failure because it is not started on a right understanding [Page 16] of life and its aims, and those young earnest souls just beginning the double voyage of life cannot do better than take to heart and put into practice the ethical teachings of Theosophy, for they will be found an immense aid and light in the serious undertaking of marriage and the future responsibility of training children. Joy and sorrow are in married life most closely linked, the greater the joy the larger the capacity for sorrow, but no less the more valuable lessons to be learned from the very intensity of each. One point to guard against most carefully is the first entrance of discord, let peace be made before the little breach has time to widen, for it is this first effort which seems so hard — nay, which *is* so hard, that will when made, render all succeeding efforts easier. People think that because the first step is difficult, all the way is to be the same, but it is not so. Divine love ever meets us half way, and this first little bit of self-denial, or wrongful suffering for others will turn to a larger blessing than we have any idea of. It will show us first our power over ourselves and our evil tendencies, and then the strength that comes from true self-forgetfulness — the real and unalloyed happiness which only self-denial can give.

For what after all are satisfied desires? Are we really any the better? Do we not begin to desire afresh and so ring the monotonous changes, desire and satiety, over and over again — besides becoming in the process a slave to our own lowest self? A pleasure cheerfully renounced changes its complexion at once, it begins to cease being desirable, and in its place comes the happiness of feeling that we are master of our desires no less than of our actions.

"For not to desire or admire, if a man could learn it, were more than to walk all day like the sultan of old in a garden of spice". By controlling all our senses and appetites we do not therefore blunt them — we keep the keen capacity for feeling, only we turn it to nobler uses. This garment of flesh we wear may be a most helpful instructive servant — teaching us many a useful lesson; but, as a master — no — it is a hindrance and tends to the degradation of all our higher faculties.

As it serves and obeys us we raise it into union with our Divine self, and so complete that perfection which we are all striving to attain.