

Eastern Psychology

The Missing Link Between Religion and Science

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THE subject of the present paper is one of the deepest interest, and also of the greatest possible importance and gravity. For not only is its study absolutely essential to those who are seriously interested in the third object of our Society, but also its methods are the only means whereby it is possible to forge the missing link between a materialistic and agnostic science on the one hand, and, on the other a religion that is based entirely on blind faith and the authority of books that are no longer understood.

Of late years, in the West, it has been somewhat the fashion with those who consider themselves of strong intellect, to belittle religion and to endeavour to trace its genesis to the fears of primitive man, the said primitive man being not only an unverifiable hypothesis but a pure fiction of materialistic and Darwinistic anthropology, for the stone age is invariably found to exist side by side with the most advanced civilization. Others again summarily dispose of the most sacred scriptures of the world with the contemptuous epithet of "theological twaddle," especially if these happen to be the bibles of some foreign race.

And yet if we look back on the history of the world, we find that the most important factor in the life of the past has been the religious factor. The laws, customs, polity, nay the very life of the ancients sought their inspiration in religion. But this is no longer the case, for like the braggarts of old, "we boast ourselves to be greater than our fathers". The motive power of today is distinctly not religion. On the contrary, the power of religion is everywhere, waning among the thinking classes and the tendency is to remove it from all the most important duties of the citizen. What is known as science and scientific methods is gradually usurping the prerogative of religion in the West, and if the conflict is to be fought out with the same weapons as are now used, we shall eventually find the religious influence completely eliminated from daily life, and the dense pall of materialism will cover the funeral car of its now almost inanimate corpse, which can only show such spasmodic signs of life as the Salvation Army and revivalist meetings.

I hope, however, to show that new weapons are ready to the hands of every sincere and honest believer in the spirit of true religion; weapons which if only they can be persuaded to use, will "utterly destroy the forces of materialism to its last 'spook'".

The first question we have to answer is, whether or not the conception [Page 4] that the moderns have of religion is the same as the spirit of religion that inspired antiquity?

To this question the answer must be most emphatically, no. That which is considered religion today

resembles the religion of the past in some externals merely. But the spirit of true religion is entirely absent, its soul is utterly different, and its body alone bears some marks of resemblance.

The spirit of religion is entirely absent today, because it is divorced from science. By science I mean real knowledge concerning man, nature and deity, and not the cataloguing of externals and the invention of hypotheses, "that mechanical manipulation falsely termed science", as Carlyle puts it, which together with its twin brother Mammon is the Janus deity of this huckstering age.

And the spirit of religion being absent; naturally enough, its soul and body differ from those of its noble ancestry in a very marked degree, so much so that they seem to be the misshapen and unintelligent progeny of parents that have already in their turn begun to degenerate through internal corruption.

On the other hand, we are told by authorities that antiquity had no science, and that it was ignorant of the most elementary facts of physical nature; that the masters of the philosophies and religions of the past were at best but crude speculators in such matters, with ears more ready to listen to old wives' tales, than eyes open to investigate the laws of physical nature. And yet, even if we take the word science in this one-sided sense, we find, if we choose to master the differences of terminology, that the latest hypotheses of today are mere repetitions of the theories of the past; whereas in philosophy and ethics, we find the modern not only not transcending but always falling short of the sublime systems of antiquity. So that the "de-hypnotised" student looks with astonishment at the modern delusion of endeavouring to invent something new in philosophy and religion when the past already occupies the whole ground.

Now what is it that prejudices the vast majority of scholars against the systems of antiquity, so that though they may be enthusiastic as students of the curious, still they refuse to give anything but at best a half-hearted confidence to the methods of the world sages, and always break up the white light of ancient thought with the prism of assumed superiority with which they busily glaze their own and the public's mental windows?

What is the cause of this strong prejudice ? Simply the fact that the ancients did not run wild over materialistic science. The Western student finds to his disgust that in antiquity ethics and philosophy went hand in hand with such disreputable baggage as mythology, allegory and symbolism. The ethics he admits are nearly always sublime, the philosophy, if [Page 5] you were to strip it of its mystic absurdities, and unscientific garb, and pious imaginings, is very often of the highest order; but the mythology, fairy tales and the rest, show a most deplorable state of weakness of intellect, of a prolific imagination that should be confined to the nursery, and of an indescribable inexactitude and a maze of contradictions and absurdities that could only have arisen owing to the complete ignorance in the ancient mind of the glorious truths of modern science, and which naturally invalidates the whole of the conclusions of the ancients, at any rate in the eyes of a man trained in the exact methods of our own enlightened age.

And yet these philosophers and ethical teachers, many of whom have never been equalled by the moderns, and some of whom have revolutionized the thought of nations and continents, and maintained an ascendancy over the minds and hearts of thousands of millions of their fellow creatures for thousands of years — men who, if any, can be called great — these teachers, I say, regarded such religious fairy tales as real factors in the lives of men, nay they very often looked upon them with more reverence than

their undisguised ethical and philosophical teachings.

Now what was the reason for this strange proceeding ?..... It was simply because such myths and allegories were the symbols of their science. It never occurred to the ancient mind to separate religion from science; such a glorious achievement was left for our own progressive age. And yet its science was not our science: for it enquired into such unimportant problems as the nature of the soul and its immortality, of life after death, of other worlds, of the gods and demons, of visions and prophecies, and of various other unscientific subjects and was so unenlightened as to take no interest in electric lighting and the invention of smokeless powder!

Can men, admittedly the greatest of ethical teachers and allowed to be in the forefront of the world-philosophers, be regarded as superstitious children in respect to their knowledge of natural phenomena? ! For so they are regarded by those who claim to be the most enlightened intellects of this age?! I think not.

For antiquity, certain things were universally regarded as sacred or secret. Today secrecy is regarded as a cloak of ignorance, or as pure selfishness and an injustice to the public. There is nothing sacred, nothing that the intellectual vulgarian will refrain from prying into if he can. For just as a great Teacher has said, the swine are ever busily engaged in trampling the holy things under their feet.

The Hindus say that all the Scriptures which are written and made common property are like the harlots in the market place that all men can see, but the Sacred Science is like a pure virgin that none can know but him to whom she is legitimately married. **[Page 6]**

Turn to whatever nation we may in antiquity, we find that the most sacred institutions of its religious life were kept in profound mystery and sanctity. The profane were strictly kept from participation in the rites which bound man to the gods. The Initiated alone were the mediators between this world and the next. While the Mysteries were in their purity, only the wisest and best were permitted to share in them. The trials which, we are told, had first to be passed through, were almost incredible, and the crime of revealing a syllable of the Knowledge to the uninitiated, was punished with instant death. Thus the Initiated were the wisest of antiquity and the greatest teachers of their times, as they are also the greatest teachers of today. One and all of them who wrote, wrote in allegorical language, or in parables and dark sayings, and many are reported to have been great wonder workers, performing deeds now called miraculous, or in other words repeating the fairy tales of mythology in real life.

All of these teachers further contended that what they spoke was *known* to the Initiated, but that the people could not understand, chiefly because they had no desire to understand and also because they were unfit to do so. And that as long as the many preferred to enjoy themselves rather than to worship the gods and live pure and holy lives, so long would they conceive of the gods as they regarded life, namely according to appearances. The few alone would know, simply because the many refused the only condition on which the knowledge was attainable.

Now when a Theosophist reads of such things, it appears to him that there was much wisdom in this

method of antiquity, judging, at least, by the present state of affairs. It is, however, usually some time before the student of Theosophy definitely arrives at this conclusion. The young student is generally imbued with protestant and scientific self-righteousness, and imagines that if there is anything to be known, he at any rate is a most worthy recipient of such knowledge. The grown man, however, learns to have less confidence in his own worthiness in proportion as he learns to analyze his own faults and failings.

Now in following out these theosophical studies a great fact will be gradually but inevitably forced home upon the serious investigator: *viz.*, that antiquity had a science and a most sacred and holy science, and that this was the science of the soul, a real psychology. Knowledge in this direction, *viz.*, a knowledge of subjective things, so transcended a knowledge of externals, that the ancients naturally refrained from wasting their time on inferior studies when superior pursuits were open to them.

It is extraordinary also what an enormous body of literature there is on the subject, especially in the East. In fact without the key of this science the "Sacred Books of the East" will for ever remain unintelligible in their dead letter absurdities. [Page 7]

Psychology, then, was the science of antiquity, and just as modern scientists use formulae and symbols for expressing their operations, so did the ancient psychologists and teachers. Their system, however, was somewhat more rational than those of today.

The symbolical, hieroglyphical and pictorial alphabets of the world are still to a large extent a secret cypher whose key has so far been unrevealed, and with these we have nothing to do in the present paper. But the general formulae of ancient science had a far greater human interest. The method employed shows a depth of wisdom, that has not only never been surpassed but not even equalled. To the ancient mind the multifarious events of life and the phenomena of existence could be classed into groups and separated into species, according to types.

Thus they saw the same law working in the various groups of phenomena in nature and man, and consequently adopted their formulae and symbols from the incidents in human life which exemplified such laws.

Accordingly they taught their children about the gods and heroes and other personifications of the powers of nature and also of past humanities, and in particular instructed them in the nature of the soul by means of beautiful allegories that appealed fully to their human interest. So that when they grew to man's estate and were deemed worthy to have the mysteries of their own nature revealed to them, they were already instructed in the formulae of the Science and only required to have the methods of interpretation explained, to be at once in possession of an almost inexhaustible fund of knowledge.

Such a system of instruction cultivated the psychic nature of antiquity to a very considerable extent. It had its abuses it is true when the great civilizations degenerated, for then the general unworthiness both of teachers and taught left nothing in their hands but a spiritless superstition. On the other hand, the present system of education today, with its unlovely scientific and commercial methods, dwarfs the

psychic nature of the young and centres all their attention on externals.

In the West comparatively few relics have come down to us of what this so carefully guarded psychological knowledge was in reality, and what little we have has been religiously boycotted by ignorant and sense - loving authorities who have preferred power to instruction and material progress to spiritual advancement. What has come down to us, however, shows clearly that the knowledge was more than theoretical, that in fact it had a practical side, and that the practices it advocated demanded the exercise of the highest qualities and endowments of human nature. "To dare, will, know and keep silent" were the conditions of adeptship in this art. Purity of body and mind, fearlessness in every direction, unflagging perseverance and incredible self-denial were the absolute essentials of progress. [Page 8]

Perhaps this thin link of tradition with the past would have snapped entirely and the West have been plunged in the Cimmerian darkness of a mere belly philosophy and sense worship, were it not that the commercial enterprise of the West took European ships to India. Thus for many decades of years, the energy of the West, and pre-eminently of Great Britain, has been almost entirely employed in quite a Jew-like manner in spoiling the Egyptians of the East of their national possessions.

We may regard this apparently unintelligent intrusion of the West into the East as the first step on the path of salvation for the former. For little by little, and in the face of the greatest prejudice, contempt and difficulty, some of us Westerners are learning that the spoiled Egyptian has far more precious treasures hidden away and guarded more jealously than his material possessions or even life itself.

The East possesses the most valuable literature in the world for the student of mysticism and occultism. Matters but dimly hinted at in the mystic literature of the West, are fully discussed in the Sacred Books of the East. And the reason for this prodigality is, I take it, that among the ancient population of India there was a larger number of men fit to receive such instruction, so that much that in the West was kept back, was given out with freedom in the East.

For the most striking feature of the Sacred Books of India and especially of the *Upanishads*, is that everywhere open mention is made of a science of the Soul and many of the fundamentals of this science are taken as axioms or facts that require no further verification. In fact it has all the appearance, not of being a speculative study in process of construction, but a perfected science and art handed down from teacher to pupil and vouched for by immemorial experience.

The practical part of this Science is called *Yoga*, a word meaning "union" It is the method whereby a man becomes at one with his inner nature and thus gains experience of subjective states of being. The command "know thyself " is the corner stone of the whole undertaking. The Yoga philosophy and Science deal especially with the *mind* and the *magnetic forces* of man.

Mind is for it twofold. The mind of man is partly free and partly bound to the material senses. Moreover, just as man receives sense impressions from without, so can he receive spiritual inspirations from within from the higher mind. But like as the ruffled surface of a pond cannot reflect truly the moon's rays, but shows them broken and obscured, so does the lower mind reflect the light of the higher, the immortal Ego

or Self, in a most confused and perplexing fashion.

The practice of Yoga teaches how to still this ruffled water-surface. For the lower mind is said to go out to the things of sense and to be [Page 9] moulded by them. These "modifications of the internal organ" have to be checked and dominated before the mirror of the mind can reflect the light of the inner divine world into the consciousness of man.

By means of such mental concentration, certain magnetic forces can be freed in man and used by him. These forces are described at length, and there are elaborate treatises explaining the intricacies of the occult anatomy and physiology of the human organism. Man is stated to be something more than a mere body. In fact he has several other vehicles of consciousness besides the outer physical body and brain, all of which are described and treated of, some plainly enough, others more obscurely.

Some of the occult powers that are to be developed by this practice are thus described by the Sage Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutra*: —

Knowledge of past, present and future things.

Knowledge of former states of existence.

Knowledge of the thoughts of others.

Invisibility of form.

Knowledge of the consequences of one's acts.

Beneficence to all beings.

Perfect strength.

Knowledge of all invisible objects.

Knowledge and sight of spirit unassociated with matter.

The power of entering any other body and causing it to act as if it were one's own.

The power of hearing sound, however distant.

The power of passing and penetrating everywhere.

The power of becoming extremely minute and expanding to an immense size.

For the Scientist of today such an enumeration is the classification of one of unsound mind and nothing better, and he can give you overwhelming "proof" that nothing of the kind can be possible in the nature of things.

Quite so, for the physical body! But then the student of Yoga learns to part mind from body, and to use other vehicles of consciousness besides the gross physical body.

As the results to be attained are incredible to the ordinary mind, so are the difficulties to be surmounted of exceedingly great magnitude. In fact, in spite of the elaborate explanation of the theory of this science and the abundance of directions for its practice, which are to be found in many books in Sanskrit and the vernacular languages of India, still those learned in such things maintain that the right pursuit of such study and practice is impossible without a teacher. For the whole matter is hedged round with insurmountable dangers and difficulties which beset every footstep; [Page 10] and none but the most

determined, even when they are fortunate enough to meet with a teacher, can make much progress in it.

For though the Eastern books tell us a thousand times more than the records of the West, they are still full of obscurities which have been purposely inserted so as to guard the knowledge from the unworthy. Moreover, the learned Brahmins say that we have as yet only scraps of the sacred works and that the bulk of them have been concealed.

There is therefore an exoteric and esoteric interpretation of the teachings, and consequently the followers of the Yoga are divided into two distinct classes. The many follow the instructions literally and imagine that the vital magnetic breaths or currents, spoken of, have reference to the actual physical breath of the body, and that the physiological directions have reference to various nervous ganglia, etc., of the physical body; whereas those truly learned in the Science tell us that such directions have to do with the astral or subtle vehicle of man. Few are those who understand the real signification of the teaching and the true method of the practice, and these instead of suppressing the breath, suppress the creation of useless thought and gain control over the mind.

The effort of the orthodox ascetic is to obtain Moksha or the *selfish* bliss of absorption into the Soul of the Universe.

The object of the true Eastern Occultist, on the contrary, is to expand his consciousness into that of the Universe, so that he may gain more knowledge and opportunity for helping on humanity. Such an one, it is true, works unseen of men, because he works with forces and in ways undreamed of by the world at large. Self-sacrifice is the law of his being and he renounces the divine bliss of Nirvâna, when he has gained it, in order to help on those who are struggling along the thorny pathway of life. No one but a student of occultism can understand what this means; for no Western is prepared to admit the almost infinite expansion of consciousness that the attainment of Nirvâna denotes. Such a sacrifice for love of humanity, continuing until the end of this world and its humanities naturally appeals but to a few. And when it becomes more generally known in this country, instead of exciting the admiration, will probably arouse the hatred of hundreds of thousands who will see their ideals dwarfed by this grandiose conception which is now for the first time told to the West through the T .S.

Such, however, is the consummation of the true Science and Psychology of the East; a science that has degenerated into a superstition in modern India, and which requires as much reform in that country as materialistic science does in this land.

This Eastern Psychology is a science that flies in the face of modern thought and which gives the lie to the authorities of the West. Along this **[Page 11]** Path of Wisdom lies the salvation of the miseries of today. Self-knowledge and self-renunciation can save the world. This does not mean that we should retire from the world and spend a life of contemplation. Far from it: we should "live in the world but not of the world". True enough the objects of our desire will be changed, and many things we have held dear, we shall no longer prize, but that will be simply owing to the acquirement of larger interests.

A study of all the factors which go to make up man will cause us to change our opinion about many

things that we have previously regarded as the only ways to progress. Material well-being will not be placed first, above all other things, and that not from any desire of the "Kingdom of Heaven" or "Devachan", but simply because we shall rationally see that it is in the nature of things inferior to much else.

To conclude, to me Eastern Psychology seems the one way out of the jungle of modern confusion. There can be no conflict between true Religion and true Science. Ethics and Physics, Spirit and Matter, may be apparently opposed to each other, but the missing-link is to be found in the "Soul" and "Mind", and the knowledge of this must be on the lines of the psychological science of the East.

A scientific basis of ethics is the crying need of the times, and it will not be the least service done to humanity if the Theosophical Society can not only show students where materials for this important construction are to be found, but also sketch the outlines of what the future building may be.