

WHAT THEOSOPHISTS BELIEVE



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THE name THEOSOPHY is an exact translation of the well known Sanskrit term Brahmavidyâ. For it is made up of the two Greek words Theos=God, and Sophia=Wisdom. Its first use was in the third century A. D. in Alexandria by the Greek philosopher Iamblicus. He used the term to mean the inner knowledge concerning the things of God which were taught in the Greek Mysteries. The word Theosophy to-day has been popularized by The Theosophical Society founded by Madame H. P. Blavatsky, Colonel H. S. Olcott and others.

Theosophy then is a word which signifies a knowledge of Brahman, or the Absolute. The knowledge as to Brahman is found, in the East, in the Upanishads and Hindu philosophies, and in the West, in the philosophies of Pythagoras, Plato and other Greek philosophers, in Ancient Egypt, and in certain mystical teachings which are found in the early days of Christianity.

To-day, however, Theosophy means a body of philosophical ideas sponsored by Theosophists. These ideas have been briefly summarized by Dr. Annie Besant, the late President of The Theosophical Society, in the following statement :

1. There is one transcendent self-existent Life, eternal, all-pervading, all-sustaining, whence all worlds derive their several lives, whereby and wherein all things which exist live and move and have their being.

2. For our world this Life is immanent, and is manifested as the Logos, the Word, worshipped under different Names, in different religions, but ever recognized as the One Creator, Preserver, and Regenerator.

3. Under Him, our world is ruled and guided by a Hierarchy of His Elder Children, variously called Rishis, Sages, Saints, among whom are the World-Teachers, who for each age reproclaim the essential truths of religion and morality in a form suited to the age ; this Hierarchy is aided in its work by the hosts of Beings—again variously named, Devas, Angels, Shining Ones—discharging functions recognized in all religions.

4. Human beings form one order of the creatures evolving on this earth, and each human being evolves by successive life-periods, gathering experiences and building them into character, reaping always as he sows, until he has learned the lessons taught in the three worlds—the earth, the intermediate state, and the heavens—in which a complete life-period is passed, and has reached

human perfection, when he enters the company of just men made perfect, that rules and guides the evolving lives in all stages of their growth.

Closely analysing the above principles, we find that modern Theosophy can be described as follows :

1. It is not an atheistic philosophy but the reverse. It starts with the assertion of the existence of a Divine Absolute Principle. This Principle reveals itself in a cosmic process which is the universe through Emanations.

2. The universe is a process of the unfoldment of potentialities. These potentialities are both of the universe and of the individual soul. This unfoldment is not a mechanical process but one planned from the beginning by the Creator, who is the First Emanation, and through whom all successive Emanations appear.

3. There is no doctrine of Maya or illusion in modern Theosophy. That is to say, the cosmic process is accepted as a reality, though its full and inmost nature cannot be grasped by the human brain.

4. This process, called Evolution, takes place not only in the visible parts

of the universe but in those more extensive parts of it which are invisible. These invisible parts consist of planes or "lokas," or worlds, composed of finer matter.

5. While no Maya is predicated of the cosmic process, the theory of Pralaya or temporary cessation of activity exists in Theosophy. There is a cyclic nature in the development of the universe, since there are periods when activities begin, come to their maximum, and then diminish, to be followed by a period of quietude. During this period of Pralaya, however, the results achieved by the work of the universe are not destroyed; they become germinal, so that at the next awakening of activity the work is carried on to greater heights from the point where the work was suspended.

6. The Absolute emanates souls from within Itself. Therefore every soul—called a Monad—is fundamentally divine and of the nature of the Absolute. But when emanated, the Monads are in a state of unawareness, and they may be thought of as dormant, as seeds are before they germinate; they become awake and

aware through a process which has been termed "the descent into matter".

7. This descent into matter is a process in which the dormant Monads are encased in various vehicles or encasements of matter, so as to receive through them vibrations which slowly awaken them into awareness. For long ages the descent takes place in invisible worlds of matter, in grades of life called by the Theosophist "elemental kingdoms". Then in the downward descent, the Monad becomes encased in mineral matter, then later in vegetable forms, and later still in the forms of animals. The Monad is still dormant ; the first signs of his awakening are seen when an animal responds to human affection, or when the animal's intelligence shows conscious adaptation under human guidance. Thereupon follows a great climax, which is a quickening into self-conscious evolution. This climax is termed by the Theosophist "individualization". After individualization the soul becomes aware of the purpose of his existence as a Monad, which is to reveal his innate Divinity, and to further the Plan of Evolution.

8. From individualization onwards, the soul identifies himself consciously

with the process of unfoldment which already has been taking place in himself through long ages. The process is now hastened through rebirth, that is to say, by repeated incarnations in human bodies.

9. From the moment of individualization, when conscious evolution begins, there comes into operation a law of evolution called the Law of Karma. Briefly summarized, it means that as a soul does right, that is, in accordance with the Divine Will, the result of his action creates for him conditions which help his unfoldment ; whereas when he does wrong, that is, goes contrary to the Divine Will, the result creates for him conditions which thwart his unfoldment.

10. From this standpoint, good Karma is what helps the Divine Plan of Evolution, and evil Karma what puts obstacles in the way of that Plan.

11. Rebirth life after life has as its purpose the gaining of experience, so that the soul may become an expert in right action. Since the purpose of existence is to be a conscious co-worker with Divinity, a life of righteousness becomes the highest mode both of fulfilling the Divine Plan, and of unfolding the highest in one's

self. But this perfect life is not achieved at once. Many experiments have to be made by the soul before he knows for himself what are the fundamental laws of righteousness which exist in his own inmost nature. For every law of right conduct proclaimed to him by the great Founders of the Religions is only an exteriorization of the Divine Nature latent within him. But he must be sure that the law is his own and not another's. Through many a blunder, at last he discovers his own true self.

12. All the pains which come as the result of blunders in testing the Divine Law have as their purpose not that of punishment but of making the soul aware of the existence of Law. Misery and suffering have as their ultimate gain the illumination of the soul. Similarly too, through co-operation with the Law, and from the resultant joy and happiness, the soul grows in illumination.

These general ideas of the Theosophical philosophy are further developed by the following teachings. Rebirth takes place in the many races of the world. In fact, the many races which appear age after age are part of the Divine Plan, so

that through incarnations in them the souls may gain the necessary experiences. Each race that appears in the course of the world's history has its particular variations in the structure of the physical body, not only in differences of colour, texture of hair, etc., but also in various differences of response, through brain structure and through nerves, to visible and invisible influences. Each race with its special characteristics is intended to awaken certain aptitudes which are latent in the soul. Since each race has its habitat in a part of the globe with particular characteristics of land and sea, these characteristics are intended to mould the forms of response on the part of the soul to the divine influences which surround him all the time, and are striving to awaken him. The varying race traditions in the many races and countries of the world are all intended to awaken some attribute of knowledge or power which is dormant in the soul.

In the process of Reincarnation, the soul lives in bodies both of man and of woman. For the two sexes are expressions of two polarities of consciousness

and of action in the soul, and the soul, who has within himself the attributes of both sexes, must awaken the highest characteristics of both by incarnation in each sex. There is therefore no superiority in man as man, nor inferiority in woman as woman. In the course of the hundreds of incarnations which are necessary for a soul before he comes to perfection, he will be reborn as often as a woman as a man. The soul will be by turns son, husband and father, or daughter, wife and mother.

From what has been said, it will be obvious that the soul of man is in the midst of a process which we can well term "becoming aware of its Divine Nature". It is this process that has been termed "Salvation" or "Liberation". But these terms do not signify escape from any danger or freedom from existence as such. The terms signify the saving of the soul from the ignorance which surrounds him, and freeing him from his own limitations. Liberation means, not the ending of activity, but rather the beginning of self-conscious and beneficent activities of far nobler types than are possible while a human being.

For, after Liberation the soul is a self-conscious worker in the Divine Plan. He is no longer bound by the process of Reincarnation, so that he need not appear any more in a human form. But wherever the liberated soul functions, stage by stage and æon by æon, he becomes a larger embodiment of the wonders of Divinity. His expanding consciousness and increasing capacities intensify in him the sense of bliss which is his divine heritage, and he lives to shed that bliss on others.

The ideal of the Theosophist is therefore not to be the soul who has freed himself to enter into some kind of a unity of bliss with the Divine, thus completely forgetting the millions of his fellows who are struggling in darkness while still proceeding towards Liberation. On the contrary, his ideal is that of the Master of the Wisdom who renounces the bliss of Liberation so as to continue to be a worker for mankind. Freed from all limitations imposed on him by the process of evolution, his very freedom makes him rejoice all the more that he is free now to help his fellowmen.

One of the very important ideas which dominate the Theosophical philosophy is

this conception of great Adepts, who are not merely Sannyâsis or recluses meditating and so disseminating peace and blessing, but are rather directors or agents of the evolutionary process for the benefit of man, and working under divine guidance. The Theosophist continually talks of "the Divine Plan," meaning thereby a Plan of the evolutionary process formulated by the Logos which is being steadily put into execution by His agents, who are Emanations of Himself. The perfected man is the Adept who has linked his liberated consciousness with that of the Logos, the Ocean of Divinity, and thenceforth is in a manner an Avatâra who has descended from on high. He has still within him, however, all the attributes of humanity, with the memories of his past struggles, joined to the Divine Consciousness which is now his. The Adept is not merely an embodiment of Divinity but he is also utterly perfect in human sympathy.

These perfected men, according to the Theosophist, work in graded ranks. They form an organization called the Great Hierarchy or the Great White Brotherhood. They are not all of equal capacity

because some achieved Liberation ages ago and others but recently, and therefore the former have a longer record of work and experience. But all of them are united by one Will, which is to serve the Plan of God for men. They are the flowers of the evolutionary process among men, since their consciousness is all the time in intimate communion with that of the Divine. The Adepts are of seven types of temperament or action called the Seven Rays. They have three Chiefs under whose orders they work, and these Chiefs are called respectively The Lord of the World, who is the Head of the Great Hierarchy, the Buddha, and the Mahachohan.

The work of the Adept Brotherhood consists of the supervision of all our world's processes visible and invisible. Associated with them are various types of angelic orders of liberated souls of other forms of evolution who are called Devas or Angels. These mighty Beings also work under the direction of the Head of the Great Hierarchy. The Adepts and the Devas in unison have as their work :

(1) All physical phenomena concerning Nature. What we usually term natural

laws are in reality forces which are controlled and directed by mighty Devas and Adepts.

(2) The many types of races and their variants are guided in their origin and in their migrations by the Adepts. Various parts of the earth are peopled according to the needs of humanity. The clash of races and their expansion, the peopling of unoccupied territories, the colonization of foreign lands, etc., are all under the guidance of the Great Hierarchy.

(3) All the religious teaching which appears, either through great religious Founders or through minor Teachers, is directed by the Adepts. The greatest religious Teachers are the Adepts themselves, who appear among mankind to give such type of religion as is best suited for the people to whom they come. Also, wherever there is any religious leader who, though not advanced sufficiently to be an Adept, yet is nevertheless unselfish in his devotion to mankind, such a teacher is inspired by the Adepts. It is well known that even among the traditions of primitive and barbarous worship among savages, now and then

there appear traces of a higher cult of purity and harmless dedication. These higher types are usually attributed by the savages to some wonderful being who once appeared among them. Such a being was one of the Adepts, or one of their disciples, who implanted among the savages the higher teaching.

(4) All the developments in the departments of Art, Science, Philosophy, Commerce, Industrial Expansion, etc., are under the supervision of the Adepts and the Angelic Brotherhood. Indeed, nothing happens that is of welfare to humanity but is definitely the working out of God's Plan for men, and that Plan manifests itself through a great Inner Government of the world with many departments, with their chiefs, all of them working under the Lord of the World. Among all who inhabit this globe He is supremely the one Personality who enshrines in Himself more of the fullness of God than any other. Indeed, He is to us the nearest that we can conceive of Omnipotence, Omniscience and Omnipresence. Every event on our globe takes place within His consciousness, for that consciousness penetrates the entire earth.

It has already been mentioned that the Divine life in its descent into manifestation expresses itself in forms of life which are termed the Mineral Kingdom, the Vegetable Kingdom and the Animal Kingdom. Every one of these forms of substance and life is also directed in its growth by the Great Plan. Even the animals in their incalculable millions are all a part of the Divine Plan, and are guided in their work and growth. What Christ said once that "not a sparrow falls but that your Father in Heaven knows" is utterly true. There is a special and intimate relation between humanity and its next lower order of creation, the animal kingdom. Animals are not intended to be exploited by man, nor to be used cruelly. They are indeed the younger brethren of humanity, and association between them and men is intended to be of mutual benefit. If animals serve men when they are domesticated, man in return owes to the animal kingdom not only kindness but also great care, so that the animal consciousness shall be developed to the point where individualization can take place, and a Monad from the bosom of God can consciously begin his great work for Liberation or Self-realization.

On all sides, therefore, as the Theosophist looks at the myriad manifestations of life, he sees striving towards Liberation or Self-realization. But this Liberation is not an escape from an inevitable Maya or from an evil process of suffering. It is rather like the training in a laboratory in order to be an expert. The aim of existence is to become a conscious co-operator in the Divine Plan, and thereby to become, for all possible kingdoms of life, a larger channel of the Divine Immanence. This wonderful heritage is not reserved only for a few whom we call Saviours, but is the heritage of every soul, however low he may seem to be at the present time.

In the process of self-unfoldment leading to Liberation, a soul is not left alone to work out his destiny. While the Divine Nature is within him in its fullness, and no one can add to it from outside, nevertheless a soul can be guided to achieve his Liberation as speedily as possible. To aid him in his work certain of the Adepts, called Masters of the Wisdom, accept candidates as their pupils, to train them in various forms of work for mankind, and through that work to help them to achieve their perfection. The

modern Theosophical Movement has strongly emphasized the fact that Adept teachers still exist, and that the way to them is open as of old to those who prepare themselves to tread the Path of Holiness through purity of life and self-sacrificing service.

From these fundamental postulates of Theosophy an attitude arises towards life which is characteristic of the Theosophist, whether he is formally a member of The Theosophical Society or not. He holds that all religions are derived from one source, and that therefore there is no one religion which is the exclusive road to salvation. He recognizes various grades in religious thought, because the term "religion" covers not only forms of loftiest worship but also modes which are characteristic of the most ignorant savages with their crude beliefs. But each religion is considered by the Theosophist as having its rôle to fulfil in a great Plan for all men, just as the seven rays in the solar spectrum have all their distinct functions in fostering the growth of living things.

Similar, too, is the Theosophist's attitude towards the races of the world. He does not ignore the distinctions among

them catalogued in works on Ethnology. But while there are races which show the highest characteristics of civilization, and others the most primitive, nevertheless all men and women born in these races are recognized by the Theosophist as having within them one common Divine Nature. Since all men, the lowest as the highest, the most ignorant and backward as the most cultured and the perfect, enshrine within themselves the Divine Immanence, Universal Brotherhood becomes a fact of nature, and, when rightly understood, the supreme fact in the life of all mankind.

In the development of civilization, there appear among men distinctions such as of caste and class. Sometimes these distinctions have a fundamental basis, since in the main those souls in the lower castes or classes are the less evolved souls, and those in the higher castes or classes the more evolved. But this is only a very general principle, and it has constantly exceptions, for it does not always follow that because a man or woman is born in any grade of life, high or low, therefore he or she necessarily shows the characteristics either high or low of that grade. He may be there temporarily for reasons of his

Karma. In spite of these differences, however, the supreme duty of all men and women who understand the Divine Plan is to minimize in every possible way the harshnesses and handicaps of caste and class distinctions. No fact in Nature is ever intended to work detrimentally to thwart the growth of a soul. Each fact in Nature is, on the other hand, intended to help, and therefore civilization is arranged in the Divine Plan with grades, so that the souls born into inferior grades may not have thrust upon them tasks too strenuous for them or a morality too high for their capacities.

One branch of Theosophical studies which is of the greatest consequence for mankind deals with the gathering of information concerning life beyond the grave. Already many facts have been gathered in past ages and are found scattered in religious traditions. These facts have been correlated and systematized by Theosophists, and much important new material has been added by their researches into conditions beyond the grave. These researches are not the results of mediumship or of any phenomena of Spiritualism, but are due on the other hand to a few Theosophists who

have trained themselves in methods of Yoga which permit them to leave their physical body at will, enter the invisible worlds in full consciousness, and record their observations on their return. Through such processes of Yoga some of the invisible worlds have been scientifically examined, and the record of these researches makes one of the most important departments of modern Theosophical knowledge.

It will be obvious from all that has been said that the Theosophist is characterized, first, by a profound belief in the existence of a Divine Wisdom which explains all the intricate processes of Nature ; and secondly, by a determination to be an agent in God's Plan for men. The Theosophist, therefore, is essentially a reformer engaged in the most strenuous forms of social service. His chief gospel as an active man or woman is the Universal Brotherhood of all Humanity. The Theosophist realizes that in any relation between human beings, whether within the family, the community, or among nations, if there is any infringement of the Law of Brotherhood, the result must inevitably be evil

both for the individual and for all among whom the individual lives. Therefore a conscious attempt to understand what is best for the Whole and not only for the part becomes the constant endeavour of the Theosophist. The ideals of his philosophy give him a guidance in the intricate affairs of life which he does not find in any other religion or philosophy.

