

The
way of
self-knowledge

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Adyar

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THE BLAVATSKY LECTURE

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THE WAY OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

by Radha Burnier

*' To reach Nirvana one must reach self-knowledge
and self-knowledge is of loving deeds the child.' ¹*

Madame H. P. Blavatsky in whose honour this Lecture has been instituted was, in the words of her teachers, 'a woman of most exceptional and wonderful endowments.' She was gifted not only with what would appear as endowments in the eyes of the world, that is with artistic capacities and intellectual brilliance of an outstanding nature, but also with penetrative perception seeing through to the hidden truths of nature and of life. In homage and gratitude to her, we shall seek here to understand the problem of human bondage and deliverance, a problem over which she has cast much light but which each individual has to understand and unravel through his own exertion, aided though he may be by wiser guides.

H.P.B.* declared with no hesitation that though Theosophy is not a religion, it is Religion itself. It is the Wisdom-Religion which is the source from which all the true religions which have been taught in the world have taken their origin. It is 'Divine Wisdom

*H. P. Blavatsky, referred to subsequently as H.P.B.

such as that possessed by the Gods.' ² It is an unveiling of old, very old truths. Though it has been propounded in many forms, it yet remains the secret wisdom or secret doctrine, known in ancient India as *gupta vidya*, for its essence is incommunicable, since it is a self-revelation, a shining forth of powers which have hitherto been latent. 'The illumination must come from within.' ³

In the words of H.P.B., 'A Religion in the true and only correct sense, is a bond uniting men together—not a particular set of dogmas and beliefs. Religion, *per se*, in its widest meaning is that which binds not only men, but also *all* beings and all *things* in the entire universe into one grand whole.' ⁴ It is so universal and all-embracing a bond of unity that no man, and no speck—from gods and mortals down to animals, the blade of grass and atoms—can be outside its light. On the truth of such a Wisdom-Religion, known otherwise as Theosophy, is based the first Object of the Theosophical Society which seeks to promote a universal brotherhood without exceptions. The universal brotherhood aimed at by the Theosophical Society cannot be a weak fraternity, a gathering together of people at an external level, or a desire to bring about a better social relationship. It has to be rooted much deeper and it must lead all those who accept the aims of the Society into an ever-stronger realization of that One Being which is the principle which gives life to all and which is also the bond of unity among them. Universal brotherhood must have a 'regenerating,

practical' quality and power, if it is to be of real value.

Know by Personal Experience

Earnest students of Theosophy must wish to do more than study theoretically the truths which are taught in theosophical literature. They must endeavour to know the truth by their own personal experience with the object of acquiring the wisdom and power needed to help others effectively and judiciously, instead of blindly and at haphazard.⁵ It is only in the measure that the fundamental truth of the One Indivisible Existence is gradually realized through the study of what we call Theosophy that it is really Theosophy. Mere intellectual speculation and argument over cosmological or anthropological topics and conceptual understanding of various details covered by the considerable theosophical literature at our disposal is not synonymous with knowing Theosophy. 'The recognition of the higher phases of man's being on this planet is not to be attained by mere acquirement of knowledge. Volumes of the most perfectly constructed information cannot reveal to man life in the higher regions. One has to get a knowledge of spiritual facts by personal experience.'⁶ The term 'higher' means more spiritually perfect, as the author of the sentence has pointed out elsewhere.

As stated in the little booklet entitled *Madame Blavatsky on How to Study Theosophy*: 'It is worse than useless going to those whom we imagine

to be advanced students and asking them to give us an interpretation of the secret doctrine. They cannot do it. If they try, all they give are cut and dried exoteric renderings which do not remotely resemble the Truth. To accept such interpretation means anchoring ourselves to fixed ideas, whereas Truth lies beyond any ideas we can formulate or express.' Exoteric interpretations may be useful if they are taken as mere pointers and not as anything more. 'If one imagines that one is going to get a satisfactory picture of the constitution of the universe from *The Secret Doctrine* one will get only confusion from its study. It is not meant to give any such final verdict on existence, but to lead towards the Truth.'

H. P. Blavatsky advises that while studying *The Secret Doctrine*—one might equally well say, while studying Theosophy—the mind must hold fast to certain basic truths, the first of which, according to her, is the fundamental Unity of All Existence. In holding to this truth, at whatever level it may be, while studying, living and acting, a religious awareness comes into being which must be the beginning of true theosophical knowledge. 'Spirit or Life is indivisible.'⁷ 'Every molecule is part of the universal life.'⁸ Orientation towards the indivisible One and the intuitive glimpse of the truth of the One is religious awareness. Theosophy itself not being other than Religion in the truest sense of the word, its study must bring about such religious awareness. Here we may recall that pregnantly meaningful statement that the first step is the

last step.⁹ Perhaps this can be interpreted to mean, among other things, that if one would proceed in a certain direction even the first step must be taken in that direction and not in the opposite one. The opposite one would lead only to untruth. Therefore if the Wisdom-Religion is what one seeks to realize, from the beginning one's study, life and action must be of such a nature that out of them arises the sense of something religious which carries one in the right direction.

H.P.B. explains the truth of unity as follows: 'This unity is a thing altogether different from the common notion of unity—as when we say that a nation or an army is united. . . existence is One Thing, not any collection of things linked together. Fundamentally there is One Being. . . Being absolute, there is nothing outside it. It is All-Being. It is indivisible, else it would not be absolute. If a portion could be separated, that remaining could not be absolute, because there would at once arise the question of comparison between it and the separated part. Comparison is incompatible with any idea of absoluteness.'¹⁰

Sorrow and Evil

The *Katha Upanishad*, an ancient work, declares that he who sees only diversity here (namely, in creation) passes from death to death. It is hardly necessary to say that it is by seeing diversity that man creates sorrow for himself. Separating the 'me' from 'you' and all others, he spends his life in competition, in conflict, in fruitlessly trying to *become* more—more

powerful, more important, more recognized, and so forth. Because the eyes of man have not yet been illumined by religious perception, human nature and human life have been the same for millions of years. Pointing this out, a sage wrote: 'It is the same now as it was a million of years ago: Prejudice based upon selfishness; a general unwillingness to give up an established order of things for new modes of life and thought. . . . pride and stubborn resistance to Truth if it but upsets their previous notions of things—such are the characteristics of your age.'¹¹ All human society, structured as it is by human thought, incites and sustains those emotions, thoughts, theories and actions which lead to ever-further separation and to more and more sorrow as a result. Sorrow and evil are the twin products of the untruth in the divided and divisive minds of men.

Both sorrow and evil exist only in the human sphere of existence. Though animals suffer—unfortunately they suffer excruciating pain as a result of human cruelty—they do not have to endure sorrow, which is the lot of man only, for sorrow is of the mind. Sorrow is a part of the mind's subjugation to the past. It is the recalling of past experiences and projection of future happenings, and it is the self-consciousness of thinking over one's own condition. Evil too does not exist save in the human sphere. Nature has no evil in it. A tiger pouncing on a deer acts according to its nature, unconsciously and innocently, free from evil. But endowed with mind, and the capacity to think

about right and wrong, human beings create evil, having wandered away from their own true nature, and shed their innocence and spontaneity. All that we consider as evil is the result of human action alone. 'The real evil proceeds from human intelligence and its origin rests entirely with reasoning man who dissociates himself from Nature. Humanity, then, alone is the true source of evil.'¹²

Wisdom is "Practical"

Purity is regained when action emanates from a religious awareness in which there is no separation between the 'me' and the other. Wisdom consists in such action. Wisdom is in all its aspects different from knowledge. Knowledge in the ordinary sense of the term is knowledge of facts. It is an accumulation of information. It does not demand that there must be action according to the facts or information known. Wisdom is of an entirely different character, for it cannot exist without translating itself into the quality of relationships and action. Therefore wisdom is always 'practical'. Wherever there is a divergence between thought and action, theory and practice, there is absence of wisdom. Such divergence is a denial of truth. Theosophy being the Wisdom-Religion demands that there should be continual progress in putting an end to the chasm between thought and theory on the one hand, and action and relationship on the other. Theosophical study is valid only if it actually destroys the gulf.

The study of Theosophy implies that contacts and relationship with the world at every level must lead nearer to the realization of the indivisibility of being. The manifestation of uncountable and incomprehensibly diverse forms in creation has a purpose and is part of a plan. Diversity imprisons the human mind in illusion, sorrow and evil, when it results in competition and struggle. But when seen with a clarified vision, it can also lift the mind into silence and wonder. Through observation of the incredible diversity, more intense awareness comes of the underlying oneness, the aloneness of the force which lives and moves in the forms, than was possible for the primeval consciousness which never moved among the many. Forms take birth and are dissolved day by day, hour by hour in continual flux and change. He who has been called the 'first among men,' the Lord Buddha, taught that all compounded things must be un-compounded. There is no exception to this. All forms, however beautiful and noble, must change. All systems, civilizations, outer things, must perish and will rise again. 'What is objective life itself but a panorama of vivid unrealities!'¹³ The student has to observe and brood on this, and realize through contemplative observation of the phenomenal world of things, the trans-phenomenal power of life, 'which cannot be heard or seen or smelt, but is perceived by the man who desires perception.' The scientist knows that matter is destructible and changes form, but energy remains. The theosophist learns that all forms are mutable and are compounded,

but there is in the unseen but perceivable realms the immutable and the uncompounded. Daily life which is passed without quiet observation and pondering over all that goes on in the world, and through such observation receives intimations of the undying, undivided and underlying existence, is a state of blindness, or what the Upanishad calls the condition of mortality. Immortality is only for him who is not blinded by the fluctuation of phenomena and the diversity of forms but permits his eyes to become more and more sensitive to the inner essence.

Sense the Oneness in Nature

The understanding of Theosophy also requires that one should observe not only the forms and phenomena of the gross, the concrete world, but also the movements and activities in the psychological world by which man is bound and conditioned. *Light on the Path* teaches: 'Regard earnestly all the life that surrounds you. Learn to look intelligently into the hearts of men. Regard most earnestly your own heart'. To these words are added the commentary: 'Study the hearts of men, that you may know what is that world in which you live and of which you will to be a part. Regard the constantly changing and moving life which surrounds you, for it is formed by the hearts of men; and as you learn to understand their constitution and meaning, you will by degrees be able to read the larger world of life.' Here, too, the study of the human mind and heart must lead not to further division but to a sensing of the oneness in human nature.

In looking at the ways of the mind, it is easy to point to the slime and mud in others and say, 'He is evil' or 'He is ugly'. Looking at oneself the description proceeds in the opposite terms, finding always something admirable, something worthy of respect and recognition. Thus the process of division continues and the aggravation of evil takes place in the world, for all the world is acting thus and thus only. The numerous wars of class, race, religion, family and so forth have arisen from saying, 'You are that' and 'I am this'. The fact that all men think in such terms, always dividing and separating, merely proves clearly to the thoughtful individual that the human mind is the same in all, for everywhere it divides. The very nature of that mind which all of us share and which belongs to all of us is that it works by distinctions. It creates the image of 'I', made up of the many descriptions one has given to oneself, based on past memories and self-conscious identification of those memories into a single imaginary thread. As H. P. B. has made clear in *The Key to Theosophy*, 'Mr. Smith' really means the long series of daily experiences strung together by the thread of memory and forming what Mr. Smith calls 'himself'—this bundle of experience is what the study of Theosophy should make one *realize*, not merely talk about, as the false personality. 'The conscious perception of one's personality on earth is but an evanescent dream.'¹⁴ With the clear discovery that every person is attributing to himself a false personality which he takes to be the

true self, there is knowledge that at the level of the mind too, there is oneness, because it is seen that wherever the mind acts, it acts in this very same fashion. Therefore H.P.B. said that there is no such thing as 'your mind' and 'my mind'; there is only mind. To regard earnestly the hearts of men and also one's own heart is to see the illusion into which one is led by the long-existing habit of describing, naming and drawing conclusions upon the nature of oneself and of others.

According to the teaching of H.P.B., 'Man is the microcosm. As he is so, then all the hierarchies of the heavens exist within him. But in truth there is neither macrocosm nor microcosm, but One Existence. Great and small are such only as viewed by a limited consciousness.'¹⁵ That one existence 'transcends the power of human conception and can only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. It is beyond the range and reach of thought'—in the words of the *Mandukya Upanishad* 'it is unthinkable and unspeakable.'¹⁶ Wisdom or Theosophy is a religious awareness, as we said before. It comes into being only when there is perception, however dim, that everywhere, in all things, omnipresent, is that One Existence; and to name and describe its many manifestations, and to draw conclusions, which cannot but be defective because they belong to thought, is to wrap oneself in a state of illusion. The true student of Theosophy learns to watch and understand without naming and presuming that he knows. His observation leads to the

recognition that essentially the human mind is the same; here too there comes a realization of the unity.

Progress in Theosophy is the journey from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality. The beginning of that progress is in understanding that the infinite cannot be known by the finite. The imperishable cannot be found by involvement in the perishable and the compounded. The study of Theosophy in the true sense is the study not only of theosophical literature; it is the study of the book of life, the observation of human nature, the contemplation of Nature and the phenomena of the created world in such a way that there is a sense of the One Existence. In one of the Upanishads it is stated that concentration or Dharana is the constant flow of the mind towards the One. There is the dropping away of all thought which separates. All thought and all perception lead on to a movement of consciousness in the stream of the One, when there is Dharana.

Theosophical life is thus a natural growth into altruism. Wisdom cannot be obtained by someone who does not have the love of humanity—nay, of all life—at heart. ‘Hast thou attuned thy being to humanity’s great pain, O candidate for light? Thou hast? . . . Thou mayest enter.’ Thus says *The Voice of the Silence*. Love cannot come about in a mind which sees only diversity. Only when the mind has glimpses of unity, does it begin to care. Then it cannot rest till it finds the way out of sorrow. Realization that sorrow and evil lie neither in circumstances nor in the course of

history, but in the human mind and in human action, logically progresses into the investigation of the structure and source of sorrow and evil in the psychology of man.

The Lord Buddha taught that sorrow must be realized as the first truth and to examine the deep roots of sorrow is the next step. Here begins the work of acquiring self-knowledge. It is vastly different from seeking relief from personal difficulties. Such relief can never be obtained for where there is a selfish end there can be no wisdom and without wisdom there is no relief. 'The highest aspirations for the welfare of humanity become tainted with selfishness if, in the mind of the philanthropist, there lurks the shadow of desire for self benefit or a tendency to do injustice, even when these exist unconsciously to himself. . . . This will never do.'¹⁷ This will never do, for wisdom is obtained only by those who have an 'unselfish hunger' for it.

Altruism is Yoga

To see sorrow as a truth implies a deep concern for the millenia-old condition of the world, and the ardent desire to succour 'the great orphan' which is humanity. The existence of sorrow does not present itself as a truth when it is casually or superficially noticed. True altruism too is different from 'wanting to help', in the ordinary sense of the term. Truly altruistic action is a form of yoga, referred to by the Sanskrit words Karma Yoga. It has to be totally free from the vanity of imagining that one is in the superior position of a person who is able to help. The history of mankind demonstrates

that despite the good desires of many people intending well by others, the world has remained the same. The mere desire to do good to another in no way qualifies a person with the wisdom which is necessary to be truly helpful. Only the individual who is prepared through deep study, which includes observation of Nature and of human nature, fits himself to learn service in the true sense.

Life is creative to a supreme degree, and operates with unimaginable and astounding newness in every little point where it exists. Its mode of growth or unfoldment can never be foreseen by a personal mind, for the magnitude of the creative power cannot be comprehended within the limits of the mechanical activities of thought. 'The world—meaning that of individual existences—is full of those latent meanings and deep purposes which underlie all the phenomena of the Universe, and Occult Science—i.e. *reason* elevated to supersensuous wisdom—can alone furnish the key wherewith to unlock them to the intellect.'¹⁸ What is good at any point is that which leads to the manifestation in fullest measure of the powers and faculties of the consciousness and the life within. Only 'pride and resistance to truth' make one presume that one can know what is *good* for another. The true altruist acts under no such presumption. Great delicacy, humility and sensitivity are the marks of a maturity which is needed before one can help. 'Be humble if thou wouldst attain to Wisdom.'¹⁹

H.P.B. writes that 'Altruism is an integral part of

self-development.’ As the consciousness of an individual becomes saturated by altruistic feeling, he becomes endowed with the qualities which we have mentioned and thereby his development takes place. It is one of the paradoxes of the inner life that one must learn to help and be actually helpful without feeling that one is in a position to help. It is the most humble who is the most wise and the best qualified to be of service to the world. Altruism is a textural change in the quality of the mind more than specific action of any particular kind. When there is the right state within, right action takes place automatically.

‘Remember always that *true Occultism or Theosophy* is the “Great Renunciation of self” unconditionally and absolutely, in thought as in action. It is ALTRUISM and it throws him who practises it out of calculation of the ranks of the living altogether.’²⁰ As we have seen, altruistic realization is that state in which self-will and the desire to mould life into patterns of one’s own making come to an end. Altruism is impossible as long as the personal self with its vanity and pride exists. Altruistic progression is skill in the wiping out of the personal self, which takes place through understanding the movements of that personal self. ‘It is not “the fear of God” which is “the beginning of Wisdom”, but the knowledge of self which is Wisdom itself’. Self-knowledge or *Atma Vidya*, to use the Sanskrit term, ‘is the only kind of altruism that any theosophist... who would be wise and unselfish ought to strive after’.²¹

Observe what is Happening Within

The existence of the self is known through the movements of the self in the form of thought, emotion, motivation and so forth. In the absence of movement one cannot be aware of the self. To understand the nature of the self one has, therefore, to observe what is happening within, which is not easy because there is constant change in the nature and quality of the activities of the mind. The changes are both quick and subtle if the mind has learned sophistication. Clarity, a logical outlook and keen observation are necessary to make a person capable of seeing these movements and understanding them. Sharpness and clarity are facilitated by the observation of external facts. An 'eye' unaccustomed to observation is inevitably handicapped for the task of knowing the self. Therefore one must learn to see the trees, the earth, the sky and the stars, ugliness and beauty, pain and joy. Such looking and watching may appear to be too commonplace to be worth doing. But it is necessary for each candidate for self-knowledge to realize the limitations of his powers of observation, how he misses subtle modulations and nuances and in what way he must learn about colour, form, movement and feelings through careful watching. In doing so, the mind learns to look, there is lucidity and keenness of sight, flexibility and subtlety are acquired, and a preparation is made for looking within. A mind which learns to be rational and logical in the observation of facts is also necessary, as without the

capacity to be rational it is likely to be deceived in looking at the internal activities. Deceit is part of the structure of self. It is always trying to be other than it is and seeking to impress others by what it is not. It wants to appear clever or virtuous, according to circumstances. To each person it presents a different face, consciously or unconsciously. It covers up its own characteristics and pretends, or puts a false gilt upon itself. To see the play of the self, in its hidden, subtle and quickly changing acts, keen sight is indispensable.

The knowledge of the self is obtained only by those who have a real intention to understand. Since such intention does not commonly exist, very few human beings have achieved self-knowledge. The many vested interests which lie hidden or apparent in each individual and every form of society present formidable obstacles to the inquiry into the self. The pressure of these interests constantly turns the mind away from looking closely within and formulates excuses for looking elsewhere. Because of this strong psychological compulsion, men have for ages attributed the cause of evil and sorrow to external circumstances. People have tried for centuries to change systems, theories and all things except themselves. Very few in the world like to admit that the vast and complicated problems of the world cannot be solved by changing the course of history or the organization of society. The solution is so obviously in the creator of the problem, that is in man himself, but he does not want to look at this unpleasant fact.

Man's biological inheritance impels him towards survival and security. To a large extent, he retains intact his animal inheritance, and that inheritance is to ensure security of life for the individual as well as for the species. Security is achieved when there is sufficient food of the right kind to keep the body healthy and when there is simple shelter and clothing to protect the individual from the elements. But the human mind has given an extraordinary extension to basic needs and has made men believe that huge mansions, varieties of objects, varied types of food, delicacies and enjoyments are necessary for his existence. As a result of his wanting more and more objects for so-called security and welfare, a vast organization has been created to manufacture innumerable objects, factories, markets, banking systems, communication networks, and so forth. Now, man is a victim of his own organization and feels like a cog in an enormous machine, suffering from the sense of alienation which is a symptom of the present time. All this ensues from the fact that what was originally a simple biological instinct of self-protection has become for the human being a psychological drive, of which he is not even aware, and which he is unable to stem, but on which he has to put a brake in order to be free. The furious race to find security and enjoyment has itself become a threat to security. The refusal to look at the psychological vested interests within himself makes man try to fulfil himself feverishly by seeking more and more from outside and trying to become always something other than what he is. The

mental activities in which he indulges being shallow by their very nature, he feels empty within, and he seeks compensation through acquiring power, property and pleasure. The race for acquisition is obviously the cause of danger and frustration.

Purifying the Mind

To know the self clearly it is necessary to apply oneself to the task with care. It is not enough to say, 'I am greedy', etc. and immediately turn away to look at other things. The 'I' in its desire to survive pushes one to turn away all the time. The pressure of an age-old mental nature, 'the unwillingness to give up an established order of things', is behind the impulse to look away. In order to look steadily and clearly within and not to run away from facts, there has to be sufficient prior contemplation to bring about the firm conviction that there is no solution for the human problem except in purifying the human mind. The human problem is of course each person's problem as well as all humanity's problem.

'The self of matter and the Self of Spirit can never meet. One of the twain must disappear; there is no place for both.'²² If the self of matter, which is the personal self with its animal inheritance and vested interests, does not come to an end, the splendour of the Spirit can never be discovered. 'Saith the Great Law: "In order to become the knower of All-Self thou has first of Self to be the knower." To reach the knowledge of that Self thou has to give up self to non-self,

being to non-being.²³ This cryptic truth is not seriously taken to heart because the personal self cleverly fills the mind with doubt about the statement and the hope that some other solution can be found. The so-called spiritual seeker usually tries to find solutions through gods, gurus and teachers, scriptures and other people's words, through mantras and ceremonials, through pseudo-saviours and mummeries of all kinds. Such hopes, beliefs and doubts make it impossible to find the energy which is necessary to understand the self. Therefore, it is essential to think out logically the basic questions and facts relating to life's problems and to obtain a profound conviction that all one's energy must be directed towards understanding the self. This energy was called in the ancient literature *virya*, 'the dauntless energy that fights its way to the supernal truth out of the mire of lies terrestrial.'²⁴ When there is such energy arising out of absence of doubt in regard to the work which is to be done, then it is possible to look at the subtle and constantly changing, often deceptive movements of the self, without turning away. To watch without such distraction, without seeking escape or excuses, is also an aspect of *Dharana*. To be able to dwell on what is within, without distraction is part of learning not to become what one is not, for becoming is the search for the more outside.

The labour involved in obtaining knowledge of the self is not easy. It is a life-long task.

'Does the road wind uphill all the way?'

'Yes to the very end.'

‘Will the day’s journey take the whole long day?’

‘From morn to night, my friend’.

The work is such that it has to be done during all parts of the day, every day and through one’s life. It is not enough to set apart a little bit of one’s time for it. ‘He who would see *beyond*. . . must be possessed. . . of an iron, never failing determination and yet be meek and gentle, humble and have shut out from his heart every passion that leads to evil.’²⁵ The aspirant must be impelled by a spirit which says, ‘Being on the way to the great knowledge, I will reach the goal or die.’

Nirvana means literally to extinguish. The extinguishing of all the movements of the little self is the way to that great unknown region of Nirvana. In the terminology of yoga it is called the silencing of the movements of the mind, for the mind is the author of the petty personal self. To reach Nirvana is not the becoming of something but the wiping away of selfishness. The Vedanta philosophy points out that Brahman or true Being cannot be found by searching, by trying to add to oneself, whether it is the addition of knowledge or of anything else. Brahman is found through negation, by the denial of the false. Falsity expresses itself in the movements of the mind which are based upon the notion, whether limited or extended, of survival and security. It is also the movement of seeking pleasure. The total negation of survival and pleasure is the giving up of the self to non-self, of being to non-being. Since each one has to negate his own little self and dis-

cover the great Non-self, self-knowledge cannot be obtained from another. It cannot be got through information in books. The work has to be done by each person for himself and it must be done daily.

Rightness in Action

As the self is understood and denied there is true righteousness in action. Action is not made right by the rules of society or the codes of behaviour approved by convention. Right action issues from a mind which has discarded the notion of 'I', the false personality, and shed the fetters forged by self-seeking. 'Ethics is the soul of the Wisdom-Religion' and 'Theosophy has to inculcate Ethics; it has to purify the soul, if it is to relieve suffering, even physical suffering.'²⁶ True ethical conduct in this sense is the only way to relief from suffering, for it prevents further suffering from being generated. Every true religion therefore has been founded on ethics. Though the commandments of the different religions may have been twisted and modified later, the universal basis of ethics shows that religion cannot exist without righteousness. As H.P.B. quoted, 'a tree is known by its fruits' and 'a portion of the true sciences is better than a mass of undigested and misunderstood learning.' Even a little self-knowledge will help humanity to grow quickly towards a moral stature which alone can bring peace and harmony to men.

'The soul of man is immortal, and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendour has no

limit.²⁷ The soul of man is essentially the faculty of knowing and of intelligence. What makes man into man is the quality of his consciousness, which is different from that of the sub-human kingdoms. The human being is conscious of surroundings, of Nature, of objects, of other human beings and other forms of life. Animals too can observe the objective existence around them, more often better than human beings can, for their senses are not made dull and obtuse by the preoccupations of a mind which is self-involved and occupied in a network of past happenings. The capacity to be conscious of external things is thus not the special quality which makes a human being human. It is the faculty of being aware of non-material and intangible facts and truths which is the essence of the human consciousness. Civilization, too, which is peculiar to human life, is not merely a matter of creating a social structure, or of building pyramids, temples or skyscrapers. The greatness of civilization depends on the various aspects of life in the civilization embodying the perception of values such as beauty, harmony, freedom, righteousness or dharma, and so forth. All such values denote intangible yet none the less fully valid realities. The growth of the human spirit is in enhanced awareness and ultimately in expressing perfectly the inner values which are inherent in the very nature of consciousness.

Source of Happiness

In ancient India consciousness, in its pure and absolutely true dimension, was said to be synonymous

with intelligence and bliss. The fact that not only every human being, but every form of life, seeks happiness proves that happiness is inherent in the nature of consciousness. No one questions why he is happy. Everyone takes for granted that happiness is the natural state and it is his birthright to experience it. He is impelled to question only when there is absence of that happiness. The less consciousness has blossomed in the human individual, the more he feels a lack and a discontentment that expresses itself in the urge to seek what the individual thinks will add to his happiness. The continual search for happiness from outside, through family, friends, objects, money, etc. is an extraordinary illusion in which men are caught. This illusion, which lasts for ages, is compared in eastern tradition to a vast sea in which human beings are immersed and tossed about. It is the 'sea of becoming' known in Sanskrit as *bhava-sagara*. The illusion begins to end with the recognition that going outwards to find happiness is a complete misdirection. The desperate search outside is most subversive of what is sought, for the source of happiness is consciousness itself. It is only by allowing the consciousness within to unfold and become aware in greater measure that there can be real happiness.

To the modern mind, the truth of non-attachment seems impossibly remote, for it is accustomed to excitement, enjoyment and the accentuation of experience. Detachment is often taken to be synonymous with the renunciation of external things, of responsibilities,

people and activities. True non-attachment has to be understood as an inner condition which can come into being whatever may be the outer circumstances. The desire to renounce outer things and to escape is itself a form of attachment. Non-attachment is total freedom from the desire for experience or the remembrance of experience. It is the constant wiping away of the dust which gathers upon the mirror of consciousness, so that it remains always a pure reflection of truth. The mind which holds to nothing reaches Nirvana, teaches the ancient wisdom.

The attachment of the mind is to all that it is accustomed to and with which it is familiar. For this reason habits are not easily shed. The mind clings to conventions, accustomed patterns and tradition. It fears death because death will deprive it of what it knows. Krishnamurti points out that one cannot be afraid of the unknown, because it is unknown. The fear of death is the fear of losing what is known. The tears shed on the death of someone are often caused by the loss of an accustomed material or psychological support. Attachment also exhibits itself as the craving to exist in the form which one knows, with possibly some modifications in accordance with unfulfilled desire. The desire 'to be' is listed among the disabilities of the mind in yoga. This is the deep-seated, sometimes subtle, desire in each individual for continuity. There is a yearning to see oneself continue through one's progeny and family or by achieving fame in some form, even by having photographs or portraits hung

up in different places. The desire for continuity through fame has made men risk their lives and perform so-called heroic deeds. It also expresses itself in the great importance the mind might place on reincarnation while it imagines its past and future lives, revelling already in the new achievements it will have in other incarnations. Another form of the same desire is preoccupation with after-death existence which causes people to resort to mediums and seances.

Desire "to be" must be Negated

Reincarnation has been taught as a part of the philosophy of several religions, on account of the clarification it offers in respect of the sufferings of birth and the justice or otherwise of events. Belief in reincarnation no doubt helps those in whom despair may arise, particularly where religious dogmas have insisted that if progress according to certain religious tenets is not made within one short life, there will be eternal damnation. Despite such support which the teaching about reincarnation gives, that wisest of men, the Lord Buddha, never spoke about it in explicit terms, nor was emphasis given to it by certain other important schools of thought and great teachers. The reason is clear. Though life and consciousness may manifest in several succeeding vehicles, this fact is of little importance to those who seriously seek deliverance from ignorance and sorrow. Such deliverance is freedom from desire and attachment. Attachment to the idea of continuity in any form, like attachment of any other

kind, is an obstacle to freedom. This particular attachment being of an extremely subtle nature and hidden in the deepest layers of the mind, special attention must be given to its observation. In trying to understand the self, the desire 'to be' must be traced and negated, before it can be said that 'being' has been given to 'non-being'. The rooting out of desire for continuity is much more important than investigating one's past lives or speculating on future existence.

Consciousness holds within it all the powers of creation which man can desire. His creative capacity flowers when he is not fixed and held to particular things through attachment. Attachment whether it is to past experience or to the present is limitation, both in time and space. The faculty of knowing, which is the essence of consciousness, is unlimited. There is, in fact, no knowing except in one's own consciousness; if objects are not reflected in consciousness they cease to be objects. On the contrary, even when there is no objective existence, if something appears in consciousness, it is a reality for the individual concerned. What is knowable is without bounds and all that is knowable is potentially a part of consciousness. But the human mind ignores infinity and attaches itself to a trivial set of known facts which it identifies with itself. These facts and experiences are what it learns to call as itself, to identify as 'my knowledge'. Attachment to a known set of facts, whether they belong to the past or the present limits the power of knowing to a very small sphere. All the information possessed by the most

erudite brain is still trivial in the perspective of what consciousness is capable of knowing. An Adept in the spiritual sense is one who has developed to perfection faculties which all human beings possess in germinal or restricted form. Such an Adept wrote: 'Believe me, there comes a moment in the life of an adept, when the hardship he has passed through are a thousandfold rewarded. In order to acquire further knowledge, he has no more to go through a minute and slow process of investigation and comparison of various objects but is accorded an instantaneous, implicit insight into every first truth. . . . the adept sees and feels and lives in the very source of all fundamental truths—the Universal Spiritual Essence of Nature. . . .' ²⁸

Freedom from Attachment

The unlimited creative power of consciousness can operate only when the limitation of attachment ends and identification is not made with objects. In freedom from attachment, there is the discovery of another of the eternal values inherent in consciousness. Since in the absence of inward freedom the other absolute values are incapable of flowering, spiritual liberation has been spoken of in the East, as the fundamental aim of human existence. Freedom, like happiness, is instinctively sought by life confined in any form. This indicates that freedom inheres in one's own nature. Consciousness, when it is free from attachment to finite things, resumes its original and natural state. Freedom has therefore been described as the natural

state in works on yoga, for in the state of freedom all that naturally inheres in consciousness manifests, including values which we have not so far mentioned. Wisdom, love, harmony, purity, plenitude are some of the natural endowments of consciousness, besides freedom, bliss and intelligence.

The awakening of the latent powers in man is the discovery of the pure and essential nature of consciousness. It has little to do with the development of telepathy, clairvoyance and such other apparent powers and achievements, which do not bring a fundamental change to the human being nor make manifest the glory of his consciousness. On the other hand, by identifying himself with the experience of achievement in this field, he limits himself and continues to remain in the field of illusion, all self-identification being illusion.

Self-knowledge is thus denial as well as discovery, renunciation as well as realization. It is the denial of attachment and illusion and the discovery of the true nature and powers of the life within. By total denial 'the purgation of the mind must take place not only on its upper level, but also in its hidden depths. When the mind is emptied of its accumulations there is no longer the "me", the gatherer. The accumulation, the stored-up memories are the "me"; the "me" is not an entity apart from the accumulations. . . the mind must be utterly empty to receive; but the craving to be emptied in order to receive is a deep-seated impediment, and this also must be understood

completely, not at any particular level. The craving to experience must wholly cease, which happens only when the experiencer is not nourishing himself on experiences and their memories.²⁹

When there is true understanding of the self and purgation has taken place there is no self in the ordinary sense of the term. Therefore the very word 'self-knowledge' has no meaning in that situation. The word 'self-knowledge' may suggest that there is a knower who knows the self as an object. But in the state of true, deep knowledge, which is the state of wisdom, there is no duality; there is no self to be known; there is no knower and no object of knowledge. 'The Real knowledge. . . is not a mental but a spiritual state, implying full union between the knower and the known.'³⁰

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