

Theosophy and Truth

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THE two great pillars upon which the structure of The Theosophical Society rests are its three great Objects and its unique Motto — “There is no religion higher than Truth”. The first Object is, of course, supreme — the formation of a nucleus, a concentration, of the existing Universal Brotherhood of Humanity. All who desire to join The Theosophical Society must be welcome so to do, whoever they are, provided it is their desire to lead a brotherly life. Otherwise it would be impossible for them to be constituent parts of a nucleus designed to this end. But they should also be in sympathy with the two Objects which, as they are pursued, lead to a deeper realization of the fact of Universal Brotherhood. Members of The Theosophical Society are people who have a [Page 2] real and practical sympathy for Brotherhood, but who also have sympathy both with the study of religion, philosophy and science to the further elucidation of Brotherhood, and with the exploration of the as yet undiscovered, no less to the further elucidation of Brotherhood. In such study and exploration they may be disinclined to engage. Yet it is vital study and exploration, and demands the sympathetic appreciation of all members, no matter what their personal relationship to it may be.

WHAT IS TRUTH ?

It seems to me, however, that while the Objects of The Society are in the forefront of the Theosophical consciousness of each one of us, we are apt to forget that our motto is a no less fundamental part of the structure of our Society. In it we exalt Truth, without defining Truth, above all forms of Truth. The Sanskrit word Sat is well translated as Truth. But we proceed to translate the word *Dharma* [Page 3] as religion, and say that there is no *religion* higher than Truth. I think that this translation quite wrongly narrows the whole conception sought to be conveyed in the motto. I have always understood that the word “Dharma” signifies right adjustment between the individual and his surroundings, right relationship; or possibly in a general way “righteousness”. But it certainly does not mean that which we ordinarily understand by the word “religion”. There is no righteousness higher than Truth. There is no expression of Life higher than Truth. These would, I am inclined to think, be more accurate translations of the motto of the Maharajahs of Benares than the translation we normally employ. Surely there is no religion higher than Truth. But equally there is no philosophy higher than Truth. There is no Art higher than Truth. There is no Science higher than Truth.

And even then the nature of the Truth must needs vary with the stage of evolution [Page 4] of the individual life. There is no righteousness for any individual higher than his fullest expression of Truth, than the fullest expression possible to him at his evolutionary level. Such righteousness will doubtless be expressed in terms of religion, but no less will it be expressed in many other terms, according to individual temperament.

THE RELATIVITY OF TRUTH

Therefore, Truth is relative to each circumstance and condition of Life. I think we are almost entitled to say that one man's truth may be another man's falsehood, though I am not sure that we have any right to use the word "falsehood" at all. In any case we can say that what is true for one may not necessarily be true for another, and that what may be supremely true for one may have little or no place among the verities of another. It is impossible to envisage absolute Truth, for parts do not contain the whole of which they [Page 5] are parts. Yet inasmuch as every part is in some measure a reflection of its whole, is consubstantial with its whole, Truth absolute is implied in it, is latent in it though not patent in it.

Thus is it that I conceive of our Science of Theosophy as a very special mode of the Truth absolute, and of The Theosophical Society as a Movement embodying the search for Truth. As The Theosophical Society stands before the world, there is certainly no commitment to what we call Theosophy. No member is in any way under the slightest obligation to study, still less to accept, Theosophy. There is no Object such as might be expressed in the words: "To study the Science of Theosophy". There is a definite commitment to Brotherhood. There is a definite commitment to the study of religion, philosophy and science, and to the exploration of the undiscovered, at all events for those who feel so inclined. But the fact that The Society is called *The Theosophical* [Page 6] *Society* cannot surely be held to imply the obligation for every member to study Theosophy. Obviously, the majority of the members are likely to be students of Theosophy. But the first Object of The Society is not to study Theosophy, but to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, which surely means that it may well be composed of many people who will not be concerning themselves with Theosophy as most of us know the Science. A nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood cannot be limited to a handful of students of Theosophy.

WHERE THEOSOPHY ENTERS

On the other hand, it is deeply significant that Theosophy and The Theosophical Society are twins. They were reborn together in 1875, and have been growing up in beauty side by side ever since. There must be some very intimate relationship between Theosophy and The Theosophical Society, or they would not [Page 7] have been reborn at the same time and to the same people. Personally, I feel that Brotherhood matters more than aught else, and that it is clothed in no exclusive form, nor is there but a single way to its achievement. I can well conceive of an individual joining our Society and yet denying the value of the Science of Theosophy to himself, though in no way denying its possible value to others. Where, then, does Theosophy enter? It enters, I think, as a suggestion relative to the possible bases of Truth which is more, of Truth which is at the ultimate root of all Truths, of Truth which is, if I may be pardoned the phrase, relatively absolute. It enters as a statement of the Greatest Common Measure of all faiths, of all philosophies, of all sciences, and of that beyond of which religions, philosophies and sciences are time-projections in this outer world. It enters as a bird's-eye view of the evolutionary process as seen by those who have acquired the wings of spirituality. It enters as witness to the Love and the Justice [Page 8] and the Purpose of God amidst all the seeming negations and futilities of His beneficence. Theosophy is suggested to be a Wisdom even more ancient than the religions, even though it appears to us today with a Greek label. In Hinduism it is known as Brahmaidya — the Wisdom of the Supreme Being. It is declared to be the eternal river whence the irrigating wells visible to man derive their fructifying waters.

THEOSOPHY NO DOGMA

Theosophy is no dogma. It is no formal religion. It is no specific mode of science. It is no carefully constructed philosophy representing the gaze of man into the heavens. It is an Experience of Reality on the part of some who, transcending the microcosm, have become in a measure free in the macrocosm, and describe something of their vision of the infinite as reflected in, and in terms of the finite. In our classic literature we may read [Page 9] of the vision, of the experience, but without obligation, without an iota of penalty for doubt, or even for unbelief. "Thus have we seen", say some great knowers of the Wisdom. Those who are eager to see will be inspired by the vision of others, be it but to see differently. Whenever and wherever a human, still more a superhuman, soul cries out: "I see! I see!" let others look, so that they too may see, even though otherwise. Some have seen that which we sum up in the word "Theosophy". Some have seen that which they sum up otherwise, in other words. It matters more to see than to believe. It matters more to see than to hope. It matters more to see than to follow. It matters more to see even than to know. Let those whose eyes are opening look when they hear the cry: "I see".

Yet Truth is more than any picture of it, than any form of it, than any description of it. Far be it from any of us, save, perchance, for ourselves, to insist that Truth is here or there, in such and such a book, in such and such a [Page 10] person, alone, or in supreme degree. For ourselves any book, any teacher, any well of Life, may be the exclusive giver of the Truth we momentarily need and are able to assimilate. But we cannot deny to others that freedom to seek and to find Truth which has enabled us, seeking, to find. Truth is more than the Theosophy we Theosophists know and cherish. Is not Truth everywhere, as well as in our own individual conceptions, which we so readily insist comprise the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth?

TRUTHS CHANGE

Truths change in form at all events as we ourselves must change. Today such and such a book reflects for us Truth's peaks. A Scripture, a philosophical dissertation; for Theosophists, perhaps, *The Secret Doctrine* or *At the Feet of the Master*, or some other classical work. But we shall not forever be reading the book which in this incarnation [Page 11] represents for us the highest revelation. We shall not be carrying under our arms the volumes of *The Secret Doctrine* as we pass through the valley of death into the hills of heaven, and thence back again on to the plains of earth. It is not the book that matters, nor even the teacher, nor yet the tradition, but the Life. And the Life must reveal itself in form after form, in book after book, in teacher after teacher, in tradition after tradition, until the kaleidoscopically changing forms reveal the constant and unchanging Life. In varied forms shall we be seeking Truth, until we become able to perceive Truth in all forms. Time after time shall we be saying that Truth is here, and here, and here, not there, nor there, nor there, until we discover that Truth is everywhere, until we identify Truth with all that lives, until we perceive Truth treading wonderfully and mysteriously her gorgeous way in a myriad differing forms.

We Theosophists are seekers after Truth, even though we are also, like the rest of the [Page 12] world, finders of Truth. We rejoice in the Truth we have found, but are restless to move onwards to Truth which we have not yet found. Each of our Objects is dynamic in that it represents seeking after more than it represents finding. Away from the Truth which enslaves us, away from the Truth we have conquered, to the Truth which may have yet to enslave us, to the Truth we have yet to conquer! The Theosophy we

have must not enslave us, nor must we rest content in its conquest. It is but the thin edge of endless Truth.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF TRUTH

I have been much preoccupied in my spare moments by the thought of the motto of The Theosophical Society: "There is no religion higher than Truth". What is this truth than which no religion is higher ? To what extent do we possess it ? What truth remains, and how are we to seek it ? We pay far too little attention to the motto of The [Page 13] Theosophical Society, for if we were to pay more attention to it we should have a clearer conception as to the nature of truth, and having that clearer conception, we should be much more understanding, less dogmatic, less aggressive, less denunciatory than so many of us are with regard to a particular reflection of truth which we imagine we perceive.

It is extremely difficult to define truth adequately. One of the most useful definitions of truth is the definition which relates it to its effect upon human character. An individual should be known by his truths; in other words, he should be profoundly affected by that which he regards as truth; it should deeply influence his life down here, and should in fact be his guiding star, the light on his path. I believe that truth can be as well defined by the character of the individual it produces as in any other way, for if we strive to define truth in any other way, we are practically confronted with the fact that truth is co-existent with life. There is no truth but life. I do not think we [Page 14] can go any further than that. Even if we think of the Theosophy so far disclosed to us in terms of its laws, and so forth, all these are aspects, functions, expressions of life, nothing more than that.

The question then arises as to what is an individual's relation to what we call truth ? How is he to seek it ? How is he to discover it ? How is he to use it when he has it ?

EVERYONE HAS HIS TRUTH

Now the more I brood upon the whole question of truth, the more I am perfectly convinced that each individual has his own truth, however different it may be or even apparently contradictory to the truths of others. No individual is without life; therefore, no individual is without truth. While it may be said in the case of some that they are more full of life and therefore more full of truth than others, for the most part we have the truth we need for the lives we lead. I, therefore, take a [Page 15] very catholic view of truth so as to accord truth to everyone, being sure that no one is without truth to the measure of the standard of his stage of evolution. If he has not one truth he has another truth. If he does not possess truths which we ourselves cherish exceedingly, and which we regard as the very essence and heart of truth, he has other truth no less vital in fact to him, no less the heart of truth, so far as he is concerned, than that which to us seems so extremely true.

Since, therefore, no one is without truth — for everyone is in possession of it since he is in possession of life — the utmost that is incumbent upon us is to declare it, not to use it as a weapon, not to use it so as to confront other so-called lesser truths and to hold them up as being inferior, but to declare what we have and let the declaration work its own way. I think we have as much the duty to declare the truths that are ours as we have the duty to live. It is surely our duty to live as fully, as richly, as strongly, as

forthgoingly, as we [Page 16] possibly can. That should involve the expression of the very essence of that truth, of that life, namely the truths we hold.

THE POWER OF TRUTH

If there is to be any acid test as to the value of any particular truth to the individual, if he is to challenge himself on the question as to whether he has the truth which should be most to him — so that there is nothing more for the time being which could mean more than the truth he already possesses — then he might very well look to see the influence and effect the truths he holds have upon the life he leads, upon his character, his understanding, his power to recognize and perceive the truths dwelling in other people. Hence, while from one point of view, each person has his own separate and individual and uniquely different truth, from another point of view he must so hold even those truths which are unique to him that he is able to perceive with joy the [Page 17] truths which are unique to other people. It may be true that he knows he has a truth which would mean much to other people if they possessed it.

We Theosophists, for example, may feel clear that we have in Theosophy life, truth, which the majority of the world does not possess; hence, the certainly urgent need for declaring Theosophy. On the other hand there are many in the outer world who possess that which we do not possess. While we may say that we have this, that and the other truth, they may have this, that and the other truth which perhaps we may possess in less degree, or not possess at all. You may say that is a rather negative condition of being. What is the worthwhileness of being a Theosophist if you cannot feel that the world is needing something urgently that we have and is the poorer without it? I definitely feel that we have the duty of declaring, and with emphasis, strength and eagerness to convince, the truths we possess, that we believe to be ours. But [Page 18] we have no call to be denunciatory, to compare our truths with other people's truths to the detriment of other people's truths; we have no cause to place ourselves on pedestals of superiority as if we had something so very special that we are far in front of other people who do not possess the specialities in which we rejoice.

THEOSOPHY AND TRUTH

I do not think it is possible for The Theosophical Society to fulfil its First Object and to establish a real nucleus of Universal Brotherhood if we confine ourselves to Theosophy in the sense in which we use the term at the present time. Theosophy is of course a specific aspect of science, it is a specific interpretation of life, it is an emphasis on certain truths. That is what Theosophy is, as we have it. From one point of view it is the ancient and eternal Wisdom and is all-inclusive, but there are not many Theosophists who have *that* [Page 19] Theosophy. Rather have they the specialized Theosophy which deals with special laws, planes of consciousness, which deals with races, rounds, and all the other teachings set forth in our classic literature. That is the average Theosophist's grasp. How many Theosophists have the universal, eternal and all-inclusive wisdom which Theosophy essentially is? Each one of us has a reflection but not the White Light as a whole.

In these circumstances, therefore, I think we ought to realize that we have, when we are thinking of this Theosophy of ours, truth only in part. More and more, as I brood upon these things, do I become convinced that while it is true that this particular aspect of wisdom we call Theosophy is ours with which to permeate the whole world, yet there are other aspects. If there is no religion higher than truth and if

each individual has his own truth we need that truth, such as he has, in order to perfect our nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of humanity. I [Page 20] feel, therefore, that while on the one hand it is our business to emphasize the Theosophy handed down to us by the Elder Brethren through our great leaders, we must not forget that Universal Brotherhood is perhaps more than the Theosophy that we know, this specialized form of Theosophy. I do not say for a moment that Universal Brotherhood is more than Theosophy. No ! But it is more than the Theosophy that the average individual calls by that name. Speaking as President of The Theosophical Society, I feel that my work largely, not entirely but largely, is to make our membership as inclusive as it possibly can be made, so that we may be enriched by innumerable differences and not starved by the lack of them.

FACETS OF THE DIAMOND OF TRUTH

In the beginning was a particular word, a special word, and that special and particular word was with H. P. Blavatsky and in fact was [Page 21] H. P. Blavatsky. But that word is not the only word, nor was it pronounced in those early days in the only way it could be pronounced. There are surely other pronunciations as certainly as there are other words, and if only we could as to our Society become collectors of, includers, of differences, on certain terms, our Society would be very, very much the stronger, without in any way detracting from the fact that we have a special restoration of truth which goes under the name of Theosophy and which has its own particular definitions. When I say "on terms", I mean that we must be mutually appreciative of each other's truths no matter how widely divergent one truth is from another. What should mark off The Theosophical Society from all other movements should be this wealth of differences mutually appreciated and understood, without there being as between one and another even the minutest depreciation, still less of course, the spirit of antagonism. I feel that very strongly. [Page 22] I do not think that it matters that we differ. But I think it does matter *how* we differ. We have to begin to learn to differ in a spirit of harmony and to go our different ways, however radically different one way may be from another, in a spirit of appreciation of the way in which somebody else is going his way.

DISCOVER FOR YOURSELF

That brings me to a point which in some way is related to this fact that each individual has his own truth, namely, that he should be careful not to borrow truth but to discover it. Very many people borrow truths. They have their truths on loan and so it often happens that an individual who has a truth on loan finds that it does not satisfy him when put to some great test or when he happens to be in some great need. I think that The Theosophical Society is in the stage in which we must lay stress on each individual very definitely [Page 23] going his own way, a way he must learn to tread without antagonism, condemnation, denunciation of other people, full of joy as to his own way and full of respect as to the ways of others.

Each one of us ought to take advantage of all the truth that we see around us. We ought to take advantage of each other's truths which each one of us is more or less living day by day, not in order to copy but in order to understand, so that light may be thrown on one's own way thereby. I am afraid that during many years very many of us, and very many even of our leaders, have held their truths almost like bludgeons. To me, if there is any negation of truth whatever, it is when that truth is held as a weapon of attack on somebody else's beliefs, no matter how crude they may seem to the wielder of the weapon. We have in The Theosophical Society today and outside The Theosophical Society people who insist that *their* particular truths or *their* particular Theosophies are the only truths [Page 24] and the only

Theosophies. That is not only dangerous, but it is almost untruthful. It means that the individual who insists upon his own particular way, upon his own particular interpretation of Theosophy does not possess his way, does not possess his own particular Theosophy, but is possessed by it, is obsessed by it, is enslaved by it.

TRUTH IS DYNAMIC

I can conceive that an individual must go into the world as a slave to his truths so that he may fulfil certain purposes, riding rough-shod over the truths of others, but such circumstances must indeed be rare. It is perfectly clear, to me at all events, that we have to understand and appreciate, to cause the truths of others to shine upon our way to illumine its course more clearly. For wherever you are, be it in Theosophy or in science, or in any department of life — religion, politics — there is always change, and truth which is less [Page 25] is constantly giving way to truth which is more; so that the truth which is less practically swings into the background, and the truth which is more occupies just for the time being the foreground, until it in its turn must swing into the background and other truth takes its place, because truth is dynamic, truth is movement, truth is growth. There is nothing static about any truth which anyone holds. No one holds any truth in form forever, not even in life for the matter of that. Your most cherished opinion, the truths which you hold most dear, the truths which are nearest to you, which mean most to you, which give you the courage and the hope and the peace and joy you need, all of them are far less than that into which they are destined to grow, are but shadows of the light to come.

Thus is it that one holds one's truths lightly. One does not clutch them as if one never wanted to let them go again. One holds them lightly, uses them while they are usable, and [Page 26] then allows them to go below the threshold of the waking consciousness into the storehouse of experience. The Theosophy that you and I know, about which we talk perhaps with such certainty and clarity and definiteness, is but the shadow of the Theosophy that we shall know. Not only that, but the Theosophy which seems to us such abundant life, with all the truths which we have in our conventional Theosophy — that is only one facet of the great diamond of Theosophy. The time will come when we shall turn from that facet to another facet which in its turn may appear to exclude those constituent elements which mean so much, in fact mean everything, to us in the facet turned towards us in this particular life.

THEOSOPHY ONLY A FRAGMENT

So many people are anxious that they shall continue the next life more or less in the same [Page 27] way in which they have been following this life. They hope they will come back into this Theosophy, into The Theosophical Society, into contact again with such and such leaders, as early as possible know in their next lives the things which they came to know in later years in this life; they are so anxious to repeat the same thing over and over again. That shows sometimes that we are holding these truths all too closely to us, we are hugging them as if someone were endeavouring to steal them from us. If you think of just the little bit of Theosophy we know, it is but the smallest fragment of the Eternal Wisdom of life, and for my own part, rather than repeat next life the particular truths which have been satisfactory to me in this life, I should like a complete change, I should like the kaleidoscope of my life to be shaken so vigorously that a picture appears entirely different from the picture which the original shaking brought to view in the beginning of the life which I am now leading. [Page 28]

TRUTH IS EVERYWHERE

I can think, even as I am talking to you now, of a life radically different from this one without most of the beliefs and truths which certainly are very dear to me now, and which I hope I shall have forever, but which I shall be quite glad to see temporarily obscured for the sake of other truths which these truths themselves may now be obscuring. Well, that is another matter, and in the meantime I hope that I myself, and hope every Theosophist, many increasingly have the power to perceive truth everywhere and not exclusively anywhere. After all, truth is everywhere, life is everywhere, and to discover truth in everything is to begin to understand and to know life.

It seems to me that our work is largely to be free, and I do not think you are free unless you can dwell everywhere in a spirit of freedom, unless you can dwell in every faith, in every human condition of life, in innumerable antitheses and be perfectly and beautifully and [Page 29] happily at home. We must be able to dwell in antitheses, in forms, ceremonies, restrictions, at home, free, kings in them, because there is no frontier to our power to move about. I have a feeling that an individual who says, "I do not care about ceremonies", is an individual who is not free. I feel that an individual who says, "I am not interested in religion", is an individual who is not free. An individual who says, "I prefer this country to that, this nation to that nation", is not free, he is imprisoned. Life is universal, be it a form, a ceremony, a faith, a nation, an individual. No matter in what form, there is life, there is God, there is a growth, there is truth, and a Theosophist, a lover of the Universal Wisdom, should be able to be free in all these modes of truth's and life's manifestation, I think we have to learn so to be and not to be negative in our declarations of truth, saying, "It is not here, it is not there, it is not elsewhere". We must be positive in our declaration of truth, saying "It is everywhere". [Page 30]

FROM SLAVERY TO KINGSHIP

The great search of the Theosophist is the discovery of truth everywhere and the exalting of truth everywhere. There is no greater service that any individual can render to any other individual than to cause that individual to feel an exaltation, an exultation, with regard to those truths which are nearest and dearest to him. If we are really Theosophists, it seems to me that we can do no better than to take each individual where he is and to try to exalt him where he is, try to help him to exult more wisely where he is. It is not very easy, because in many, many cases you are confronted with an individual who is in a condition of dogmatism narrow in its rigid exclusiveness, or of despair helpless in its utter hopelessness. I do not say that it is not a necessary stage of evolution to be certain you are right and that everybody else is wrong. Yet in fact nobody is much more right than anybody else. It is the habit of the individual who is very full of [Page 31] his temporary self to be sure that he is right, that his views are right, that his scheme, his plan of life is right. Those individuals are a little difficult because they have so great a hold on time that they have nothing wherewith to take hold of eternity, and that is their weakness. They live in the prisons of their own temporary narrownesses and they are very sure, self-satisfied, self-opinionated. They are not free. While, of course, it is true that an individual must be slave before he can be a king, a Theosophist should be on the watch that the period of slavery be passed as quickly as possible, that his face be turned as early as possible towards his kingship.

THE RAINBOW

To conclude. I feel that we have to enter into this third period of The Society's life, a period of recognition

of the universality of truth, and of the need to have that universality as [Page 32] perfectly expressed within the confines of our Society as is possible, so that even the apparently most emphatic contradictions may learn within The Society to live harmoniously and constructively at peace. Thus do we move away from external authority to internal authority, from external forms to individuality, from all that is without to the within, so that valuing as perhaps we have not valued our own within, we may not seek to make it a weapon wherewith to try to mould other within to the forms of ours, but to make it a means whereby we appreciate the within of each, the individuality of each, and through our own eagerness to develop our own individuality, become able to encourage others to develop their individualities not along our lines but along theirs. So may every colour of the rainbow clearly be expressed, with the result that a White Light becomes beautifully manifested in all its exquisite whiteness by very reason of its constituent colours.