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UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD — *Alan Shurlock*

Universal Brotherhood is a Theosophist's way of saying that all things in Nature are akin, from the dust under our feet to the farthest star in the sky. The phrase "Universal Brotherhood" is not new or startling, although its true meaning is not often used. It has been the theme of poets and philosophers, the ideal of statesmen and patriots. Scientific research even shows that all matter may be resolved into its primary division of atoms, so that everything in this physical world is related and akin to everything else.

Many persons, however, examining the racial and religious differences of human beings, find that Universal Brotherhood is only a platitude or possibly a consummation devoutly to be wished, as far as mankind is concerned. But a Theosophist understanding that everything physical and mental is only a reflexion of the Divinity that is the source of all things, states positively that Universal Brotherhood is a fact in nature. Wars, sorrow, and confusion among mankind are proofs in themselves of this fact. We are all bound together with the golden cord that comes from the heart of the universe, and what affects the smallest part affects the whole. The poet Francis Thompson expresses our belief very beautifully, when he says:

All things by immortal power Near or far Hiddenly
To each other linked are,
That thou canst not stir a flower
Without troubling of a star.

Once we have an understanding of the fundamental laws of the universe, the belief in Universal Brotherhood becomes a real thing and part of our daily living. Stated simply, these laws are:

The Law of Hierarchies; the Law of Balance; the Law of Cycles. The Law of Hierarchies may be explained as the division of all nature into groups or kingdoms, one above the other, without end. All kingdoms are alike in one particular: they are all groups of living beings in some form or another, coming into being as expressions of the universal life force that shows itself in the myriad shapes and patterns that fill the world with beauty. Each kingdom is related to and dependent upon the one below for its existence. At the same time it is gradually reaching up or evolving towards the kingdom above.

We see this relationship in the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms. Trees and plants have their roots in the soil from which they draw their life-sap. Animals, in turn, depend on grass, vegetables, and fruit for their existence. Mankind, having an animal body, is likewise dependent on the kingdoms below, but having developed mind and will-power, is evolving towards the kingdom of the gods above. Why should this be thought a stretch of the imagination? We cannot truly conceive ourselves, in our present state, as being the ultimate, the finest product of the universe. Is it not reasonable, then, to assume that there are higher beings who have evolved beyond man's state, even though our physical eyes cannot see them? And so Theosophists say that these beings, call them gods, archangels, Mahatmas, Super-Men, as you will, do exist; and that though our bodies are chained to the physical kingdoms below, our spiritual selves are reaching up to the state of godhood above us. And beyond the gods stretch even higher realms of consciousness, without end; all related and a part of the grand whole.

As we study the universe and its operations we begin to see that there is nothing hit-or-miss about the way it is run. The sun rises daily; the flowers bloom and die and are reborn year

after year; the stars move in their appointed courses in spite of our wars, quarrels, and ignoble confusion. Why does the universe run so grandly and why don't we live in an equally grand manner?

Here is where the second law comes into effect — the law called by Theosophists Karman. Interpreted, this means the Law of Cause and Effect, attraction and repulsion; or better still, the Law of Balance. This law keeps the universe running so beautifully year after year. As the result of our own actions it operates to bring us war or peace, happiness or misery; and thus we become the judges, juries, and policemen of ourselves.

A cold-blooded fatalistic belief, you say? Not at all. A complete understanding of this law can be had only by considering it together with the third universal law, the Law of Cycles. This last law may be explained as the belief and realization that everything in nature progresses upwards in a spiral path, that is, a series of circles each one higher than the other. Another side of this law is the fact that all manifestation is dual — the well known pairs of opposites that Plato and other philosophers have written about. A study of nature and our own lives gives us many examples: day and night, winter and summer, and the familiar daily routine of sleeping and awakening. Each day is a miniature life; our whole life, a series of days in which we learnt life's lessons, or flunked them; we do noble or ignoble deeds; we help others or live in a selfish world of our own. But no life, no matter how well lived, can be complete in itself. There is always so much more to learn and to do and to undo, even for the brightest of us. So, in harmony with this law of cycles Theosophists believe in reïmbodiment: the return to earth again and again to take up our progress where we left off, after a period of rest; just as every day we go to work, refreshed after the night's rest, to pick up the incompleting thread of the previous day's business.

With this cyclic law in mind, the Law of Balance becomes logical and not fatalistic. We return in another life to reap here the benefits of our previous helpful actions, or to straighten out the injustices we have done before. And thus, from life to life, we gradually progress upwards.

An explanation should be given here of what is meant by "we" in this paper. As stated before, Theosophists believe that there is Divinity behind all physical matter, including ourselves. Our real selves are composed of finer and more spiritual grades of consciousness than our physical bodies, which in turn are lit up by the pure spark which is a part of the Divine Whole. This spiritual part of ourselves, sometimes called the soul, reincarnates again and again until it has learned all that can be learned through materialization into physical matter. This process, in turn, gradually spiritualizes the physical matter with which our soul comes into contact while residing in our bodies, so that this physical matter will evolve in time into a spiritual being.

How is this done? Consider the makeup of our physical bodies. Forming the flesh, bone, and blood are tiny atoms, each of which has a spiritual counterpart. These atoms enter our system through the food we eat, and during their stay with us they become colored with the thoughts, magnetism, and individuality of ourselves. As we progress upward by spiritual enlightenment we in turn impart a touch of our growth to these atoms, so that they are lifted up by their contact with us. This is just one example of what is meant by a Theosophist when he states that everything in nature is dependent and related to the rest.

Having considered and interpreted Universal Brotherhood through the fundamental laws of the universe, let us see how it affects the progress of mankind. In a previous paragraph concerning the Law of Balance the suggestion was made that man seems to be an inharmonious unit in a seemingly harmonious whole. The apparent discrepancy is explained by the fact that human beings are endowed with the power to discriminate. Man is more than

a mere animal, because man has the power of Mind, the ability to choose between good and evil. Until men learn how to use this power for the good of their brothers, instead of their harm, there will be discord, wars, and suffering.

Theosophy gives us the key to understand ourselves; the power to end all strife and sorrow. What is it? To live to benefit mankind. The same thought can be found in all religions. The Eastern scriptures say: By loss of self alone can Self be found, which is a beautiful, concise way of saying that by overthrowing our personal, selfish nature we shall find the real, the spiritual part of our being. And this can be done only by living to help others. It is the sacrifice of the personal self that gives us advancement., The greatest paradox of the universe is that through self-sacrifice, devotion to others, and practice of altruism we gain infinitely more than we give up. The very virtues and qualities we possess that endear us to our fellow-men were obtained only by self-sacrifices on our part sometime or another in our various existences.

Jesus was asked: "Teacher, what is the great injunction in the Law?" He replied: "Thou shalt love the Lord God thy God, in all thy heart and in all thy soul, and in all thy consciousness. This is the prime and great injunction. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt *love thy neighbor as thyself*. In these two injunctions hang all the Law and all the prophets."

The spirit of brotherhood, properly understood, may be found throughout nature, even in the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms. It has been said that nature is ruthless, "red in tooth and claw." Could it not be better stated that the Monads or life-entities back of each kingdom understand that by sacrificing themselves as food for the kingdom above they are undergoing spiritual development by coming in contact with a higher-developed form of consciousness? Mankind, the top kingdom in material development, makes his material sacrifice by devoting himself to the advancement of his brothers. Thus is the principle of Brotherhood carried out everywhere in the universe.

When we understand the operation of the laws of Karma and Reimbodiment the true meaning of brotherhood becomes very clear. Every action, kind or unkind, helpful or harmful to our fellow-beings becomes a force we have created that will help or hinder us in our own evolution. "For every flower of love and charity we plant in our neighbor's garden, a loathsome weed will disappear from our own." A thief can steal only from himself. The energy created by such an action remains long after the act has been forgotten, until it is balanced by an act of restitution, perhaps in a future existence. A nation robs and plunders other nations, as Spain did the Incas of Peru and the Aztecs of Mexico. Today Spain is undergoing war and destruction.

Does anyone doubt that the condition of Europe today is not the result of past European thoughts, words, and misdeeds? I think it is quite reasonable to say that there would not have been dictators in Europe today had a magnanimous peace treaty been drafted after the World War. The karmic results of the failure of all the nations to live harmoniously with each other are only too clear. We, as citizens of these nations, are all somewhat to blame. If our individual lives are not unselfish and harmonious, we cannot expect our national actions to be any different. If we Theosophists had worked harder before the world war to create a current of unselfish thoughts and actions perhaps the results might have been different today.

I think the gist of this discussion may be condensed into the simple quotation learned in my childhood: "Helping and sharing is what Brotherhood means." Everything in nature has one hand fastened to the kingdom below and the other touching the hand of the kingdom above. We can only progress by helping those below us, thereby making it possible for those above us to help us.

For those considering Universal Brotherhood from a practical viewpoint the following reasons are cited to show that this idea is not only ethically and philosophically correct, but full of common sense as well:

1. Because everything in nature is related and dependent on everything else; we cannot progress upward without helping those below. Consequently, by helping those below, we make it possible for those above to give us a helping hand.
2. We are responsible for our thoughts, words, and deeds. Therefore every selfish entry in the Karmic ledger only retards our progress, while every unselfish thought and act helps us to evolve, and consequently helps also, because we are all related and interdependent, the evolution of the universe.
3. The law of rebirth shows that selfishness, snobbishness, and isolation, whether done individually, in groups, or by a nation, are futile and illusory. Such actions cause similar reactions to be produced, and react against those who originated these acts. There is no racial group, or individual superiority, as spiritually we are all One, and souls incarnate into different racial bodies only for experience and progress.