

THE FOUR GOLDEN LINKS AND THEOSOPHICAL DUTY

All That Lives

So shalt thou be in full accord with all that lives; bear love to men as though they were thy brother-pupils, disciples of one Teacher, the sons of one sweet mother.

The Voice of the Silence, p. 54

H.P. Blavatsky

The Four Golden Links in *The Key to Theosophy*

ENQUIRER. How, then, should Theosophical principles be applied so that social co-operation may be promoted and true efforts for social amelioration be carried on?

THEOSOPHIST. Let me briefly remind you what these principles are — universal Unity and Causation; Human Solidarity; the Law of Karma; Re-incarnation. These are the four links of the golden chain which should bind humanity into one family, one universal Brotherhood.

ENQUIRER. How?

THEOSOPHIST. In the present state of society, especially in so-called civilized countries, we are continually brought face to face with the fact that large numbers of people are suffering from misery, poverty and disease. Their physical condition is wretched, and their mental and spiritual faculties are often almost dormant. On the other hand, many persons at the opposite end of the social scale are leading lives of careless indifference, material luxury, and selfish indulgence. Neither of these forms of existence is mere chance. Both are the effects of the conditions which surround those who are subject to them, and the neglect of social duty on the one side is most closely connected with the stunted and arrested development on the other. In sociology, as in all branches of true science, the law of universal causation holds good. But this causation necessarily implies, as its logical outcome, that human solidarity on which Theosophy so strongly insists. If the action of one reacts on the lives of all, and this is the true scientific idea, then it is only by all men becoming brothers and all women sisters, and by all practising in their daily lives true brotherhood and true sisterhood, that the real human solidarity, which lies at the root of the elevation of the race, can ever be attained. It is this action and interaction, this true brotherhood and sisterhood, in which each shall live for all and all for each, which is one of the fundamental Theosophical principles that every Theosophist should be bound, not only to teach, but to carry out in his or her individual life.

ENQUIRER. All this is very well as a general principle, but how would you apply it in a concrete way?

THEOSOPHIST. Look for a moment at what you would call the concrete facts of human society. Contrast the lives not only of the masses of the people, but of many of those who are called the middle and upper classes, with what they might be under healthier and nobler conditions, where justice, kindness, and love were paramount, instead of the selfishness, indifference, and brutality which now too often seem to reign supreme. All good and evil things in humanity have their roots in human character, and this character is, and has been, conditioned by the endless chain of cause and effect. But this conditioning applies to the future as well as to the present and the past. Selfishness, indifference, and brutality can never be the normal state of the race—to believe so would be to despair of humanity—and that no Theosophist can do. Progress can be attained, and only attained, by the development of the nobler qualities. Now, true evolution teaches us that by altering the surroundings of the organism we can alter and improve the organism; and in the strictest sense this is true with regard to man. Every Theosophist, therefore, is bound to do his utmost to help on, by all the means in his power, every wise and well-considered social effort which has for its object the amelioration of the condition of the poor. Such efforts should be made with a view to their ultimate social emancipation, or the development of the sense of duty in those who now so often neglect it in nearly every relation of life.

ENQUIRER. Agreed. But who is to decide whether social efforts are wise or unwise?

THEOSOPHIST. No one person and no society can lay down a hard-and-fast rule in this respect. Much must necessarily be left to the individual judgment. One general test may, however, be given. Will the proposed action tend to promote that true brotherhood which it is the aim of Theosophy to bring about? No real Theosophist will have much difficulty in applying such a test; once he is satisfied of this, his duty will lie in the direction of forming public opinion. And this can be attained only by inculcating those higher and nobler conceptions of public and private duties which lie at the root of all spiritual and material improvement. In every conceivable case he himself must be a centre of spiritual action, and from him and his own daily individual life must radiate those higher spiritual forces which alone can regenerate his fellow-men.

ENQUIRER. But why should he do this? Are not he and all, as you teach, conditioned by their Karma, and must not Karma necessarily work itself out on certain lines?

THEOSOPHIST. It is this very law of Karma which gives strength to all that I have said. The individual cannot separate himself from the race, nor the race from the individual. The law of Karma applies equally to all, although all are not equally developed. In helping on the development of others, the Theosophist believes that he is not only helping them to fulfil their Karma, but that he is also, in the strictest sense, fulfilling his own. It is the development of humanity, of which both he and they are integral parts, that he has always in view, and he knows that any failure on his part to respond to the highest within him retards not only himself but all, in their progressive march. By his actions, he can

make it either more difficult or more easy for humanity to attain the next higher plane of being.

ENQUIRER. How does this bear on the fourth of the principles you mentioned, viz., Re-incarnation?

THEOSOPHIST. The connection is most intimate. If our present lives depend upon the development of certain principles which are a growth from the germs left by a previous existence, the law holds good as regards the future. Once grasp the idea that universal causation is not merely present, but past, present and future, and every action on our present plane falls naturally and easily into its true place, and is seen in its true relation to ourselves and to others. Every mean and selfish action sends us backward and not forward, while every noble thought and every unselfish deed are steppingstones to the higher and more glorious planes of being. If this life were all, then in many respects it would indeed be poor and mean; but regarded as a preparation for the next sphere of existence, it may be used as the golden gate through which we may pass, not selfishly and alone, but in company with our fellows, to the palaces which lie beyond.

Interdependence

As mankind is essentially of one and the same essence, and that essence is one—infinite, uncreate, and eternal, whether we call it God or Nature—nothing, therefore, can affect one nation or one man without affecting all other nations and all other men.

The Key to Theosophy, p. 41

H.P. Blavatsky

It is an occult law, moreover, that no man can rise superior to his individual failings, without lifting, be it ever so little, the whole body of which he is an integral part. In the same way, no one can sin, nor suffer the effects of sin, alone. In reality, there is no such thing as “Separateness”.

The Key to Theosophy, p. 203

H.P. Blavatsky

The Theosophical “missionaries” aim also at a social revolution. But it is a wholly ethical revolution. It will come about when the disinherited masses understand that happiness is in their own hands, that wealth brings nothing but worries, that he is happy who works for others, for those others work for him, and when the rich realize that their felicity depends upon that of their brothers—whatever their race or religion—then only will the world see the dawn of happiness.

Misconceptions (Reply to the Article “Révolution”)

H.P. Blavatsky

Our Appointed Work

The Selfish devotee lives to no purpose. The man who does not go through his appointed work in life—has lived in vain. Follow the wheel of life; follow the wheel of duty to race and kin, to friend and foe, and close thy mind to pleasures as to pain. Exhaust the law of Karmic retribution. Gain Siddhis for thy future birth.

The Voice of the Silence, p. 38–39

H.P. Blavatsky

More Room For Others

Step out from sunlight into shade, to make more room for others. The tears that water the parched soil of pain and sorrow, bring forth the blossoms and the fruits of Karmic retribution. Out of the furnace of man's life and its black smoke, winged flames arise, flames purified, that soaring onward, 'neath the Karmic eye, weave in the end the fabric glorified of the three vestures of the Path.

The Voice of the Silence, p. 34–35

H.P. Blavatsky

The Quintessence of Duty

Duty is that which is due to Humanity, to our fellow-men, neighbours, family, and especially that which we owe to all those who are poorer and more helpless than we are ourselves. This is a debt which, if left unpaid during life, leaves us spiritually insolvent and moral bankrupts in our next incarnation. Theosophy is the quintessence of duty.

The Key To Theosophy, p. 229

H.P. Blavatsky

Duty and Self-Sacrifice

ENQUIRER. Then you regard self-sacrifice as a duty?

THEOSOPHIST. We do; and explain it by showing that altruism is an integral part of self-development. But we have to discriminate. A man has no right to starve himself *to death* that another man may have food, unless the life of that man is obviously more useful to the many than is his own life. But it is his duty to sacrifice his own comfort, and to work for others if they are unable to work for themselves. It is his duty to give all that which is wholly his own and can benefit no one but himself if he selfishly keeps it from others. Theosophy teaches self-abnegation, but does not teach rash and useless self-sacrifice, nor does it justify fanaticism.

ENQUIRER. But how are we to reach such an elevated status?

THEOSOPHIST. By the enlightened application of our precepts to practice. By the use of our higher reason, spiritual intuition and moral sense, and by following the dictates of what we call “the still small voice” of our conscience, which is that of our EGO, and which speaks louder in us than the earthquakes and the thunders of Jehovah, wherein “the Lord is not.”

ENQUIRER. If such are our duties to humanity at large, what do you understand by our duties to our immediate surroundings?

THEOSOPHIST. Just the same, *plus* those that arise from special obligations with regard to family ties.

ENQUIRER. Then it is not true, as it is said, that no sooner does a man enter into the Theosophical Society than he begins to be gradually severed from his wife, children, and family duties?

THEOSOPHIST. It is a groundless calumny, like so many others. The first of the Theosophical duties is to do one's duty by *all* men, and especially by those to whom one's *specific* responsibilities are due, because one has either voluntarily undertaken them, such as marriage ties, or because one's destiny has allied one to them; I mean those we owe to parents or next of kin.

ENQUIRER. And what may be the duty of a Theosophist to himself?

THEOSOPHIST. To control and conquer, *through the Higher, the lower self*. To purify himself inwardly and morally; to fear no one, and nought, save the tribunal of his own conscience. Never to do a thing by halves; *i. e.*, if he thinks it the right thing to do, let him do it openly and boldly, and if wrong, never touch it at all. It is the duty of a Theosophist to lighten his burden by thinking of the wise aphorism of Epictetus, who says: “Be not diverted from your duty *by any idle reflection the silly world may make upon you*, for their censures are not in your power, and consequently should not be any part of your concern.”

ENQUIRER. But suppose a member of your Society should plead inability to practise altruism by other people, on the ground that “charity begins at home”; urging that he is too busy, or too poor, to benefit mankind or even any of its units -- what are your rules in such a case?

THEOSOPHIST. No man has a right to say that he can do nothing for others, on any pretext whatever. “By doing the proper duty in the proper place, a man may make the world his debtor,” says an English writer. A cup of cold water given in time to a thirsty wayfarer is a nobler duty and more worth, than a dozen of dinners given away, out of season, to men who can afford to pay for them. No man who has not got it in him will

ever become a *Theosophist*; but he may remain a member of our Society all the same. We have no rules by which we could force any man to become a practical Theosophist, if he does not desire to be one.

The Key to Theosophy p. 239-241

H.P. Blavatsky

Duty and Wisdom

He who seeks “the small old path” has many duties to perform. His duty to mankind, his family—nature—himself and his creator, but duty here means something very different from that which is conveyed by the time and lip-worn word, Duty. Our comprehension of the term is generally based upon society’s or man’s selfish interpretation. It is quite generally thought that duty means the performance of a series of acts which others think I ought to perform, whereas, it more truly means the performance of actions by me which I know are good for others, or the wisest at the moment. It would be quite dangerous for me to take upon myself the duty of another, either because he told me it was good, or that it was duty. It would be dangerous for him and me if I assumed that which he felt it was good to do, for that is his duty, and cannot be mine. That which is given him to do I cannot do for him. That which is given me to do no living thing can do for me. If I attempt to do another’s duty then I assume that which belongs not to me, was not given me. I am a thief, taking that which does not belong to me. My brother consenting thereto becomes an idler, fails to comprehend the lesson, shifts the responsibility, and between us we accomplish nothing.

Passage from “Am I My Brother’s Keeper”
Path, August 1887

William Q. Judge

Wisdom and Good Works

The Theosophist who desires to enter upon occultism takes some of Nature's privileges into his own hands, by that very wish, and soon discovers that experiences come to him with double-quick rapidity. His business is then to recognise that he is under a—to him—new and swifter law of development, and to snatch at the lessons that come to him.

But, in recognising this, he also makes another discovery. He sees that it takes a very wise man to do good works without danger of doing incalculable harm. A highly developed adept in life may grasp the nettle, and by his great intuitive powers, know whom to relieve from pain and whom to leave in the mire that is their best teacher. The poor and wretched themselves will tell anyone who is able to win their confidence what disastrous mistakes are made by those who come from a different class and endeavor to help them. Kindness and gentle treatment will sometimes bring out the worst qualities of a man or woman who has led a fairly presentable life when kept down by pain and

despair. May the Master of Mercy forgive us for saying such words of any human creatures, all of whom are a part of ourselves, according to the law of human brotherhood which no disowning of it can destroy. But the words are true. None of us know the darkness which lurks in the depths of our own natures until some strange and unfamiliar experience rouses the whole being into action. So with these others who seem more miserable than ourselves.

As soon as he begins to understand what a friend and teacher pain can be, the Theosophist stands appalled before the mysterious problem of human life, and though he may long to do good works, equally dreads to do them wrongly until he has himself acquired greater power and knowledge. The ignorant doing of good works may be vitally injurious, as all but those who are blind in their love of benevolence are compelled to acknowledge. In this sense the answer made as to lack of Christ-like lives among Theosophists, that there are probably none strong enough to live such, is perfectly correct and covers the whole question. For it is not the spirit of self-sacrifice, or of devotion, or of desire to help that is lacking, but the strength to acquire knowledge and power and intuition, so that the deeds done shall really be worthy of the "Buddha-Christ" spirit. Therefore it is that Theosophists cannot pose as a body of philanthropists, though secretly they may adventure on the path of good works. They profess to be a body of learners merely, pledged to help each other and all the rest of humanity, so far as in them lies, to a better understanding of the mystery of life, and to a better knowledge of the peace which lies beyond it.

But as it is an inexorable law, that the ground must be tilled if the harvest is to be reaped, so Theosophists are obliged to work in the world unceasingly, and very often in doing this to make serious mistakes, as do all workers who are not embodied Redeemers. Their efforts may not come under the title of good works, and they may be condemned as a school of idle talkers, yet they are an outcome and fruition of this particular moment of time, when the ideas which they hold are greeted by the crowd with interest; and therefore their work is good, as the lotus-flower is good when it opens in the midday sun.

None know more keenly and definitely than they that good works are necessary; only these cannot be rightly accomplished without knowledge. Schemes for Universal Brotherhood, and the redemption of mankind, might be given out plentifully by the great adepts of life, and would be mere dead-letter utterances while individuals remain ignorant, and unable to grasp the great meaning of their teachers. To Theosophists we say, let us carry out the rules given us for our society before we ask for any further schemes or laws. To the public and our critics we say, try to understand the value of good works before you demand them of others, or enter upon them rashly yourselves. Yet it is an absolute fact that without good works the spirit of brotherhood would die in the world; and this can never be. Therefore is the double activity of learning and doing most necessary; we have to do good, and we have to do it *rightly*, with knowledge.

It is well known that the first rule of the society is to carry out the object of forming the nucleus of a universal brotherhood. The practical working of this rule was explained by those who laid it down, to the following effect: –

HE WHO DOES NOT PRACTISE ALTRUISM; HE WHO IS NOT PREPARED TO SHARE HIS LAST MORSEL WITH A WEAKER OR POORER THAN HIMSELF; HE WHO NEGLECTS TO HELP HIS BROTHER MAN, OF WHATEVER RACE,

NATION, OR CREED, WHENEVER AND WHEREVER HE MEETS SUFFERING, AND WHO TURNS A DEAF EAR TO THE CRY OF HUMAN MISERY; HE WHO HEARS AN INNOCENT PERSON SLANDERED, WHETHER A BROTHER THEOSOPHIST OR NOT, AND DOES NOT UNDERTAKE HIS DEFENCE AS HE WOULD UNDERTAKE HIS OWN—IS NO THEOSOPHIST.

Passage from “‘Let Every Man Prove His Own Work,’ “
Lucifer, November, 1887

H.P. Blavatsky

Practical Exposition of Ethics

High scholarship and a knowledge of metaphysics are good things to have, but the mass of the people are neither scholars nor metaphysicians. If our doctrines are of any such use as to command the efforts of sages in helping on to their promulgation, then it must be that those sages - our Masters - desire the doctrines to be placed before as many of the mass as we can reach. This our Theosophical scholars and metaphysicians can do by a little effort. It is indeed a little difficult, because slightly disagreeable, for a member who is naturally metaphysical to come down to the ordinary level of human minds in general, but it can be done. And when one does do this, the reward is great from the evident relief and satisfaction of the enquirer.

It is pre-eminently our duty to be thus practical in exposition as often as possible. Intellectual study only of our Theosophy will not speedily better the world. It must, of course, have effect through immortal ideas once more set in motion, but while we are waiting for those ideas to bear fruit among men a revolution may break out and sweep us away. We should do as Buddha taught his disciples, preach, practise, promulgate, and illustrate our doctrines. He spoke to the meanest of men with effect, although having a deeper doctrine for greater and more learned minds. Let us, then, acquire the art of practical exposition of ethics based on our theories and enforced by the fact of Universal Brotherhood.

Selections from “What Our Society Needs Most”
Path, September, 1892

William Quan Judge

Seeking, Learning, Teaching

Our duty is to keep alive in man his spiritual intuitions. To oppose and counteract—after due investigation and proof of its irrational nature—bigotry in every form, religious, scientific, or social, and cant above all, whether as religious sectarianism or as belief in miracles or anything supernatural. What we have to do is to seek to obtain knowledge of all the laws of nature, and to diffuse it. To encourage the study of those laws least understood by modern people, the so-called Occult Sciences, based on the true

knowledge of nature, instead of, as at present, on superstitious beliefs based on blind faith and authority.

The Key To Theosophy, p. 48

H.P. Blavatsky

Golden Words

And now a last and parting word. My words may and will pass and be forgotten, but certain sentences from letters written by the Masters will never pass, because they are the embodiment of the highest practical Theosophy. I must translate them for you:

Let not the fruit of good Karma be your motive; for your Karma, good or bad, being one and the common property of all mankind, nothing good or bad can happen to you that is not shared by many others. Hence your motive, being selfish, can only generate a double effect, good and bad, and will either nullify your good action, or turn it to another man's profit.

There is no happiness for one who is ever thinking of Self and forgetting all other Selves.

The Universe groans under the weight of such action (Karma), and none other than self-sacrificial Karma relieves it.

How many of you have helped humanity to carry its smallest burden, that you should all regard yourselves as Theosophists. Oh, men of the West, who would play at being the Saviours of mankind before they even spare the life of a mosquito whose sting threatens them!, would you be partakers of Divine Wisdom or true Theosophists? Then do as the gods when incarnated do. Feel yourselves the vehicles of the whole humanity, mankind as part of yourselves, and act accordingly.

These are golden words; may you assimilate them! This is the hope of one who signs herself most sincerely the devoted sister and servant of every true follower of the Masters of Theosophy.

“Five Messages to the American Theosophists (Second Message)”

H.P. Blavatsky

Point Out the Way

Point out the “Way”—however dimly, and lost among the host—as does the evening star to those who tread their path in darkness.

The Voice of the Silence, p. 39

H.P. Blavatsky

Give Light and Comfort

Be, O Lanoo, like them. Give light and comfort to the toiling pilgrim, and seek out him who knows still less than thou; who in his wretched desolation sits starving for the bread of Wisdom and the bread which feeds the shadow, without a Teacher, hope or consolation, and—let him hear the Law.

The Voice of the Silence, p. 40

H.P. Blavatsky