

SRI RAM on TRUTH - WISDOM - KNOWLEDGE

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TRUTH–WISDOM–KNOWLEDGE

It is sometimes said, as a charge against Theosophists, that while they preach high ideals, they do little in practice to cure the basic ills of the world, “basic” meaning here the physical ills. Some of them do not even lay the stress on practical ideals, but are content with metaphysical truth. Still others do not care for the Truth as such, which Truth may be said to be the proper source for action, but lose themselves in fancies clothed with claims to verity. It is possible to make these charges in some cases and to some extent because of an element of truth in them. After all, we are all human. But the fact that we are human and weak, apt to misunderstand values and truth, like so many millions of our fellow human beings, including our critics, does not vitiate the whole basis of the movement, the concept that lies at its back, binding each aspect of human life with the others.

Truth in its purest and most abstract form – provided it is the truth and not a mere abstraction – the forms of action in which it ideally manifests itself, the exterior relations which such action brings about, all form a whole, of which no one element or part can in real life be stripped away from the others. To attempt such a separation is to let the petals fall apart, dry away and wither; the fragrant blossom will exist no more.

To cure the malady of the world with its increasing psychic and physical complications, we need to produce a change from within outwards, that is, from the motives of conduct and an understanding of their rightness to their outer physical effects. It is necessary, of course, to deal with these effects as they arise, to apply the alleviating balm, even if the cause is deep-seated in the system and calls for a different and somewhat gradual treatment. But any kind of a purely superficial change, brought about without that inner conviction and feeling of which it should be the natural expression, is sure to wither away like leaves not fed by sap and give rise to the same problem all over again.

While there may be in some pure souls an instinct of rightness which is self-sufficient, it needs in mankind as a whole to be fostered and supported by a philosophy which is unshakably based on facts which afford “an implicit insight into every first truth”. Truth at all levels and in all forms is a harmonious whole and gives rise to rightness or righteousness, which is goodness. Truth and goodness are both fundamental values which were recognized in Greek thought, along with beauty, as inseparable from each other. Right perception, right thought, right speech and right action are all parts of the Lord Buddha’s noble eightfold path, eightfold yet one. Wisdom and Will, when the will is that of the Spirit, flow together and form a natural union. It is only rarely that we find someone like Dr. Annie Besant who embodied in herself the wholeness of the Truth and illustrated it by action at all levels in every available form. But the truth must give rise, in every one who receives it, to *some* form of action which advances human happiness.

(April 1954)

When we use the word “Theosophy”, it has for many of us a certain fullness of meaning which only one who is sufficiently acquainted with the Wisdom can understand or appreciate. What is the difference between the Wisdom which is Theosophy and all other kinds of knowledge? There is a vital difference. Theosophy is first of all an apotheosis of reasonableness, which is as poles apart from every tendency to fly off at a tangent into realms of incoherent fancy. In Theosophy – or

Occultism – we are concerned with facts, with truth, with the meaning of life in general. If there is such a thing as Divine Reason, then Theosophy is our understanding of the universe in its aspect as reason. As there is no field of existence from which the Divine Wisdom can be excluded, we have, at all times and with respect to every question, to have an approach of pure reason which refuses to be deliberately illogical or self-contradictory, and never elects for ideas which are attractive because they are sensational.

While all this is so, and we take into account all data acquired by the senses and the mind, there is an aspect of Theosophy which transcends these means of perception. We may base ourselves on facts which can be observed and experienced, never move off the ground of reality, yet is there not something more, besides these “facts,” on whatever plane of phenomena, which constitutes the essence of the Wisdom? Theosophy is not only knowledge such as we can acquire by processes of the mind but includes a certain apprehension or realization which goes beyond the mind, which is not so much a mental product as an aspect of life, with the qualities that conduce to the charm and creativeness we find in expressions of life.

Knowledge is of separate things and of the relations between things. But in Wisdom there is something more than knowledge. To know the form of a thing, its behavior as seen from outside, and to know the relations between different things, all constitute but equipment of the mind, which can be used for good or for evil. But when we talk of the Divine Wisdom, surely it is something more, which includes knowledge of what is latent in life, its purpose, and the nature of that which is being manifested in the life-process.

Theosophy has been translated as the Divine Wisdom. If so, it must be a Wisdom which is both immanent, that is to say, present in all things, and transcendent. We use such words as immanent and transcendent very freely, but then we have to try to discover their deep meaning. Since the Wisdom is in all things, in the smallest as well as the biggest, in the totality as well as in the unit, if we can understand the unit, which is the single life, we shall be able to perceive there as [is?] in a drop the same Wisdom which is in the ocean.

The Divine Wisdom is in everything – in the atom, in the electron, in the tree, in the animal, in the human being, in all these as well as in the whole, in their two aspects of being and becoming. Everything in Nature, every species, every substance, every individuality, has a certain uniqueness, and in that uniqueness is the very being of the thing, which makes it that thing and not any other thing. But there is also, when we look at the expressions, the form, a becoming which shows itself in multiplication, change and evolution. What is meant by becoming? There is a certain thing which becomes different a little later, yet can be regarded as the same. Does not the word “becoming” imply that the thing which has altered its appearance, its character, the mode of its functioning, is somehow the same as the thing that existed previously? Are we the same as what we were when we were children, or different? We are obviously different; yet we think we are the same. Is it an illusion? If it be an illusion, what causes the illusion? There is a deep mystery concealed in the fact that a thing can be regarded as same yet different. It lies apparently in a certain principle, a thread of consciousness or life, in which is the continuity. That which can be the same yet different cannot be material though it has a material basis. It is related to the body of change, yet transcends the change. This is implied in the idea that the Spirit is ever free, ever transcendent, yet immanent.

If the Divine Wisdom, which must include both the aspects, be in essence spiritual or non-material, though understood by us only in relation to matter, it is not possible for us ever fully to comprehend it. We can only have a certain tiny fragment of it at any time. Therefore the Theosophist has ever to be humble, open to the Wisdom, to a deeper meaning than he has so far sensed or perceived in all the phenomena of life. It seems to me that an essential element in the attitude of a Theosophist is

this willingness to understand a little of the inward significance of the phenomena by which he is confronted.

In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Shri Krishna says; “Having pervaded this whole universe with a fragment of Myself, I remain.” That is to say, His nature is not exhausted by entering into the various forms of manifestation. That which is able to enter into things yet transcend them must necessarily be abstract. But what is abstract to us need not be unreal. It may be more real than the concrete things we are able to perceive and contact. The Spirit is that which fills the consciousness, whereas matter is only touched by the latter. A vital difference between what we call Matter and what we call Spirit lies in the fact that every element of matter merely brushes the consciousness, whereas when we experience the nature of the Spirit in any of its manifestations, it has the quality of filling and pervading the consciousness.

In the Theosophical Society we do not formulate the Wisdom, because we are essentially a body of seekers. All that we understand and realize is but a very small portion of what there is to know. If we formulate our Theosophy in some rigid form and declare that *this* is Theosophy, then of course we limit it to that formulation, to that imperfect expression. If Wisdom is identified with Life, it can never be static. To be wise we must have an attitude which is capable of being modified, that is, a condition of inward receptivity and sensitiveness. The truths of Theosophy are not fixed in such a way that they cannot be understood in a deeper and fuller sense. It is very, very important that in the Theosophical Society we should hold our knowledge, our realizations, our understanding, in that fluidic form. It should be open to such modification and expansion as is possible at our stage of evolution. Now, that does not mean that we cannot have any understanding at present. We have a certain understanding of what is life, what is man, his relationship to the universe, and all the other things we consider in Theosophy, which is definite enough. But that understanding should be such that we can improve on it continually. So, while we use our present understanding, build on its basis, and share it with other people, there should always be this inward attitude of being willing to weigh and learn even from ideas different from our own.

Theosophy has been defined in various ways. We can call it a synthesis of all available truth. It is science, philosophy and religion at the same time. But in this science we are particularly concerned with the meaning of things. We are not content merely to observe, study phenomena, but we want to find out what is the significance of the phenomena, pleasurable or painful, that arise in the course of our living. What is the whole purpose of the process in which we are caught? To know the nature of that purpose is in itself an essential part of the Wisdom. That means we have to know the real nature of things and not merely their outer form and appearance. That means we have to enter into the realm of life and consciousness. Is this not what makes Theosophy different from all other kinds of knowledge? We are trying to know more about what life means, its potentiality, its charm, the riches which it unfolds, and the different levels and states of consciousness which it is possible to awaken and bring into activity.

It is not mere information which is going to change us. If we had a hundred times as much information as we have at present, about all sorts of recondite things, about various Planetary and Solar Beings for instance, we would still be the same. We would understand about all that only what our petty superficial minds are able to grasp. The knowledge we need is really a knowledge of fundamentals. Of course everything in the universe has its use, and knowledge is power. But we are neither in a position to know about everything nor use the power as it should be used. More important than any amount of learning is the knowledge of ourselves — what we are, the purpose of existence, our relation to others, what is meant by freedom, and so forth. In the light of such

knowledge we shall find that all things around us – including the truths which form part of our Theosophy – become changed in their aspect and meaning.

We have in our books, *The Secret Doctrine* for instance, a certain outline of the whole cosmic process. It is a rounded outline, complete so far as it goes. All that is included in that outline stands together in a coherent form. It is this coherence, the harmony of parts, which is so very attractive in Theosophy. But the outline, let us remember, can only be a form, which is the vehicle of a certain life, and that life is identical with consciousness; it has a certain psychic and spiritual quality, which comes more and more into manifestation. Therefore a Theosophist is he who seeks to understand the nature of the life which is in himself and in others, which has a certain depth, a richness, a potentiality of which only a very, very small fragment has been brought out so far.

In order to gain this knowledge, which is knowledge from inside and not merely from outside, we need something more than the purely formal, observing, superficial mind. We may talk of a chain of globes, of various planes, of how the life-wave comes first to this globe and then to that, and so on. All these globes and planes are merely sites or theatres for the evolution of life. They provide the conditions by means of which that which is hidden is brought into light, that which was previously potential is made active and scintillating. Therefore the significance of it all can be understood only in the light of that which is being revealed through the whole process. Why all this turmoil, this bother? In order to answer this question, to know the meaning of this process, the cycles within cycles, we have to have some inkling, some intuitive knowledge of what it is which is being evolved. This can only be gained by each for himself.

It is not possible to explain to another the knowledge of that which is within the form, the nature of the life therein, the quality that belongs to it, just as we cannot explain to another what is beauty. You may point to a beautiful object, point out the elements of the picture, explain the parts, but an understanding of the elements and parts will not give the experience of beauty. It is possible to perceive the lines, the colors, the points, take note of everything, yet completely miss the beauty which lies in the whole. The experience of beauty has to come to each by himself. It can be communicated perhaps, but not in words. It seems possible to communicate it directly through a sympathetic feeling or vibration. It may be that all such “feelings” and appreciations which are individual yet intangible, implied in our sympathy, love and understanding, are capable of transmission only in that way.

We should be able to feel the beauty of what we are trying to understand. If we are unable to perceive the beauty of it, the reason, the logic, the harmony of it, we have not truly understood Theosophy, we know it but superficially. A knowledge of mere phenomena, whether they are physical phenomena, astral phenomena or any other phenomena, will not bring lasting satisfaction. For a time such knowledge may satisfy, may even be found exciting, but the inspiration will cease quickly.

But there is a source of inspiration in each one of us, which can never fail; each one has to find it for himself. Each person has to understand the nature of the Wisdom which is Theosophy, the essence of it, the true pure quality of it, for himself. Only when there is this understanding does a person have some knowledge of Theosophy. Otherwise one may be learned in all the details of the things that take place, yet not know what is Wisdom, that Divine Wisdom which as it were permeates everything that takes place, even as life permeates form, causing the form, if it be that type of living form, to blossom as the rose.

In the Theosophical Society there should be the atmosphere of this Wisdom, the fragrance that belongs to beautiful living. It is not enough to have knowledge of a purely mental sort. The Society should consist of persons whose life is becoming different, purer, more friendly, more beautiful in

every way. The whole object of the existence of the Society is to bring about a fundamental change — first in ourselves and, through ourselves, in the conditions which exist around us. The Society does not exist merely to gather together people who read what is in certain books, move largely amongst themselves, and give a kind of tepid allegiance to certain great ideals of conduct. We should be doing much more than all that. The Society stands for Theosophy which is a very wonderful Wisdom. How far is the Wisdom illustrated in our lives?

(Feb. 1955)

It is often the case that when a simple truth with a great depth of meaning is to be explored by the person himself to whom it is presented, he passes it by. But if he is invited to study something intricate and complex, a number of facts in a tabulated form, a series of equations or correspondences, he thinks he is learning something of value.

Yet it is often the simple truth which is more profound and has more to do with one's own living. There is a simplicity born out of richness and not out of the privation of meaning, and its beauty comes into being when what is presented is in a form which brings out its essential value. To understand a simple but profound truth is to understand its pervading quality, the life of which the form is the perfect expression, life and form being inseparable from each other.

It seems to me that in all our Theosophical studies we should attempt to reach the truth, which is ever simple and beautiful. Even in the field of the intellect it is the principle which is more important than the particular facts which illustrate it, if only because there can be endless such illustrations. It is a virtue, both of mind and heart, not to become lost in a mass of details, not to be overburdened or confused with particulars, whether they be of an ordinary or of a mystifying or occult nature.

In true Occultism, which calls for the living of a life based on fundamental truths, there has ever to be a sense of values, a discrimination between the ever-fleeting and the ever-being, the things of time and that which is timeless. In the language of *The Voice of the Silence*, head-learning is not the same as soul-wisdom, and masses of such learning cannot give rise to that divine condition to which one may be lifted even by a drop of that elixir which is true spiritual Wisdom, although learning is valuable when it is fused with Wisdom.

To study how things take place; the various natural processes which are distinguished by different phases to which we attach specific concepts involving space and time, cannot be bad in itself. But we must not allow that which is of the nature of a mere means or detail from the standpoint of essential purpose, to obscure that purpose or the unity in which that purpose inheres.

Theosophy is a study both of the complex means and the ends which are quite simple. It explains the form — which is the objective side of Nature and of man — and indicates the nature of the Life, along with the relations between them at different levels. He who identifies himself with the Life and understands it as it is at the various stages of its manifestation knows Theosophy in essence. Such knowledge is simple and integrated, even if expressed in a complexity of detail. The details then do not obscure or mar the picture.

(May 1956)

It is fairly obvious that before one can undertake to propagate the Wisdom, he must have found that Wisdom in some measure for himself, but that is not too frequently the case, because we do not

distinguish between Wisdom and knowledge. Knowledge is very different from Wisdom. It is possible for a man to be very learned, yet appallingly stupid in many ways. Often the more learned a person is, the more fixed he tends to be in his ideas and the more intolerant of others. He develops a spirit of argumentation, causing a friction which generates more heat than light. Wisdom is difficult to define because it belongs to a deeper, subtler and more comprehensive aspect of man than the mind which picks up facts, makes comparisons, puts them in a certain order, and makes use of them for its own purpose.

It is not enough for our purposes to have talents of various sorts. All talents are meant to be used wisely, but then the man must have wisdom in order to use them for whatever is the true good of all. It is so easy to sway a crowd by oratory, as Anthony did in speaking of Caesar. But then, should we treat our listeners as a crowd? Our aim should not be to conquer them by cleverness in argument or by the ability to destroy the theses of others, but we must enable them to see things as they are, in perfect freedom, and distinguish the truth from what is false. The help that we thus give will remain with them and endure. If our lectures have merely the effect of stimulating or stunning the listener, after a while the effect will wear away and he will be exactly where he was before.

There is the whole question of what is meant by help, and how to help those whom we meet. It deserves serious consideration. Perhaps when we talk of helping and being useful, we are merely repeating set ideas and talking conventionally, with a view only to the immediate effects. To force upon a person a truth for which he is not prepared, especially in a form which evokes from him reactions which confuse and bewilder him and do not clarify his sight, is no help at all. At the same time one must not allow oneself to be dissuaded by specious pleas from the course which one feels to be right, even though it may disturb the set attitudes of people. So, one has to steer one's course rightly, which is a balance between opposites. This balance comes into existence by itself in a state of mind which is not swayed by one kind of reaction or another.

In *The Voice of the Silence*, H.P.B. makes a clear distinction between what is called the doctrine of the heart, or soul-wisdom, and the doctrine of the eye, or head-learning. The doctrine of the eye is superficial. In the old days, head-learning was considered an even greater impediment than sheer outright ignorance. We must not mistake mere information, which can be amassed, for real wisdom, which in practice is more a way or a direction of action than anything else, but implying an appreciation of things from the standpoint of their lasting values and a capacity to comprehend diverse elements in a balanced synthesis.

As Wisdom is always beautiful with the beauty of the soul which has in it immeasurable depths, one might think of it as Wisdom deep-dyed in beauty. This deep dye or color can only come from the depths of one's soul-nature. It is there that the experiences of life are converted into wisdom. We are familiar with the idea that when a person sheds his physical body he carries all the memories of his life into the after-death condition, and gradually as he passes through various planes these memories are sifted and shed, and finally he carries with him only that which can be assimilated to his soul-nature. This assimilation takes place in the state which is called *Devachan* or *Svarga*. It is there that what might be termed the spiritual essence of one's earthly experience becomes part of the nature of the divine Ego or soul.

(Aug. 1959)

In a letter to *The Canadian Theosophist* of May-June 1964, containing various statements concerning the Society and the kind of Theosophy which "aging officials" with a "pinhead mentality" propagate instead of the genuine article – statements breathing such a spirit of aggressive

intolerance and opinionatedness that it seems best to pass them over rather than take any serious notice of them – the correspondent says, with unqualified assurance, that “even Buddha headed his eightfold path with ‘right doctrine’ as the most important of all. Love, Purity and other attributes are well down the list.”

This is an extraordinary statement to make. The Pali word *Ditthi* (or *Drishti* in Samskrit) can by no stretch be translated as “doctrine”. It means literally “seeing”, and can be interpreted as vision, insight, view or even belief, although belief can here mean only what one believes because of his inclinations or one's instinctive understanding. Doctrine is a formulation, the product of a mental process which is conditioned by various factors, whereas right perception implies direct seeing from which right speech, right action, etc., naturally follow.

Love and Purity are not specifically mentioned in the eight-fold path, although these are implied, as without them there can be no right seeing. Doctrine has its place, but it is secondary to the living of the life. In *The Secret Doctrine* H.P.B. quotes one of the Mahātmās as saying: “Live the life. Wisdom will come to you naturally.” The Buddha particularly eschewed metaphysics and speculation as much as He eschewed dogmatism. A spirit of dogmatism, even in stating a truth, vitiates the understanding of that truth.

(Sept. 1964)