

H.P. BLAVATSKY (*Ed.*)

Footnotes on

THE ESSENTIALS OF RELIGION

(An answer by Babu Raj Narain Bose)

[*The Theosophist*, Vol. IV, No. 11(47), August, 1883, pp. 274-275.]

I have read your able, wise and discriminating remarks on my article in the *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, the “Essential Religion,” in the June Number of *The Theosophist* with the greatest attention. The great liberality of tone which marks those strictures does you much credit. I am sorry, however, that I cannot agree with you in all the opinions broached in your article. You have expressed yourself, in the same, as hostile to religious proselytization and conversion. Every man, who has a regard for the sanctity of truth must feed it his *duty* to propagate that which he considers to be true.*

* And since few of us have identical beliefs, and every religionist of whatever faith is firmly impressed with the truth and superiority of his own creed, with no regard whatsoever for the truths possibly contained in that of his brother,—the result is, that sectarianism is kept ever alive, with no chance in it for mutual toleration—least of all, feelings of Brotherhood. There are many atheists in our Society, as deeply impressed with the correctness of their negations as our esteemed correspondent is with that of his affirmations. Would our atheists be welcome, or likely to be listened to, in the Brahmo Mandirs? Then why claim for one what is refused to the other? There never was a time yet, when a Brahmo preacher could not have had the chance to discourse before the Theosophical Society, upon Theism, nor ever one when the like courtesy has been given to Col. Olcott, or any other Theosophist speaker. For years, we lived near the Prarthana Samaj in Bombay, but its platform was ever closed for, and refused to us, even when asked for.—*Ed.*

This holds good in religion as in all other branches of knowledge. It would show disregard for truth and would be a dereliction of duty if we do not propagate what we consider to be true and confine it to ourselves. You are of opinion that religion does not require to be propagated, it is a mere matter of emotion and human weal or woe does not depend upon it. Granting that it is a mere matter of emotion, does not emotion influence human conduct and thereby human weals or woes? Religion should therefore be propagated, but the propagation should be made by means of argument and gentle persuasion, not using the least compulsion. Do not you, Theosophists, propagate your opinions which are of a semi-religious character and try to convert others to your views? Do you not “impose your own personal views,” to use your own words, upon people who do not believe occultism to be true and who disbelieve in the existence of spirit and a future world?*

* We can assure our correspondent that we do nothing of the kind. When challenged to give out our views, we do so, adding every time that they are our own *personal* views; and as such—since we do not believe ourselves infallible—are not to be taken as final truths. Instead of preaching our own religion, we implore everyone to first study his own and remain in it, whatever it is. Besides which, theosophy is compatible with every religion, the world over. There were thaumaturgists in every creed, and mysticism has as much room in idolatrous as in monotheistic systems. Theosophy is the culmination and the practical demonstration of the *truths* underlying every creed. It requires but sincerity and a firm will in the application to the Essentials of any of them—whether they be Theism or Adwaitism or even Atheism. Theosophy

is simply the informing life of creed and of every religion and goes to prove their *raison d'être*, instead of their negation.—*Ed.*

The opinion that God is impersonal is, I understand, your personal opinion and not that of the general body of Theosophists Do you not try to impose this personal conviction of yours on others although it has little connection with Theosophy, or else why do you return to the subject again and again in the columns of *The Theosophist*?†

† Denial of a *personal* god is no personal belief of ours, but that of all our Buddhist, Adwaitee, Jain and Freethinking members. We defend our position and welcome all others to do the same.—*Ed.*

Propagandism and conversion you cannot avoid, but it must no doubt be made by gentle means. You say that religious propagandism carried in any way leads to bloody wars and fiery persecutions, but do not differences of opinion in matters of politics and science also lead sometimes to fiery persecution ? There is need of tolerance in politics and science as in religion. Among persecutions in the province of science may be mentioned that of Homeopaths by Allopaths. What I meant to say in my article on “Essential Religion” is that we should be tolerant of all forms of religious faith, but at the same time propagate our own individual views by means of argument and gentle persuasion. This certainly will not lead to bloody wars and fiery persecutions. If, after trying to convert others by such means, we fail, we should not be sorry. The Sanskrit proverb is “if a man exerts and does not succeed, where is the blame?”

You say in one place in your article: “With the exception of those above-mentioned cases of the universally recognized code of morality, the furtherance or neglect of which has a direct bearing upon human weal or woe, we have no right to be influencing our neighbors’ opinions upon purely transcendental and unprovable questions, the speculations of our emotional nature.” Is religion a mere matter of emotion ? You believe in the existence of an Eternal and All-pervading Principle, and you certainly consider its existence as a scientific truth. But science extends a little further. It includes the knowledge of that Principle as a Spirit, or in other words an Intelligent Being, and not only that but as a Perfect Spirit. I refer the reader to my views on this subject in my little treatise *The Science of Religion*. I can adduce the same sort of proof for the existence of a Perfect Spirit as you can do for that of an Eternal Principle.*

* A “Perfect Spirit” is an abstraction, a *non-being*, and can have no *gunas* or attributes which alone make up the entity. Science has no “knowledge,” we beg leave to state, of an “intelligent Being,” a “Spirit”—not modern science at any rate. And the science of metaphysics rejects entirely the possibility of the Infinite having any conscious relation whatsoever with the finite. Moreover “Perfect Spirit” and “Eternal Principle” are synonyms and identical, and if both our esteemed correspondent and we are adducing proofs—one for the *Existence* (implying consciousness) and the other—for the *Presence* (implying unconsciousness or *absolute* consciousness, which is the same thing) it becomes a question between us to be decided by other and unbiased persons as to which of us is right and which wrong.—*Ed.*

You are of opinion that religion does not influence the moral conduct of mankind. A few individual atheistic philosophers, such as Hume and Huxley, may not require belief in a God and future state to influence their moral conduct, but the mass of mankind does. Consider, for instance, the frightful mischief done to Society by the prevalence of Atheism at the time of the French Revolution, and which

will no doubt be done by such prevalence among Nihilists, Socialists, *et hoc genus omne*, in future, if those revolutionary classes ever gain predominance.*

* It will be a sufficient answer to draw our friend's attention to the revelation contained in the statistical tables given in the article "Suggestive Comparisons" in *The Theosophist* for June, 1883, page 217. They show that so far from an "irreligious belief," i.e., free-thinking Agnosticism or Atheism being provocative of crime, the criminal offenses chargeable to this class were immeasurably less than those of the rough-going Orthodox Christians and Theists. It appears that of crimes to the 100,000 of population, 2,500 were of Catholics, 1,400 of Church of England members, 150 of Dissenters, and 5 of Infidels. *And*, to bring the thing nearer home, the recent census of Bombay shows that while among 408,680 Hindus, *idolaters* and *pantheists*, there were 18,950 criminals; there were 2,343 crimes committed among the 34,724 Christians and theists *or 6.74 per cent of the whole criminal offenses*—a much greater percentage than is shown by the class of pantheists and idolaters.—*Ed.*

You maintain that the doctrine of *Karma* has a greater influence on human conduct than the doctrine of propitiation of God by repentance, but is the effect of *Karma* eternal? You certainly would not say so. You see then both of us agree in the opinion that punishment does not last for ever. What objection then can there be to believing that repentance is expiation for sin?† Granting for the sake of argument that God does not exist and depending only on nature, we see that when pain is short-lived in the universe, some provision must have been made by beneficent nature for the expiation of sin and the placing of man in a position in the future state leading to spiritual improvement and progress. I do not believe in the usual cant of the day of nature, "red with tooth and claw." Even if there were no God, there is clearly discernible a beneficent purpose running through the whole system of nature.**

† None whatever. But where is the necessity?—*Ed.*

** A pleasant expression, but highly optimistic. It is equivalent to affirming that although the moral law in nature may be offended, yet punishment is not logically inevitable. Penitence may take the place of expiation, and prayer restore the equilibrium of nature. The repentant culprit may go scotfree, but the victim or victims of his crime suffer its consequence without recompense!—*Ed.*

I believe in the strong power of will, mesmerism and yoga powers as testified to by such authenticated cases as Runjeet Sing's Yogi and the Sunderban Yogi, and am an advocate of the cultivation of ancient Sanskrit learning. I am not therefore unfriendly to Theosophy, but I have a word of humble advice to offer to the disinterested leaders of the Theosophical movement, for whom I entertain every feeling of respect. The more they keep Theosophy and Theology distinct from each other, and the less they mix up their personal opinions on the subject of religion with their legitimate province, Theosophy, the better. I think it would be better for the cause of Theosophy if they do not discourse of their "godless Buddhism," as they love to call it, before a nation so pre-eminently religious as the Hindus a nation of devoted lovers of *Bhagavan* or God, Adwaitism so often appealed to by yourself in questions of Theology being but Philosophy and not religion. There is a difference between philosophy and religion. Such discussion augurs ill for the ultimate success of Theosophy in this country. I am at a loss to understand why the leaders of the Theosophical movement preach Agnosticism and express deep sympathy with Atheism, and, in the same breath, deprecate the prevalence of atheism, scepticism and materialism in this country. This appears quite mysterious to my humble self. I am perfectly disposed to tolerate Atheism, that is, abstain from persecuting Atheists in any shape whatever, since every man has a right to his own opinions, but there is a difference between toleration of Atheism and deep sympathy with it.

DEOGARH, E. I. Ry., 14th June 1883.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—

Buddhism and Adwaitism—are as much religions as any theistic system. A “religion” does not necessarily imply the doctrine of a personal God or any kind of God in it. Religion, as every dictionary can show, comes from the Latin word *relegere*, to “bind” or collect together. Thus whether people pursue a common idea with, or without, a deity in it, if they are bound together by the same and one belief in something, that belief is a *religion*. Theology without the vital warmth of Theosophy is a corpse without life, a dry stick without sap. Theosophy blesses the world; Theology is its curse. Our whole endeavor is to test Theology by the theosophical *experimentum crucis*. The affliction of India is, that it lost theosophy when the persecuted adepts had to fly beyond the mountains. And true religious living can never be again prevalent until their help is invoked to illumine the *Shastras*. Our Brother has had many years' experience of the hopelessness of converting India to even the benign form of theism which his *Adi Brahma Samaj* teaches. The saintly characters of Ram Mohun Roy, Debendra Nath Tagore, and a few others of his colleagues, have not won the Hindus from their exoteric worship—we think, because neither of them has had the Yogi power to prove *practically* the fact of there being a spiritual side to nature. If we hold so strongly to esoteric Buddhism and Adwaitism, it is exactly because no religion can stand, save on the foundation of philosophy and science. No religion can prove by *practical*, scientific demonstration that there is such a thing as one *personal* God; while the esoteric philosophy, or rather *theosophy* of Gautama Buddha and Sankaracharya *prove* and give means to every man to ascertain the undeniable presence of a living God in man himself,— whether one believes in or calls his divine indweller Avalokiteswara, Buddha, Brahma, Krishna, Jehovah, Bhagawan, Ahura-mazda, Christ, or by whatever name—there is no such God outside of himself. The former —the one ideal outsider— *can never be demonstrated*—the latter, under whatever appellation, may always be found present if a man does not extinguish within himself the capacity to perceive this Divine presence, and hear the “voice” of that only manifested deity, the murmurings of the Eternal *Vach*, called by the Northern and Chinese Buddhist Avalokiteswara and Kwan-Shai-yin, and by the Christians—*Logos*.