

THERE IS NO RELIGION HIGHER THAN TRUTH

As many of you know this title is the motto of the Theosophical Society and we are going to look into the subject of religion in its true sense. Well let's begin by defining religion.

In her article "Is Theosophy a Religion." HPB states:

It is perhaps necessary, first of all, to say, that the assertion that "Theosophy is not a Religion," by no means excludes the fact that "Theosophy is Religion" itself. A Religion in the true and only correct sense is a bond uniting men together,-not a particular set of dogmas and beliefs. Now Religion, per se, in its widest meaning is that which binds not only all MEN, but also all BEINGS and all things in the entire Universe into one grand whole. This is our theosophical definition of religion.

Of course not many of the followers of the world's great religions have any real understanding of this and so build walls instead of bridges and argue over trifling matters and are willing to cause untold suffering to others in the name of these great beings who tried to teach us love and tolerance. Looking at it in the true light, it seems inconceivable that the teachings of a highly evolved Spiritual teacher can be twisted by the human mind into their complete opposite-but sadly that is what happens.

In the Mahatma Letters to AP Sinnett, KH has some very direct things to say about God and religion. KH certainly doesn't mince his words in this. It may seem rather harsh in some ways, but given the way things have gone regarding the exoteric or dogmatic religions, it gives us food for thought. This is a small extract from letter 10 - if you get the chance try to read the whole letter - it's readily available on line nowadays - he says that:

We deny God both as philosophers and as Buddhists. We know there are planetary and other spiritual lives, and we know there is in our system no such thing as God, either personal or impersonal. Parabrahm is not a God, but absolute immutable law, and Iswar is the effect of Avidya and Maya, ignorance based upon the great delusion. The word "God" was invented to designate the unknown cause of those effects which man has either admired or dreaded without understanding them, and since we claim and that we are able to prove what we claim, i.e. the knowledge of that cause and causes, we are in a position to maintain there is no God or Gods behind them.

So here he is not denying the fact that there is a Divine Presence that can be experienced and felt within and around us, but he is saying that the concept of God in

the Victorian era was mistaken. Theosophy teaches that there is a hierarchy of Spiritual beings that helped to shape humanity into what it is today on all levels and also will help us to become what we are in essence - we can understand that when KH says that there are no God or Gods, he refers to the exoteric or anthropomorphic ideas of God

Later on he adds :

And now, after making due allowance for evils that are natural and cannot be avoided, — and so few are they that I challenge the whole host of Western metaphysicians to call them evils or to trace them directly to an independent cause — I will point out the greatest, the chief cause of nearly two thirds of the evils that pursue humanity ever since that cause became a power. It is religion under whatever form and in whatsoever nation. It is the sacerdotal caste, the priesthood and the churches; it is in those illusions that man looks upon as sacred, that he has to search out the source of that multitude of evils which is the great curse of humanity and that almost overwhelms mankind. Ignorance created Gods and cunning took advantage of the opportunity. Look at India and look at Christendom and Islam, at Judaism and Fetichism. It is priestly imposture that rendered these Gods so terrible to man; it is religion that makes of him the selfish bigot, the fanatic that hates all mankind out of his own sect without rendering him any better or more moral for it. It is belief in God and Gods that makes two-thirds of humanity the slaves of a handful of those who deceive them under the false pretence of saving them

Those are very direct and potent words. However, if we look at them carefully, we can see that what he says is very true. Most of the wars we have had over the centuries have arisen as a result of orthodox religion, and religion has caused so much suffering and turned nation against nation over the centuries. This kind of religion is man-made - it has little to do with the original impulse given out by the Spiritual Beings that initiated it. These beings, whether Gautama Buddha, Krishna, Jesus or Mohammed, had given us some insight into our Spiritual Nature. They wanted to help us to awaken our benumbed souls to an appreciation of what we truly are as Spiritual Beings on a human journey and to help us to see that we all share the same Divinity and therefore to overcome the great dire heresy of separateness that weans us from the rest (Voice of the Silence).

As HPB wrote earlier true religion should be a bond that unites, not separates as it does now. Christianity is split into countless sects, most disagreeing with certain ideas or teachings of other sects - Islam has warring sects - and that is just within their own religion - towards other religions they are often inimical or even, if tolerant, still believe their religion to be superior. Only the mystics who are able to soar above

the illusions of this world have seen that there is only one reality behind all of this, but even they when returning to their lower mind intellects have couched their experiences in the language of their own religion. HPB says of the Theosophical Society:

It is a brotherhood of humanity, established to make away with all and every dogmatic religion founded on dead-letter interpretation, and to teach people and every member to believe but in one impersonal God; to rely upon his (man's) own powers; to consider himself his only saviour; to learn the infinitude of the occult psychological powers hidden within his own physical man; to develop these powers; and to give him the assurance of the immortality of his divine spirit and the survival of his soul; to make him regard every man of whatever race, color, or creed, and to prove to him that the only truths revealed to man by superior men (not a god) are contained in the Vedas of the ancient Aryas of India. Finally, to demonstrate to him that there never were, will be, nor are, any miracles; that there can be nothing 'supernatural' in this universe, and that on earth, at least, the only god is man himself.

This may seem to contradict in some ways what KH was saying as she talks about an impersonal God. But to repeat what I said earlier, what she and KH are saying is that there is no such thing as an external God as all is ONE in the final analysis. As she says the only god is man himself.

So what is this Truth that the mystically inclined have first-hand knowledge of? Can this Truth be defined? Can it ever be expressed in human language?

In the East two kinds of truth are mentioned - Samvritti satya and Paramartha satya. Samvritti is relative truth and in this world of maya or illusion that is what we have most of the time - with our limited intellects we can only absorb partial truths-so we see through a glass darkly almost all the time. When we have reached a certain level on our Spiritual journey we will begin to discern deeper truths that render all that we have learned up until then meaningless - most of the great Spiritual teachings will tell us that to really move onwards Spiritually we have to forget all that we know - meaning all that we have intellectually gathered up until then - for to move onwards we have to transcend the limitations of our brain mind notions, to enter realms that can never be fathomed by the mind so long as it remains a mind that is not illuminated by the Spiritual side of our nature. Spiritual truths cannot be understood intellectually. We have to develop our intuitional nature to move on to the next level of understanding.

It's like the dawning of a new day for us - slowly but surely the mists will clear and

we will begin to feel ourselves as immortal beings, the illusions of temporality will begin to fade and we will find ourselves in a place that does not change, or to put it more clearly, we will have discovered who we really are behind the masks we wear and then there will be no more birth or death for us anymore but just an eternal existence..

Immortality is but one's unbroken consciousness. It is only the illusion that our consciousness IS ever broken that makes us believe that there is such a thing as death.

Rumi says:

“This place is a dream. Only a sleeper considers it real. Then death comes like dawn, and you wake up laughing at what you thought was your grief.”

— *Mevlana*
Rumi

The essential teaching then of all religions is that we must take our sustenance from our inner selves via the source of all things.

In the Bhagavad Gita right at the end Krishna says to Arjuna that he is to reveal the truth, the mystery of mysteries, the deepest secret. And what is this:

“Dedicate thyself to me, worship me, sacrifice all for me, prostrate thyself before me, and to me thou shalt surely come”

This may sound at first like a rather exoteric statement regarding a personal god-so why should it be regarded as the deepest secret? Well the whole of the Bhagavad Gita has one underlying message and that is to surrender to the Divine, to be vowed to the Infinite to forego all else to realise our Spiritual nature which will always sustain us through all the trials of existence.

The Tao Te Ching has exactly the same message but expressed slightly differently - we are told that if we draw upon the Tao for sustenance, all else will fit into place - just in the same way as Jesus told us that if we seek the Kingdom of Heaven first, all else will be added unto us.

“When the great Tao was abandoned
There appeared humanity and. Justice.

When intelligence and wit arose

There appeared great hypocrites.

When the six relations lost their harmony,

There appeared filial piety and paternal kindness.

When darkness and disorder began to reign in a kingdom,

There appeared the loyal ministers.”

“In ancient China the rules of subservience developed from the Six Kinships of Confucius. Under its order of loyalties, the older is always master of the younger, man is master of woman, the lord is master of the subject, the father is master of the son, the husband is master of the wife, and the brother is master of the sister. “

Some of these ideas may seem rather archaic now and we will not agree with some of them, but it is how it was at the time of Confucius. Probably we can develop our own six relationships now based upon modern understanding.

This is really the template for how we have fallen away from a reliance upon the Spiritual nature. As Leo Tolstoy points out, if everyone had followed the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount as regards loving one's enemy and forgiveness etc then there would never have been a need for armies, police forces etc. and governments would have been much more compassionate, rather than obsessed by profit. In ancient times man lived in perfect harmony with his Higher Self, but gradually as we descended more and more into a materialistic frame of mind we lost the ability to do this naturally and so we began to rely more and more upon dogmatic thoughts and external organisations etc.

The Tao is like a well:

used but never used up.

It is like the eternal void:

filled with infinite possibilities.

It is hidden but always present.

I don't know who gave birth to it.

It is older than God.

It is older than the concept of a God which again arose from a falling away from direct experience of Divinity.

The Tao is said to blunt all sharp edges, untie all tangles, harmonise all lights and unite the world into one whole and seems to be the common ancestor of all, the father of all things. And of course the Tao that can be talked about is not the real Tao - the real Tao can never be expressed or explained in words.

If we wish to live a truly Spiritual life we need to learn the art of synthesis - to be

able to extract the essence of all that we study as the swan is said to be able to extract milk from water in the Indian legend. If we want to know the Truth we must first understand that words cannot encompass it. HPB says:

In our humble opinion, the only "Essentials" in the Religion of Humanity are--virtue, morality, brotherly love, and kind sympathy with every living creature, whether human or animal. This is the common platform that our Society offers to all to stand upon; the most fundamental differences between religions and sects sinking into insignificance before the mighty problem of reconciling humanity, of gathering all the various races into one family, and of bringing them all to a conviction of the utmost necessity in this world of sorrow to cultivate feelings of brotherly sympathy and tolerance, if not actually of love. Having taken for our motto--"In these Fundamentals--unity; in non-essentials--full liberty; in all things--charity," we say to all collectively and to every one individually--"keep to your forefather's religion, whatever it may be--if you feel attached to it, Brother; think with your own brains--if you have any; be by all means yourself--whatever you are, unless you are really a bad man. And remember above all, that a wolf in his own skin is immeasurably more honest than the same animal--under a sheep's clothing."

The Universal law is that of harmony, everything is harmonious, even that which seems disharmonious in a universal sense is only transformation symbolised by the God Shiva in hinduism. Karma is merely a law of adjustment. Many people mistakenly equate it with religion or some kind of punishment. It is just a scientific law that restores any break in the harmony of the universe- as said it is the Universe readjusting and restoring its harmonious state.

Once we grasp that we realise that the task we have before us is to assist always in this restoration of harmony. That is why we are told to love, because love in the true sense is harmony as is compassion. In a footnote in the "Voice of the Silence" HPB writes:

This "compassion" must not be regarded in the same light as "God, the divine love" of the Theists. Compassion stands here as an abstract, impersonal law whose nature, being absolute Harmony, is thrown into confusion by discord, suffering and sin.

Discord, suffering and sin also throw our natures into confusion at first until we begin to take out ourselves in hand and realise that in our own way we must assist in restoring the harmony at the centre of the Universe. This is what the spiritual path is about in reality. How we do it is very much up to us as individuals – the teachers just point the way – the whole adage 'man know thyself' refers to the fact that we must be aware of our own natures and how we can best proceed on the path by self induced

and self devised efforts. Every one of us has our own unique contribution to make to the Spiritual fund that is available to us. There is total freedom in what we do - whether for good or for bad. The thing is that the Universe will always restore any broken harmony and this restoration is what we describe as karma. Now we, especially in the west, have ingrained in our collective consciousness the misleading teachings of the Christian church so that we misread karma as punishment, because we think of a vengeful God, even if not consciously. But the fact is that there is no idea of punishment in the Universal mind, just in the perversions of the human mind and we create our own punishments. How can harmony be restored by more disharmony –it's like trying to put out a fire by using more fire. Punishment, even as regards offenders in society, does no good whatsoever – rehabilitation is all that is needed and love and compassion. If you send someone who is motivated by anger, lustfulness or hatred thoughts of anger or hatred, then you are just fuelling that negativity. One of the greatest guides to living is the Buddhist scripture, the “Dhammapada” and in that it says that we should overcome hatred by love, the liar by truth and the greedy by liberality. Jesus told us to love our enemies and to forgive not 7 but 70X70 times. I use these teachings a lot in my talks as they are the crux of living a truly Spiritual life. If we live this life we will think and act in a way alien to the ordinary man or woman in the street and our reasoning on life will be based on totally different ideas. Most people are too busy or involved in activities to be bothered thinking deeply on life and their thoughts are mainly second hand from a largely materialistic society. Someone on the Spiritual path is trying more and more to live intuitively under the guidance of their Higher Self, they are trying to befriend that Higher Self and to revolutionise their world view. If we look at ourselves honestly we react to life in general in a very orthodox way, very little is as a result of our spiritual studies and meditations. We are all children of our age to varying degrees though hopefully many of us in the Society are trying to disengage ourselves from stereotypical views. HPB said that orthodox was not desirable or possible regarding Theosophy.

As said at the beginning, true religion is that which binds not only all men, women, beings but all living things throughout the universe. This is the process that we are trying to assist on the journey. That is the real living truth in nature. We are all ONE inwardly – we share the same life, the same Spirit and everything we do and think affects everything else.

Spiritual teachings from sources like the Ashtavakra gita and the Diamond sutra state that we cannot really comprehend Truth if we hold on to any concepts whatsoever. It is only when we transcend concepts that we can get a deeper appreciation of Truth, because it is way beyond and form of conception. We can get some understanding of

secondary things that go on in this universe like round and races, the constitution of man and the planes of being, karma and reincarnation – but of course these are events that take place in the realm of concepts. They come into being due to limited views – essential to our lives as unenlightened being but ceasing to exist for the illumined soul. It is said that for the Masters even the after death state of Devachan doesn't exist, as they have transcended the realms of illusion, and that is a higher state of being that we are in at the moment in general.

Once we are free from conceptualisation, we can see people and things as they really are without the veil of preconceptions. We tend to impose our own world view on to others and see them as we would like them to be, rather than how they actually are in reality.

In “Practical Occultism” HPB gives hints as to how we should proceed on the path:

.” Meditation, abstinence in all, the observation of moral duties, gentle thoughts, good deeds and kind words, as good will to all and entire oblivion of Self, are the most efficacious means of obtaining knowledge and preparing for the reception of higher wisdom. “

Of course we must adapt these things to our own particular journey and not make the mistake of creating a new level of dogmatism. We need to approach these teachings in an intelligent way and to try to understand how such practices can lead us to a deeper appreciation of TRUTH though there is no fixed definition of truth nor any guarantee that what we might think of as a final truth is just another doorway to yet another set of relative truths. What we are trying to become is truly human, to develop the qualities in us that make us human. We should strive always to see the best in everyone and as the Dhammapada tells us to work on correcting our own faults and to overlook the faults of others. The essential thing is to see ourselves in others and to try to do unto others as we would want them to do to us.

It is very much a do-it-yourself job – we can take in advice from various sources, but we tread the path using our own self-devised efforts. The Japanese Haiku poet Santoka Teneda said that “my pilgrimage is into the depths of the human heart.” That is the way that we are all following in reality. Religions tend to externalise the journey whereas in reality it is a totally internal transformation. What prevent us from understanding the true meaning of Religion are our conditioned thoughts. More and more in society we are learning to rely on externals – we put our trust in computers and other machinery. Society in general has a very narrow view of what it is to be human and indeed what constitutes a human being. In Theosophy we give a much wider view of what we are as humans than is the accepted norm. I remember a quote

that I use a lot from the master KH when he says that the true mystic is always a poet, which gave me great encouragement years ago. But of course he does not mean just writing down words, he means a feeling we have deep in our hearts that becomes in time the alchemy and the magic that will transform us into truly human beings.

None of us can really define Truth. With our limited appreciation of life and the confining views of our intellects we never see clearly.

As I said in my synopsis of the talk quoting Isis Unveiled

"Men and parties, sects and schools are but the mere ephemera of the Worlds Day. TRUTH, high seated upon its rock of adamant, is alone eternal and supreme"

If we can sweep our minds across the vast reaches of time, we begin to see that many religions have come and gone and there will be more. We think because we are in that small portion of time where Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism exist, that they are the be all and end all religion wise. But there may have been other religions that have lasted thousands of years that have arisen had their day and then faded from mortal memory. But if they were true religions they would have been based upon the same TRUTH as all others – the TRUTH that cannot be expressed in words or even in thoughts.

When HPB was asked in the Key to Theosophy what was expected for Theosophy for the future she replied:

+ of the Future, because Theosophy is synonymous with EVERLASTING TRUTH.

And in her article "What is Truth" she states

Concerning the deeper spiritual, and one may almost say religious, beliefs, no true Theosophist ought to degrade these by subjecting them to public discussion, but ought rather to treasure and hide them deep within the sanctuary of his innermost soul. Such beliefs and doctrines should never be rashly given out, as they risk unavoidable profanation by the rough handling of the indifferent and the critical. Nor ought they to be embodied in any publication except as hypotheses offered to the consideration of the thinking portion of the public. Theosophical truths, when they transcend a certain limit of speculation, had better remain concealed from public view, for the "evidence of things not seen" is no evidence save to him who sees, hears, and senses it. It is not to be dragged outside the 'Holy of Holies,' the temple of the impersonal divine Ego, or the indwelling SELF. For, while every fact outside its perception can, as we have shown, be, at best, only a relative truth, a ray from the absolute truth can reflect itself only in the pure mirror of its own flame--our highest SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS. And how can the darkness (of illusion) comprehend

the LIGHT that shineth in it?

We can only point people towards that truth which needs to be experienced; if it is not experienced then we must expect to meet with criticism from those who only speculate on the subject and will only find their minds lost in a labyrinth of words and images.

No one can ever really know or understand until they experience. This has been the failure of many of the religions of the world. They set up rules for life based upon the dead letter, devoid of the love and compassion that the Universe pours into our hearts if only we open ourselves to the harmony that pervades it. The deepest truths as HPB says have to remain unspoken, but their activity in the finite world can be known through the manifestation of those qualities in day to day lives as pity, love, compassion, understanding.

No one who truly feels within themselves the promptings of the Divine could ever give themselves to acts of violence or hatred. These are only distortions of feelings created by the limited mind. If we could keep the mantra "Take heart, the race of man is divine" for our line of life meditation then we could begin the alchemy of the heart that purifies our vision of our fellow man and the world in general.

Theosophy teaches us that we are part of nature's unfolding and therefore should have a respect for nature as we are as much reliant on it as it is on us.

THE outward form of idolatry is but a veil, concealing the one Truth like the veil of the Saitic Goddess, Only that truth, being for the few, escapes the majority. To the pious profane, the veil recovers a celestial locality thickly peopled with divine beings, dwarfs and giants, good and wicked powers, all of whom are no better than human caricatures. Yet, while for the great majority the space behind the veil is really impenetrable--if it would but confess the real state of its mind--those, endowed with the "third eye" (the eye of Shiva), discern in the Cimmerian darkness and chaos a light in whose intense radiance all shape born of human conception disappears, leaving the all-informing divine PRESENCE, to be felt--not seen; *sensed*--never expressed.

To conclude and recap we must try to see that what we are attempting to do is to return to what we actually are, beyond all the illusions that we create through a misunderstanding of what we are. It is something natural, part of nature, whereas what we are led to believe is not natural in the final analysis. We should certainly strive to see ourselves and others as much more than mere automatons reacting and living our lives in a conditioned way. The Zen monk Bankei warned us against

swapping our Pure Unborn Buddha mind for false minds of anger, jealousy, greed, lust etc. If we ever feel ourselves being overcome by these emotions we should try to centre ourselves and focus on the real Eternal part of us, our Spiritual nature. I always say that it's a return to clarity, to sanity, awakening to Reality.

Sincerity is important and a vital power we all have. The Masters said that all they ask is that we TRY.

In the darkest moments there is always Hope which springs eternal in the human breast thankfully.

But we're all on different levels of the Journey and have our own trials and tribulations to contend with, so we should always have pity and mercy and pass the gentlest sentence on those who err. We cannot judge others lest we be judged ourselves, nor should we cast the first stone. The Truth is within us and yet as said many times in this talk it cannot be expressed in words or even thoughts - so we need to live the life requisite to realise this truth and experience it in the very depths of our Souls- a living Light to guide us on our way.