

The Attitude of the Enquirer

C. W. Leadbeater

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I have received many letters from those who are put in the position of lecturers and teachers of Theosophy, asking how best to meet the constant demands of enquirers for proof of the accuracy of the Theosophical teaching. Another common remark of the enquirer is: "You have a large literature: I am a busy man. Where am I to begin in all this? Give me the most important part first."

Instead of writing a number of private letters, I have thought it best to put an answer, once for all, in the pages of *The Adyar Bulletin*, to which later enquirers can be referred.

What should be the attitude of the enquirer towards the wonderful mass of new truth which is put before him in Theosophical teaching? It should be an intelligently receptive attitude—not one of carping criticism on the one hand, nor of blind belief on the other, but of endeavour to understand the different facts as they are presented to him, and to make them his own. In Theosophy we strongly deprecate the attitude of blind belief, for we say that it has been the cause of a vast amount of the evil of the world. On this point the teaching of the Eastern Masters is emphatic, for they regard superstition as one of the fetters which it is absolutely necessary that a man should cast off before he can hope to make any progress on the occult Path. They also regard doubt as a fetter, but they say that the only way to get rid of doubt is not by blind faith, but by the acquisition of knowledge. It would be quite useless for a man to exchange blind faith in orthodox Christianity for a similar blind faith in those who happened to be writing or speaking on Theosophy. To say: "Thus saith Madame Blavatsky or Mrs. Besant," is after all only a small advance on saying: "Thus saith S. Paul of S. John."

We who live in western countries have a bad heredity behind us in these matters, for the point of view of our forefathers has usually been either the blind faith of the unintelligent and biassed person, or the blank and rather militant incredulity of the materialist. We have been too much in the habit of thinking that what does not happen in Europe or America is not worth taking account of, and that nobody outside of ourselves knows anything at all. Many of us have grown up in the midst of the ridiculous theory that there was only one religion in the world, and that the vast majority of its inhabitants were 'heathens,' whom we had to 'save,' and that if we could not do that, they must be left to 'the uncovenanted mercies of God'. It seems incredible that civilised people could ever believe anything so silly, but what I state is actually the fact. When we think that we may have had among our recent ancestors people who were capable of *that*, we see at once that we are but ill-prepared for the reception of a rational creed.

Again, we have been unfortunate in that we had not even the whole of Christianity, for history shows us that what has been taught to us is only a dismembered fragment of the original form of that religion. Before the Gnostic doctors were cast out, Christianity had a system of philosophy fully equal to that of the other religions, but after their departure it was but a truncated faith. Still its ethics remained to it, and they will be found to be exactly the same as those of the other great world-faiths. In Theosophy we hold that it matters little what a man believes, but much what he does; whether he is kind and noble, just and gentle, pure and true.

It may be of interest to western readers to remember that on this subject the teaching of the Christian scripture is exactly the same as that of Theosophy. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew will be found a striking account, said to have been given by the Christ Himself, of what is commonly called the day of Judgment, when all men are to be brought before Him and their final destiny is to be decided according to the answer which they are able to give to His questions. Remember that, according to the theory, the Christ Himself is to be the judge on that occasion, and therefore He can make no mistake as to the procedure. What then are the questions upon the answers to which the future of these men is to depend? From what one hears of modern Christianity one would expect that the first question would be: ‘Do you believe in Me?’ and the second one: “Do you attend Church regularly?” The Christ, however, unaccountably forgets to ask either of these questions. He asks: “Did you feed the hungry, did you give drink to the thirsty, did you clothe the naked, did you visit those who were sick and in prison?” That is to say, “were you ordinarily kind and charitable in your relations to your fellow-men?”

And it is according to the answers to *those* questions that the destiny of the man is decided. So far as He, the Judge, has explained Himself, any heathen who had done these things would at once pass into eternal felicity, for He says no single word about belief at all. As regards all these virtues the teachings of all the religions are identical. The daily life of a really good Christian will be found to be identical with that of a really good Buddhist or a really good Hindu. One will call his religious exercises by the name of prayer, while the others call them meditation, but in the nature of them there is little difference. Each enjoins the practice of the same virtues; each reprobates the same vices.

We must clear our minds utterly of the extraordinary theory that a man’s religion is a question of importance. It depends entirely upon where the man happens to be born. You are, let us say, a Christian, and you cannot conceive it as possible that you could have been anything else; yet if you had been born in an Indian family, you would have belonged just as unquestioningly to the Hindu religion, or to the Buddhist if you had been born in Ceylon or Siam. Therefore we must entirely cast aside the curious prejudice that it is necessary for a man to hold some particular form of religion if he is to obtain final perfection.

On taking up the study of Theosophy it is necessary that we should adopt an entirely new attitude—that we should open the doors of the mind, and learn to treat religion as a matter of common-sense, exactly as we do science. On the one hand we must accept nothing which does not commend itself to us as reasonable, and on the other hand we must not expect proofs of a nature incongruous with the fact which we are considering. It is often impossible to give for psychological problems and theories a demonstration along mathematical lines, or a proof on the physical plane which a man can hold in his hand. The proof of any proposition must be congruous with the nature of the proposition, and consequently the final proof of some of the deepest Theosophical doctrines must lie in the experience of the evolved soul.

A common-sense attitude will enable us to determine whether we can know a certain thing positively, or whether it is necessary to take first what seems to be a reasonable working hypothesis, and then see how far future experience supports or weakens it. Much of the Theosophical teaching must remain as a hypothesis for each man until he is able to develop powers by which he can see for himself; but in the meantime he may easily acquire *practical* certainty with regard to it, by weighing it against all other hypotheses and seeing how perfectly it, and it alone, accounts for the observed phenomena of life. This is exactly the ground on which are held a large number of what are commonly called scientific facts.

It is a valuable exercise for the student to think carefully which of his beliefs in ordinary life are really founded upon direct personal knowledge. He believes, for example, that the earth rotates upon its axis; yet all the evidence of his daily life goes to prove exactly the contrary. The ground is stable beneath his feet, and he cannot in any way prove to himself that the sun, moon and stars do not really move above him, exactly as they appear to do. There *is* proof available of the rotation of the earth. There is the Foucault pendulum experiment and the experiment with the gyroscope. If a man has seen those experiments tried, he *knows* that the earth rotates; if he has not, he does not know it, but only believes it. He believes it on good evidence, but it is not the evidence of his senses. A reasonable hypothesis is necessary in order to induce a man to work, and here his imagination comes into play. He must be evolved enough to imagine a thing as possible, or he must be able to abstract his ideas and deduce from them a working principle, before he can be induced to make an effort towards proving a fact as true.

Theosophy presents to the student several working hypotheses which appeal to his reason, and at the same time it promises him success in demonstrating them to be true, if he will do certain things. It tells him that some men have already had success in this demonstration, that they have been able to develop in themselves certain powers which enable them to know that these things are true, and that therefore it is possible for him also to do this, though it does not conceal from him the difficulty of the undertaking.

Theosophy has a considerable literature, but it has no inspired Scriptures. We who write books on the various branches of the subject, put before our friends the results of our investigations, and we take every care that what we state shall be scrupulously accurate as far as our knowledge goes; but the model which we set before us when we write is not the sacred Scripture but the scientific manual. So far as the western world is concerned, the study of Theosophical subjects is comparatively a new one, although in the East many books have been written in which these matters are expounded; but these oriental books naturally do not approach them from the modern scientific point of view. Our plan in verifying the information originally given to us has been just what was adopted in the beginning of the sciences of chemistry or astronomy—a careful observation of all the phenomena within reach, their tabulation, and the endeavour to deduce from them the general laws which govern them.

We are then in the position of the early students of a new science, and although, thanks to the information we have received from eastern Teachers, we have already grasped the main outline of our science, our own investigations are constantly adding to our knowledge of its detail, and this fact often makes it necessary for us to modify statements made in the earlier days of the movement, and to amend imperfect or premature generalisations. The details will increase in number and accuracy as the number of those who can make the investigations increases, but the broad outlines of principles which have been given to us will always remain the same.

Our attitude to Theosophy should, I think, be thus characterised:

- (1) We must not exchange the blind belief in the authority of the Church for an equally blind faith in personal Theosophical teachers.
- (2) We must preserve an open mind and an intelligently receptive attitude.
- (3) We should accept as working hypotheses the truths which are given to us, and should set to work to prove them for ourselves.

- (4) We should realise that this teaching sets before us the scheme of the Logos for His universe, and that the condition of making progress in that universe is to learn the rules of that scheme, and set ourselves to work with them and not against them.
- (5) We should seek development or progress not for the sake of ourselves, but in order that the knowledge we may acquire may be used for the benefit of humanity, and that we may fit ourselves to be the servants of that humanity.
- (6) We must change absolutely our point of view towards life. When regarding the sorrow and suffering of the world, we must put aside the despairing attitude of the theologian for one of hopefulness, because the teachings fills us with the calm certainty that everything will at last be well.

THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE TRUTHS

Again, Theosophy lays before us a vast mass of new truths with regard to the constitution both of man and of the universe, and also with regard to their past and future. Though the outline is simple the detail is considerable. We have therefore to think in what order we shall consider these truths; what is their relative importance. It seems to me that they group themselves naturally into three great classes: first, the ethical teachings, and the reason for them; second, the explanation of the constitution of man and the planes on which he lives; third, the remainder of the teaching, the great mass of information about planetary chains and earlier races of mankind.

They come thus in order of importance because the knowledge of the ethical teaching and the reason for it is necessary for the daily life of man, because as he learns even a little of it he can instantly proceed to put it into practice. If, having learnt so much, something should occur to prevent him from learning more, he will still have gained a priceless possession—one which will affect the whole of his future life, not in this world only but in others also.

The second block of information, with regard to the constitution of man and the world in which he lives, is also of great importance to him, as showing him how to do many of the things which the first division of the teaching has commended to him, as showing him also how to be much more useful to his fellow-men than he could be without this knowledge.

The third block of teaching, though keenly interesting, is less directly practical. It has its value; it has a great value; for from the past we may in many cases predict the future, and from it we may learn many a lesson which will be of help to us in that future. At that same time one must admit that a man might be just as loyal a subject, just as good a citizen, and just as useful to his fellow-men if he had never heard about the planetary chains, whereas it is not true that he would be just as good in any of those capacities if he remained ignorant of the first and second of our great classes of truth.

First, the ethics and the reason for them. The ethical teaching of Theosophy is precisely the same as that of any and all of the great religions. There is therefore nothing new for us to learn here; the only difference is that Theosophy gives us a scientific reason for our ethics, which most religions do not. This consideration of the reason for ethical teaching involves a very large block of the Theosophical teaching, for the ultimate reason for all good action is that it may be in harmony with the divine plan, the will of the Logos. That we may understand what will be in harmony with it, we must first try to grasp as much as is possible for us of that divine plan itself. This involves the consideration of the nature of God and the method of His working, and also His relation to man. Under this head we must speak of the Logos of our solar system, and the beginnings of that system, of the atom and planes, of the nature, of the formation, constitution and development of man, and of the methods appointed for

that development, and the way in which he can hasten it, and of the obstacles which he will find in his way.

Under the second heading we must take up in greater detail the various vehicles of man and their relation to the different planes of nature. We must learn to understand ourselves, in order that we may direct intelligently the complicated machinery of the vehicles. This is an intensely practical consideration for us; we are living upon all these planes now, though most of us do not know it; we are using our mental and astral bodies as bridges to carry to the physical brain the messages from the ego, and to carry back to him in return the information which they obtain from external impacts of all sorts. Unless we understand those bodies we cannot use them to the best advantage, we cannot get out of them all that we might. Apart from the fact of that constant use of the vehicles, we all spend about a third of our lives in the astral body—in a state which we commonly call sleep. After physical death we enter upon a long life in these higher vehicles, and it becomes once more obvious that the more we know about them the more efficient and the more comfortable will this life be. These higher bodies have their powers and their capacities as well as the physical body. If we understand them we can utilise all these for our own advancement and for the helping of our fellows, so that their study is eminently practical.

The third division is that which treats of the past evolution of man. It deals with the planetary chain of which our earth is a part, with its relation to other chains in the solar system, and with the successive life-waves which have passed over these chains. It takes up the question of the work of the great Official who superintends the formation of each Root Race and its subdivision into branch races. It explains how men come to be at such different levels in life, and accounts for the formation of classes and castes. Although this appears to be less practical than the other kinds, we shall find not only that it is intensely interesting, but that it has its uses as well. It is a remarkable fact that all religions have made it a special point to teach their followers something of the beginnings of the world and of man. In the Jewish scripture you have the extraordinary story of the earlier chapters of the Book of Genesis, which is unfortunately adopted just as it stands by the Christian Church; but each religion has some such story—even those of savage tribes. It is clear therefore that those who found religions must know that this information is of great importance for man. Madame Blavatsky has followed in the footsteps of her Teachers in that respect, for the whole of her monumental work, *The Secret Doctrine*, is a sermon upon the text of the Stanzas of Dzyan, which give an account of the origin of man and of our system.

The point of first importance is that we should live the life; the second that we should understand our possibilities; and when we have got so far, we may then take up with advantage the study of past history. In following out thoroughly that first block of teaching, we have arrived at certainty in regard to the rest. “If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.” The best way to prove to oneself the truth of these Theosophical doctrines is to take them for granted and to live as though they were true; then the proof will soon come.