

The Battle of Theosophy

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IT is not uncommon to meet members of the Theosophical Society (TS), or even newcomers, who say that when they first came in contact with the teachings of Theosophy, they had the impression that they knew them before coming to the Society. Plato advocated that to know is to remember, implying that the soul in us, the higher consciousness, has knowledge of those things which are worth knowing.

Contact with theosophical literature expands the mind, inspires the heart, and gives the student a sense of logical perception regarding life and its processes. Several authors, looking at the various aspects of the teachings, present their unique understanding of them and contribute to show that only one presentation can never exhaust the subject.

So, gradually, Theosophy assumes a key position in our world view and in it we find answers to many questions. However, the knowledge of Theosophy comes with a test: will it remain a notional “wisdom”, inspiring as it may be, or can it transform our lives completely? Reading many books may give us the impression, masquerading as certainty, that we *know* what Theosophy is.

But the difference between that idea and its realization is called daily life.

T. S. Eliot, in his poem *The Hollow Men*, wrote:

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow

The shadow is the self in us. That is when the Theosophy battle begins. For Theosophy to reach the very core of our consciousness and cause in it a complete and irreversible transformation, it has to fight its way through layers upon layers of the structure called “self”. And it is not only the deeper teachings of Theosophy that point to this archetypical battle; many other traditions also do so. Vedanta; ancient Gnosticism, as distinguished from the parody that goes under its name today; Sufism; the Gospel of Thomas; the Zen Buddhist tradition; the Buddhist teachings; mysticism as well as classic and contemporary poetry; among others. They all denounce “self” as the biggest impediment to the discovery of the undivided nature of all life and consciousness.

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The Battle of Theosophy

For Vedanta, the self is just a notion, with no real substance in reality. It is built by *ahamkāra*, the “I”-building faculty enmeshed in the very activity of the mind. Every one of our thoughts, actions, and emotional responses tends to build and strengthen the sense of self. That faculty has successfully convinced us that we are the self, and it creates an exclusion zone around it, so that nothing can challenge it.

For the Buddha, the self was a structure, put together by Māra, the powerful demon of duality and separateness. The structure of the self is cemented by *tr̥shna*, the thirst for more experiences, which looks at life as an acquisition counter, with plenty of things for us to acquire and possess. Such desire dominates the mind completely, moving between the extreme poles of “I want” and “I do not want”, the latter being also a form of desire. According to Buddhism and to other traditions, this thirst is unquenchable although it lasts for hundreds of incarnations.

For Meister Eckhart, the self is what prevents the mystical birth to take place within our souls. The Gospel passage “There was no room in the inn”, according to Eckhart, is the metaphorical representation of a mind which is so crowded with images, concepts, self-will, memory, that it cannot provide that quiet, humble, and peaceful space for that consciousness which has been described as “the well of Compassion” to be born in us.

One of the intrinsic aspects of the self is to be alive to sensory things but dead to spiritual realities. This is

what the Gospel of Thomas says (113):

His disciples said to him, “When will the kingdom come?”

Jesus said, “It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying ‘here it is’ or ‘there it is’. Rather, the kingdom of the father is spread out upon the Earth, and men do not see it.”

Self-centred activity makes us blind to the unimaginable beauty of the Earth and existence. Thomas Traherne shared something of this life-altering perception when he wrote: “You never enjoy the world aright, till the Sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars . . .”

Theosophical teachings also point out the insidious nature of the self. Rule 4 in *Light on the Path* compares the self to a giant weed: “. . . it is a plant that lives and increases throughout the ages. It flowers when the man has accumulated unto himself innumerable existences.” And it adds: “Live neither in the present nor the future, but in the eternal. This giant weed cannot flower there: this blot upon existence is wiped out by the very atmosphere of eternal thought.” What we call the “present” is very often the past speaking to us through our personal minds.

What are then the obstacles Theosophy has to face on its journey to the core of our consciousness? Here we need to remember that they are all aspects of the personal self, our own creation through numerous incarnations. One of these obstacles is conditioning which manifests as the incapacity to consider new ideas.

The Battle of Theosophy

It is like a set background from which the mind sees itself and the world. Such a view is bound to be stale and not dynamic, and is out of sync with the movement of life and consciousness. It is self-evident that Theosophy finds it difficult to penetrate this barrier of conditioning.

Another obstacle on the path of Theosophy to the depths of human consciousness is reaction. Most reactions are nonrational. Suspicion is a form of reaction. We are introduced to someone we do not know and the subtle movement of reaction sets in: “Who is this person? What does he or she want? Can they be trusted? Will they take advantage of me?” There was a member in Sydney some years ago who was a gentle man, caring, cooperative. He once told me: “I like Theosophy but I cannot accept its teachings on reincarnation.” Probably his Catholic background made it impossible to consider this aspect of Theosophy. Fortunately, he was aware that the Society did not impose any teaching on its members or sympathizers. However, he could not even consider that reincarnation could be a possibility that could explain, perhaps, the mysteries of human evolution.

Self-importance is, perhaps, one of the strongest obstacles faced by Theosophy as it tries to approach the depths of the human heart. It emanates from what the Sanskrit language calls *svārtha*, “self-interest”, attributing excessive value to oneself. As Madame Blavatsky described it, the personal mind is full of desires, which are constantly magnified by its self-centred activity. She called it *kāma-manas*, “the desire mind” and every one

of its activities is a projection of its core desire: to be a separate self. It would be very hard for Theosophy to penetrate this ego-created fortress.

Finally, another obstacle on the path of Theosophy to enter the human heart is inattention. With so many desires, images, memories, comparisons, guarding the fortress of self, our minds tend to be governed by inattention. The essence of inattention is to be incapable to see the wholeness of life in the present moment. The mind’s self-centred contents create a confused and noisy screen which distracts it from life which is unfolding always in the present moment.

Therefore, such a screen is a denial of compassion. The meaning of the name Kwan-Yin, the Goddess of Mercy and Compassion, is “she who hears the cries of the world”. When we look at the suffering of the world, which never ends, we look through the noisy screen of our deep-rooted self-centredness. When Kwan-Yin looks at the same suffering she does it out of a condition of absolute emptiness, and her response is boundless compassion.

In spite of all obstacles, once the student perseveres in the enquiry which is Theosophy and ponders over passages of deep significance, a momentous change may begin to occur. One such passage comes, again, from *Light on the Path*: “To work for self is to work for disappointment.” Extraordinarily and simply put, that little book echoes a timeless truth: nothing can really satisfy the self and its pleasurable structures. The pursuit which selfishness engages in never ends

The Battle of Theosophy

and such pursuit is in reality the architect of suffering. It is a web of isolation from the wholeness of life.

Another passage that can lead to a profound change in our perception, if we ponder over its meaning and implications is this: "Service is the great illuminator. The more we serve the wiser we become, for we learn wisdom not by studying but by living." (*The Theosophic Life* by Annie Besant). Selfless service can erode the citadel of self-centredness and reveal the truth that none of us lives for ourselves. It builds a pure conduit through which the gifts of the uncreated Spirit can flood the human heart and mind and recreate a person as a beneficent force in the world.

Gradually, the study of Theosophy becomes a yoga of self-transformation, when new depths are discovered, and new insights appear like little epiphanies which disclose the ever-present mystery that has always been here with us. Theosophy is thus discovered to be not a doctrine or a teaching to be memorized, holding the copyright of truth, but a Wisdom that emanates from the very depths of life, a Wisdom that was lost in our journey guided by the will-o'-the-wisp of isolationist self-importance. Theosophy is discovered as a living Wisdom, a transcendence that has come to visit us in the quietness of a heart made simple by selfless service.

We are told in theosophical literature that in those dimensions of Theosophy as a living Wisdom the student finds the sacred, that uncreated wholeness which

has been untouched by the personal mind and its worldly attitude to life's mystery. The sacred is "the meeting place of saints", the holy ones. Each one of them does not live for themselves, as they walk the untrodden ground of oneness without beginning and without end, wholly free from time and its processes, bringing to the world the fragrance of that consciousness which embodies the very spring of newness. The holy ones live to bless the world in its entirety and prevent its destruction.

Theosophy, breaking all the barriers built by selfishness through the ages, reaches at last the very heart of the dedicated student, the core of his or her consciousness. It has ceased to be a description of universal and human processes, an inspiring world view, a hallowed doctrine. It ceases to be Theosophy as we understand it and becomes the pure light of infinite goodness, truth and beauty. And the student is lost in its unlimited field of sacred awareness which the great teachers called "love", an unending love for humanity.

The battle is over; the enemy — selfishness — lies lifeless, assimilated into the glory of universal life. Those who win become an irresistible force for the good. They become one with the all-giving Soul that animated the Theosophical Society since its hallowed beginnings. And many in the TS have won this battle in the past 145 years. They became pillars of light in the Society and poured strength, wisdom, peace and unity into its life. They are our great benefactors and mentors. The battle is calling. Are we ready for it? ✧