

The Keynote of Human Life — Altruism

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ALTRUISM should be the characteristic quality of every declared Theosophist. Many of us declare ourselves to be Theosophists, but we are only members of the Theosophical Society, not real Theosophists. The Theosophist is one who is different because he is characterized by this quality of altruism. Each one of us can examine, from time to time, whether we qualify to be a Theosophist or not, or whether we are merely members of the Theosophical Society.

Altruism, about which HPB has written in glowing terms, is the quality that we all need to display in our actions, words and life, if we want to be of use in this world. As long as we do not possess the correct tendencies, we are not truly useful. We have to pursue our slow way through many incarnations, until we realize the beauty and the grandeur of being altruistic. The world may regard various people as altruistic when they do a little bit of good, but the person who is truly altruistic lives, not for himself but for the sake of others, including birds, animals, insects and the earth itself.

In the present day, most people are engaged in some kind of competition,

whether they are conscious of it or not. They start to compete in examinations in school, for in order to get work of a particular kind they have to compete, and show they are excellent. Without that spirit of competition it is very difficult for the average human being; he remains at a level where he is merely passing time.

HPB said, motive and motive alone makes the action which a person performs good or bad. The altruist is not necessarily one who performs right action according to the notions of the world, but he who sees whether his actions are good or bad. HPB says: 'It is impossible to employ spiritual forces if there is the slightest tinge of selfishness remaining in the operator.' All of us, without exception, do have a tinge or two, or may be more, of selfishness as we perform our duties. We may be aware of them as duties, but we still think of them in terms of success, failure and so on which makes it selfish in the real sense of the term. HPB also said:

Meditation, abstinence, the observation of moral duties, gentle thoughts, good deeds and kind words, as goodwill to all and entire oblivion of Self are the most

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effective means of obtaining knowledge and preparing for the reception of higher wisdom.

These words appear to be easy to understand, but they are difficult to follow. Abstinence from what? Abstinence from the intention of connecting it with myself; there is a sense of 'myself' in our minds to which we connect everything we do. Altruism means not only avoiding connecting everything to oneself but to do a thing because it is the right thing to do. And if that is so all these words have great meaning: abstinence, meditation, observation of moral duties, observation of self and so on.

The principle of competition has become very important in modern life. Without competing, it is difficult for a person to live. I do not say it is impossible, but it becomes difficult for a person to do anything useful. Therefore children are taught this spirit of competition; they naturally like to compete, but they can compete without this consciousness that 'I am competing, I am winning'. They are taught this spirit of competition in the sports field. We can see how aggressive even the competition for world championship has become. But they can be taught to learn to play for the fun of it, the lessons that it brings to us, etc. In jobs also competition becomes very important. Everybody has started to compete and daily life becomes tainted because of the competitive spirit. It is one of the qualities of modern life which it is sad to see.

Many women are stimulated to appear beautiful even if they are not. They put

on what they think will make them appear well. To be neatly and nicely dressed is natural. But to dress in order to compete with others, to appear splendid, is very peculiar to human beings. No animal which is beautiful tries to be beautiful. It is beautiful by itself. But human beings try to be so, even if they are not really what they appear to be.

Very few people in this world are encouraged to be altruistic. They are so intent upon their own appearance, their own cleverness, their own progress and their own families, their nation, etc. So evolution is very slow and, contrary to what people say, evolution by nature is very slow in this age. It is called Kali Yuga because competition and all the things which go with it are so strong. It is very common for artists to be jealous of each other. I know something about this having been in this field myself. Even when they are brilliant they are still looking at other people to be sure that no one else reaches the same level. Ordinary people emulate this feeling and appear to be courteous, to be good when they are not really so. Our work in the Theosophical Society is to destroy such attitudes, to destroy the spirit of competition which says 'I shall go first'. You do what is necessary, what is beautiful, what is right, not because you want to be better than others but because it is the natural way for you.

HPB says that the key to each degree is the aspirant himself. Nobody else is responsible. But another characteristic of the present day is that we throw the

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responsibility on somebody else. We say, 'My parents should have brought me up in such and such way; if I were in different circumstances I would have behaved in a better way, etc.' But in life there are no 'ifs'. We are put in circumstances which we deserve, which we have chosen for ourselves. Our motto should be to know ourselves well. Then we can begin to bring changes into civilization which most people will accept. We must see that everything depends on ourselves, not on somebody else, on father or mother or brother or whatever it is.

Human welfare is very important because the human being is the only one that can understand himself. There are many people who think that human life in the present world is the highest. This is a fallacy. It is not the highest, it is the beginning. If we read *Light on the Path*, which has many valuable things to say, it suggests that when we really become human, not half-human, then we begin the Path to enlightenment and not until then. But most of us do not start in the beginning. We think the beginning is the end and that human life has reached the top of all life, which is not so. Human life must go beyond itself, beyond this stage at which it finds itself now. How many of us are ready to take this as the stage from which we will have to make progress and not regard this life as the height of achievement? Human life must go beyond itself and it can then enter the life of all creatures, it can become part of the earth itself, of Nature, of every higher form. And that would be the most glorious thing

a human being can achieve — not more money, more power over other people and things, and more of anything at all. Just this elevated place from where one can understand and know everything. This is the life of the Mahatmas.

The word Mahatma means 'great soul', not somebody who has been given the title of Mahatma by other people who do not know anything at all, but a person who really has a great soul. He is someone who knows everything, who knows how people shall improve themselves and leave behind all the past. Science, as it is, cannot help us in this way because it is used mostly for war purposes. Science, instead of being knowledge, becomes a way of destruction. It is a great pity because in its very nature science means to know. It is the opportunity to know everything, and is capable of becoming the ally of spiritual growth. This is possibly a future which we have to envisage — when science, religion and philosophy become one Truth.

Gupta-vidyā is a Sanskrit word which means sacred knowledge, wisdom or the hidden wisdom. It is now considered to be a special privilege which is given to some people only, because they are discreet and others are not. This knowledge of everything can be very dangerous as it is evident from people who know a little bit more than others. Many clairvoyants and people who have a little additional power are more dangerous than the ordinary man. It is really power to give to the world, when one becomes completely indifferent to what one is.

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Gupta-vidyā is the knowledge of the inner nature of life or the forces of Nature and how they work and is not suitable for present-day people. But we can all become aspirants to Gupta-vidyā. A difference has been made in the Indian tradition between Gupta-vidyā and Ātma-vidyā. Ātma-vidyā, the knowledge of the Soul, of what one can really be, is for people who wish to be wise, unselfish, before they obtain full knowledge.

Ātma-vidyā has to be acquired first and then only can enlightenment come. Ātma-vidyā means that one must become completely clean inwardly and all traces of self and selfishness have to be renounced for ever. It is available to persons who wish to have beneficent powers. You can have all the powers that you want, those you want and those you do not want, but every power will come to you when you are completely unselfish. HPB in her own style says that when people seek to obtain knowledge without renunciation they may take to sorcery. You will find this in her little essay on *Practical Occultism*. Because people who have knowledge but do not have the feeling for life can become vivisectioners, and can do very evil things. We have seen something of this during and after the last World War when experiments of a horrible nature were done on living human beings who were captured as prisoners. They were held in secret and then used in many experiments.

The real powers of the Spirit, the *siddhi-s*, are meant for those who follow the true Path of occultism which, in the

strictest sense, is pure Theosophy. What we know is the semblance of Theosophy, a little bit of it. But real Theosophy is known by those who have shed all the selfishness and therefore have come to knowledge. HPB says:

True Occultism or Theosophy is the 'Great Renunciation of SELF', unconditionally and absolutely . . . It is ALTRUISM and it throws him who practises it out of calculation of the ranks of the living altogether.

Competing makes no difference. We may be cleverer than other people and we may achieve more than other people, or we may think we are superior to them. But we are superior only by being nothing, when the personality disappears and a person becomes a beneficent force in Nature. And this is the only way to enter the presence of the higher Self, the Master within oneself. These are the people who will not allow fire to smoulder under a thin layer of ashes.

Annie Besant says: 'The higher Self is the Divine Consciousness inside ourselves.' All the good feelings and aspirations trickle down from this source. She says there has to be a subjugation of the animal desires and passions so that the Higher Self can begin to operate — all animal tendencies, all those traits which lurk within us, perhaps hidden from us, because we think we are superior to animals. They wait for their chance but when all these are dead the personal self is also dead. The personal self and the divine Self cannot function together. The

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divine Self alone is said to be the Master within, not just a Master outside. You can meet the Master outside, perhaps you do, but it will not change you or make you different. It will only make you feel that you have reached some good thing, which is another form of selfishness: 'I have reached this.' HPB says that even love of wife and family are part of the lower self. A mother will do things for her child at the expense of other children. Most of them will do something for their child which may hurt another child. So although the feelings of a mother are very good they are not the final feelings that we can expect of someone who wishes to find the higher Self.

Someone who really understands our first Object, the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, sex, creed and all that which is mentioned, can really lead because he discards egoism totally. True occultism is practised by him and this is Theosophy or the Wisdom of the gods, which is the meaning of the word Theosophy. We use the words Theosophy and Theosophical easily because we think we are good Theosophists, but it is not correct. We are only members of the Society trying, I hope, to become good Theosophists. If we try to become good Theosophists without bringing the self in, whatever we do we are doing something which is worthwhile.

The aspirant has to choose between leaving the worldly life or staying in it. It does not mean that you reject your wife and children, that you be without a job and expect other people to pay for your

expenses, which is another form of selfishness. But in spirit, in the heart, to be free of the worldly things of child, wife, job, of everything except the good of all creatures, is the life of a true Theosophist. Only the great cry of humanity will then find a voice within. And we all have to try to come to this, to a state which is one of love.

I hesitate to use the word 'love' because it means anything anybody wishes it to be. But it is really a state of real care for humanity as a whole. This is true altruism and this is what the Theosophical Society exists for. It exists not in order to do some petty little things which appear to be good. If the member of the Theosophical Society wishes to become a true Theosophist, *Ātma-vidyā* which causes beneficent influences to radiate on all must prevail over other things in life.

The Bible says 'strait is the gate, and narrow is the way' that leads to the Eternal. You cannot reach the Eternal, God, the Ultimate, whatever name you give to it by a little bit of good, a little bit of this or that. It can only come when everything that is selfish is disregarded, rejected. It is a very difficult Path to tread. To be a Theosophist is not easy. We all think we are Theosophists. We are not. We are members of the Theosophical Society. And if we are good members we hope to become Theosophists. We hope that the study of Theosophy which we can do with the help of good books and its practice in daily life will lead towards such altruism. This practice in daily life is very important in order to see whether in all the different

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situations in life we act in a way which is altruistic. This is what we have to learn.

In this way, Kali Yuga becomes a yuga of fast progress. As we said earlier, progress is very slow if we follow humanity in general. But it can become a very fast method, if we use the circumstances in the right way, though they may be difficult. The more difficult they are the better, because it can help us to bring out this quality of not caring for the self, not listening to the whispers of the self. There are people who go a long way on the Path of occultism and when they are tested they break down, they fall deep down. They will have to start all over again. This can happen to us. But if we

want to be free we have to be completely unselfish right from the beginning. From now on do all the little jobs of daily life in that spirit, whatever you are doing, unless it is wrong. If you do that then you can reach faster than at any other time. So altruism is what we have to hold up in our lives. We have to personify that and teach the world through our very being. The Great Ones of the world did not meet a lot of people as one can do in the present day. The Christs, the Buddhas and people of this kind can bring light to other human beings and other beings by what they are, not only by what they taught. Because they live in a different way, the altruistic way. ✧

People ought not to consider so much what they are to do as what they *are*; let them but *be* good and their ways and deeds will shine brightly. If you are just, your actions will be just too. Do not think that saintliness comes from occupation; it depends rather on what one is. The kind of work we do does not make us holy but we may make it holy. However 'sacred' a calling may be, as it is a calling, it has no power to sanctify; but rather as we *are* and have the divine being within, we bless each task we do, be it eating, or sleeping, or watching, or any other. Whatever they do, who have not much of (God's) nature, they work in vain.

Meister Eckhart