

What Is Theosophy? by H. A. V.

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Von jener Macht, die alle Wesen bindet,  
Befreit der Mensch sich, der sich überwindet.

— GÖTTE

So many people show excessive hostility to the mere word, "Theosophy" because, in complete ignorance of its real meaning, they look upon it as the representative of classical infidelity, and loudly condemn everyone pursuing studies in that direction.

It may, therefore, not be amiss to direct a few words of explanation to the general public in the hope that this modest endeavour to throw some light upon a misunderstood subject into prejudiced minds may meet with some response.

Let us divide man into his "seen" and "unseen" parts, viz., his physical and psychical nature, his body and his soul. We have no concern here with his body or its various component parts, but his soul we will consider under its three aspects: —

1. The "animal" soul, comprising our passions and all lower emotions.
2. The "human" soul, or our intelligent or reasoning mind.
3. The "spiritual" or higher soul, whence arise the dictates of our conscience, all our aspirations towards the divine and the general promptings of our religious nature.

Far from these groups representing so many distinct layers or strata, they must be conceived as interpenetrating and reacting upon each other, though we must constitute a gradation from lower to higher, as this forms one of the essential bases of theosophical teaching.

The "animal" soul is so-called because it is in close connection with all the wants and desires of the body;

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it is under our carnal and sensuous influences, and constantly yielding to their power, unless controlled by superior checks.

The "spiritual" soul, on the contrary, is farthest removed from the material plane, ever trying and yearning for an inward flight in the direction of the ideal or divine, yet incessantly hampered and weighed down by the powerful attractions originating in the "animal" soul.

In this struggle between the two, and alternately lending its help to either, we have the "human" soul, full of resolve, or hesitating by fits and starts, whether it is to throw its entire weight into either scale, or allow itself to be carried along, almost passively, in the swaying movements of the fight.

Yet it is the "human" soul, under its aspect of "reasoning mind", which has to decide in the end, whether or not it is to enlist in the service of the self-willed [Page 19] lower soul, or whether, listening to the inner voice of conscience, it will devote all its energies to the development of our higher nature and bring it within the borderland of the divine.

In this battle of our various natures, success would mean the evolution of our higher principles and the crushing out of our lower ones, for victory can only be achieved when the powerful influences of our material desires have been so far conquered, that they can no longer offer any lasting resistance to the soul's upward progress.

There is no desire to advocate asceticism or seclusion of a rigid kind to enable the aspirant to reach this stage of self-conquest; our "animal" soul is not to be killed, but its powers are to be brought under such complete subjection to the *purified* will that they can be used as active levers for our ascent, though, undoubtedly, before they can be rendered serviceable for higher purposes, "transmuted" as it were, their energies for doing harm must be reduced within the smallest limits, and various methods for achieving this end will be found best suited to the requirements of different individuals. The practical lesson to be learnt, above all others, is the conquest of our selfish desires and the devotion of our best energies to the services of our fellow-men.

When the hold of matter, or, to use an equivalent, when the love of self has been sufficiently subdued within us to cause a state of even temporary balance between our lower and higher soul, evolutionary progress has reached a stage, when our consciousness fully realizes the momentous issues placed within our range, and the occasional victories obtained, moreover, fill the soul, not only with brighter confidence in its power, but also with a clearer perception of the methods of action required for attaining the goal.

The centre of our soul-life must, we are told, be made to gravitate on a steadily rising plane of consciousness, for thus only, by infusing a higher and purer purpose into every thought and action of our daily life, can the great aim, the spiritualization of our soul, be achieved. By this spiritualization we eventually attain to that inner illumination which reveals "the Christ within us".

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We shall be told that these views are purely visionary, as proof for such a theory is nowhere to be found; and undoubtedly it is true, that *belief* is necessary at one stage or other of our soul's upward career, for, before we can choose the road of our pilgrimage leading through unknown regions, we must trust for guidance to the loving advice of those who have trodden the path before us. Yet how small is the amount of *blind* faith, that is required of us ! Anyone, by trying earnestly and perseveringly to take a few steps in the indicated direction and conforming to the prescribed road, can, step by step, and without difficulty, verify the fact that the aim he pursues is not an imaginary will-o'-the-wisp, but that the results of his development, gradually but surely brought within range of his consciousness, prove to him the possibility, nay, probability, of attaining the higher grades. Looking back to his earliest starting [Page 20] point, he will see in vanishing distance all the obstructions which at the time appeared insurmountable, and as long as they existed, shut out all further progress from his view. After such self-gained experience, are we not justified in trusting to the testimony of saints, the assurances of initiates, and to the general teachings of Theosophy, that by steady perseverance on the upward path, the inner light, whose attraction we already dimly and fitfully feel, will more and more come within our reach, and eventually make us partakers of "the eternal life" ?

All religions teach this great truth and proclaim their ultimate aim to be the complete union of the soul with the Divine spirit; but Theosophy asserts that, while no single religion possesses a patent key for opening the heavenly gates, it is the birthright of every human soul to claim and to receive admittance, as soon as in the process of its spiritual evolution it has reached the required standard.

To this stupendous work many terrestrial lives must be necessary — lives of incessant struggle, of unselfish strife and high aspiration; but once the light is kindled in our hearts and steadfastly kept alive, it is the sure beacon which will safely lead us through ages of darkness to the eventual "salvation" of our soul, the glorious goal and end of our pilgrimage.