

THE SCIENCE OF SPIRITUALITY

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As the Theosophical Society celebrates this year the seventy-fifth anniversary of its founding, occasions will not be wanting for the review of its history and for some appraisal of its achievements. Without entering into historical particulars, which are amply recorded elsewhere, it may be safely stated that certain currents of thought which are noticeable in the world of today trace their origin or their wide development to the Theosophical movement. The similarities between the great religions of the world have become common knowledge among educated people; the doctrine of reincarnation is an accepted theme in Western literature; the problem of survival has passed from the field of popular superstition to that of academic research; symbolism, astrology, telepathy, spiritual healing, all have their serious students and a significant body of literature; the Western reader may now have direct access to oriental thought through the commentaries and translations of many sacred and philosophical texts. Furthermore, individual Theosophists have made notable contributions to progress in the varied fields of religion, science, art, literature, education, politics, and human welfare. Indeed, Theosophical thought has been productive of such diverse expressions that one may easily lose sight of the principles which they attempt to embody. While, therefore, we may gain profit and inspiration from the review of the past, it is of the first importance that we should continually look beyond the superficial and transitory to the essential elements of the Theosophical system.

In this fascinating labyrinth, in which each of the many paths promises to lead to the heart of the mystery of life, it is scarcely to be wondered if bewilderment should supervene and the clue be lost. Yet, of the many teachings which have been restated to the world through the modern Theosophical movement, there is one which, when the distorting fascination of other truths has been outlived, emerges to due prominence as the one essential truth of Theosophy. It is at once the foundation of every doctrine, the key to every problem, the justification and the goal of every search for Truth. Without it, all other teachings become mere playthings of the mind, meaningless and incoherent fragments of a pattern that has lost its recurrent theme. With it, every fact becomes illumined and significant, and the chaos of isolated items of knowledge becomes a pattern of ordered loveliness. It is the doctrine of the Oneness of Life.

Wherever the student may turn in his search for a clue to the meaning of existence, the principle of unity emerges with an insistence which is sufficient indication of its essential nature. It pervades the scriptures of the great religions; it is the central theme of mysticism; increasingly its presence is revealed in the discoveries of science. Unity is declared to be in the beginning, for it is an axiomatic attribute of the Absolute, "One, without a second." Unity is traced as the cohesive force beneath the infinite multiplicity of forms in manifestation, and unity is looked to as the end in which all diversity will be resolved.

Although no reminder may be necessary of the grand phrases which have proclaimed the Unity to men from very ancient times, their repetition may attune our minds to the contemplation of the mystery of the One Life. In the magnificent stanzas which are the basis of *The Secret Doctrine*, the fact is stated with forceful simplicity: "Alone, the One Form of Existence stretched boundless, infinite, causeless, in Dreamless Sleep; and Life pulsed unconscious in Universal Space. . . ." ¹ In the sacred literature of India, so dominant is the theme of the Oneness of the Self that passage after passage could be chosen to reiterate the truth: "Unseen He sees, unheard He hears, un-thought of He thinks, unknown He knows. None other than He is the Seer, none other than He is the Hearer, none other than He is the Thinker, none other than He is the Knower. He is the Self, the Inner Ruler, Immortal. That which is other perishes." ² The Buddha likewise taught: "As all things originate from one essence, so they are developing according to one law and they are destined to one aim which is Nirvana." ³ And in the treasury of the Hebrew Scriptures the same truth is uttered: "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me." ⁴

In these and countless other passages from the religious teachings of the past, man has been taught that life is one, that the Self is the same in all, that wherever he may turn

God present is at once in every place,
Yet God in every place is ever one . . .⁵

If the modern exposition of Theosophy is a faithful restatement of ancient tradition, it must proclaim the unity of life as its central and abiding message. So we find *The Secret Doctrine* summarizing its teaching in these words: "Esoteric Philosophy teaches that everything lives and is conscious, but not that all life and consciousness are similar to those of human or even animal beings. Life we look upon as the One Form of Existence, manifesting in what is called Matter; or what, incorrectly separating them, we name Spirit, Soul and Matter in man. Matter is the Vehicle for the manifestation of Soul on this plane of existence, and Soul is the Vehicle on a higher plane for the manifestation of Spirit, and these three are a Trinity synthesized by Life, which pervades them all . . ."⁶

Confronted so insistently with the affirmation of the unity of the Self, the student of Theosophy may find himself insensibly persuaded into giving lip-service to the doctrine of Oneness, and echoing the declaration of the Ancient Wisdom in the phrase: "The Self is One: I am THAT." But for how many is this acquiescence in the creed of the One more than a mechanical nodding of the head in deference to the superior wisdom of an accepted authority? Is it, indeed, for many of us, any more real in conscious experience than the fact of the revolution of the earth round the sun or the fact that solid objects are, as scientists have assured us, nothing but insubstantial radiation? Unlike Galileo, who outwardly recanted from his belief in terrestrial motion while inwardly affirming that "yet it moves," we repeat with our lips the statements made by scientists but inwardly remain convinced that our chairs are solid and stationary. As laymen, we accept the facts of science without knowledge or experience, on the authority of the experts, and in consequence our belief in them is largely sterile and lacking in conviction. In a similar way, it must be admitted that the majority of men do not normally enjoy any awareness of the fact of unity, and that while we may repeat with our lips that the Self is One, a mental reservation reasserts the fact of difference and separateness. Indeed, except for rare moments of intense devotion or love, during which a temporary loss of personal identity may be experienced in the consciousness of at-one-ment with God or another human being or with the world of nature, most of us go through life without any realization of the Oneness of the Self. If it were otherwise, if we were constantly aware of our identity with one another, the first Object of the Theosophical Society could never have been formulated. For the brotherhood of man is implicit in the doctrine of the One Life, and awareness of the unity would carry with it the active recognition of brotherhood as an actual and not merely a theoretical fact. Is there not a disturbing truth in the contention that talk about brotherhood indicates an absence of the true consciousness of brotherhood? "A man that is really brotherly, affectionate," we are told, "does not talk about brotherhood; you do not talk about brotherhood to your sister, or to your wife; there is a natural affection."⁷ It would appear that the need to affirm the unity of the Self is evidence that the unity of the Self is less a fact of experience than an act of faith.

Yet here and there, both among the voices of the past and among the men and women of our own time, one may distinguish a note of confident assertion so simple and direct that it cannot be other than the statement of personal experience. Among the many who more or less blindly believe are the few who most surely know. But such is the nature of that knowledge that of these few rarely has one attempted to convey his experience to others through the limiting and distorting instrument of words, for the task appears "as hopeless as to try to empty the ocean into a thimble." Enough has been written, however, to convince the seeker that finding is as possible now as in the past, and that the conscious perception of oneness may yet transform his uncertain belief into the certainty of knowledge. The literature of mysticism provides abundant evidence of this possibility. But it is fitting that we should remind ourselves also of those who, in the modern Theosophical movement, have repeated the teaching of the Ancient Wisdom not because of its authority but because they knew it to be true, because they had perceived at least in part the oneness of the Self.

The record of personal experience can never be more than suggestive to those who have not shared it. But because it is suggestive, such a record can be of value to the student and the seeker, for it indicates more effectively than impersonal exposition the nature of the goal towards which they are striving. An example that comes readily to mind is the attempt made by Dr Arundale to describe some aspects of nirvanic consciousness as he had experienced it. In his book, *Nirvana*, he tells how, although he had brooded much upon unity, he still had only a vague idea of it without any clear perception. Then he narrates how, gazing one day on an orange grove that lay in the valley beneath him, he had his first glimpse of the fundamental unities. "All of a sudden," he writes, "I found myself peculiarly, wonderfully, identified with the orange trees, with their very life and being. I was at my window, yet was I also in the orange grove—indeed, I was the orange grove. It was almost as if my consciousness flickered between George Arundale as George Arundale and George Arundale as the orange grove. I was two entities, yet one."⁸ A similar experience is described by Krishnamurti in *The Kingdom of Happiness*, where he tells of a temporary identification of himself with the growing grass. "I felt myself," he says, "to be that grass which had not yet divided into separate blades. Then I could feel the grass pushing through from under the earth, the sap rising in it, and the blades separating, and I was myself each blade."⁹

Two questions immediately present themselves to the mind for answer. In the first place, why is it that, since unity is declared to be a fact, awareness of unity appears to be the exception rather than the rule? Secondly, how is it possible for an individual to join the thin but steady ranks of those who, by virtue of their experience, stand witness to the fact that unity may be realized? In other words, why do we not know unity and how may we come to know it?

It is possible to look for the answer to the first of these questions both at the cosmic and at the personal level. Taking the former approach, the student will find his attention directed to what may be called, in the human idiom, the beginning of things. It is here, in the mystery of manifestation, that the principle of separateness must be sought. He will learn of the emergence of that principle of separateness from latency into activity when the One that is without a second willed: "May I be many, may I be born."¹⁰ At the same time, he will be warned against the facile assumption of a duality which is an appearance but not a fundamental reality. For the many which arise in the One, by the will of the One, are not other than the One. "As from a blazing fire go forth by thousands sparks of its own nature, so from the Imperishable manifold existences are born forth, and thereinto verily return."¹¹ The student must grasp the fact that the universe is an explication of oneness, if he is not to beg the whole question of separateness by supposing an original duality where there is none. "You cannot speak of a Universe as being made," writes Dr. Besant, "as though it had not ever been, for all is in that which changes not. All opposites find therein their reconciliation, their mutual destruction; all opposites there merge into each other, for THAT is all, and there is none other."¹² It is within this unity of the All that the multiplicity arises, and although from the point of view of the parts the condition of separateness is real enough, it is non-existent from the point of view of the whole. The many pictures which have been used in illustration of this paradox of unity in multiplicity have become familiar: thoughts in the mind, waves in the sea, sparks in the fire, and so on. Yet although the whole never ceases to be a unity in spite of its manifold parts, it suffers in the parts the experience of separateness. It is for this reason that the act by which a universe arises is traditionally described as an act of sacrifice on the part of the Logos of the universe, an act "consisting in the assumption of the limitations of matter by the Immaterial, in the veiling of the Unconditioned in conditions, in the binding of the Free within bonds."¹³

At this remote level it may perhaps seem that the problem is one mainly of academic interest. But it ceases to appear so when we turn from the consideration of cosmic principles to the familiar ground of conscious experience. For it is here, in the human personality, that the problem of separateness is experienced with acute and painful intimacy. Although we hear it declared with authoritative assurance that separateness is an illusion, to our present state of consciousness it is no illusion but the most convincing reality of daily experience, and one which denial seems powerless to destroy. We can admit, theoretically, that the content of our consciousness may have no objective reality, but it remains true that "the illusions of a madman are as real to him as ours are to us."¹⁴ The mind may be deluded in its

interpretation of the messages conveyed by the senses, but while the delusion lasts, the man is their prisoner. The dual function of the senses seems only to increase the dilemma. They are the gateway between the individual and the world, admitting experience and knowledge to his consciousness; yet their selective capacity suppresses more than it reveals and leaves him with no means of knowing either the nature or the extent of his constant deprivation. Through their agency he becomes caught in the snare of the not - Self, and remains deaf and blind to the presence of the Self:

O my beloved, heir to Mine estate!
Come to Me swiftly, though the hour be late!
Those My five envoys, whom I sent to seek,
Have lured thee from Me, and alone I wait.¹⁵

It seems, then, that if separateness is the great heresy, we must confess ourselves helpless if unwilling heretics. The reason for our blindness has been explained in terms of an identification of the life, which is one, with the individual forms, which are many. It is the consequence of the movement of consciousness, as it were, from the centre to the circumference. The ocean that breaks its surface into countless waves remains one ocean, yet each wave enjoys an individual identity whose illusory nature derives a semblance of reality from time and form. In a similar way, the Self manifests in an infinite number of separate personalities. Their separation, as personalities, is real, but as the Self, it is an illusion. For the sense of separateness experienced in the personality arises from the identification of the Self with the temporary forms with which it is associated in the threefold world of human experience. "Whatever plane our consciousness may be acting in," says The Secret Doctrine, "both we and the things belonging to that plane are, for the time being, our only realities. But as we rise in the scale of development, we perceive that in the stages through which we have passed, we mistook shadows for realities, and that the upward progress of the Ego is a series of progressive awakenings, each advance bringing with it the idea that now, at last, we have reached 'reality'; but only when we shall have reached absolute Consciousness, and blended our own with it, shall we be free from the delusions produced by Mâyâ."¹⁶

Until that final consummation is attained, man repeats at each level of consciousness the mistake of identification with a form, and so reasserts the fact of difference and separation. Consequently, he binds himself to the pain created by that falsehood. "Those who see differences pass from death to death."¹⁷ His error is twofold: he suffers first on account of his failure to know himself, and he suffers still further by seeking the security of permanence in forms outside himself which are by their nature changing and transitory. The one error results in a growing sense of dissatisfaction with his present condition and a yearning after a wider life than he yet knows; the other results in the bitter pain of oft-repeated loss. Then in the agony of his frustration he cries out against the limitation that keeps him from the realization of the Self:

Vain the dream! I cannot mingle with the all-sustaining soul:
I am prisoned in my senses; I am pinioned by my pride;
I am severed by my selfhood from the world-life of the Whole;
And my world is near and narrow, and God's world is waste and wide.¹⁸

As he begins to understand the cause of his condition, the student will enquire into its purpose. He will ask why it is that he of whom it is said "Thou art THAT" must undergo "the martyrdom of self-conscious existence."¹⁹ Briefly, that purpose may be described as the raising of consciousness through self-consciousness to Self-consciousness. The cycle of experience is thus summarized in The Secret Doctrine: "The Ego starts with Divine Consciousness; no past, no future, no separation. It is long before realizing that it is itself. Only after many births does it begin to discern by this collectivity of experience, that it is individual. At the end of its cycle of reincarnation it is still the same Divine Consciousness, but it has now become individualized Selfconsciousness."²⁰

The experience of separateness is an essential preliminary to the realization of unity. Where there is absolute unity, there is no sense of “other” and therefore no sense of “I”; consequently, there can be no awareness of unity. The spark of self-consciousness can be struck only between the steel of Self and the flint of not-Self, hence the necessity of duality, the opposition of two poles, as a preliminary to the awakening of self-consciousness. Both Freud and Jung have perceived that self-consciousness arises out of an initial state of non-differentiation between subject and object. The former expresses the view that “a relation to objects, and thus consciousness in the subject, develop from a state of unconscious oneness, or identity,”²¹ while Jung points out that “the chief characteristic of the primordial, unconscious state of the psyche is that it is not differentiated from the object - a condition that is distinctive of children and primitive peoples.”²² As the individual “becomes conscious of himself only in society and from knowing others like himself,”²³ so consciousness acquires meaning only in so far as it is differentiated from its field. But the condition of separation is no more than a means to an end, and once the end has been achieved, the means must be discarded, or it will be found a burden and a hindrance in the way of further development. “The purpose of life,” says Krishnamurti, “is to lose the separate self which started as an individual spark and when you have done that, then the Truth is established within you and you become part of the Truth, and you are yourself the Truth.”²⁴ So, from his momentary identification with the growing grass, he returned to the normal consciousness of himself with the realization of this fact: “I do not want anything more in my life than to have the capacity to lose the sense of the separate self. Because then I am able to forget the “I” and identify myself with the rest of the world—with every kingdom, vegetable, animal, and human; I am then nearer the Truth, nearer that perfection.”²⁵

Difficult as it is to grasp the paradox of individuality in unity, it is clearly a mistake to suppose that the result of the great work of evolution is the merging of the drop with the ocean in such a way that the identity so laboriously gained is destroyed. That the final end of evolution is not annihilation *The Secret Doctrine* has firmly asserted. “In Paranirvana . . . the Past, Present, and even Future Humanities, like all things, will be one and the same. Everything will have re-entered the Great Breath. In other words, everything will be ‘merged in Brahman,’ or the Divine Unity. Is this annihilation? . . . To see in Nirvana annihilation, amounts to saying of a man plunged in a sound dreamless sleep—one that leaves no impression on the physical memory and brain, because the sleeper’s Higher Self is then in its original state of Absolute Consciousness—that he, too, is annihilated . . . Re-absorption is by no means such a “dreamless sleep,” but . . . Absolute Existence, an unconditioned unity, or a state, to describe which human language is absolutely and hopelessly inadequate.”²⁶

An explanation of the nature of the changes which consciousness must undergo has been attempted with a happy simplicity by Carrington in his *Essays on Consciousness*. “However the process of individualization came about,” he writes, “it seems clear to me that it must have involved a concomitant isolation or limitation or circumscription, and, although I may be not quite clear in my mind just how it all happened, I can have no doubt whatever that I am now highly individual and highly circumscribed. Broadly speaking, my own view is that the second half of evolution, so to speak, consists in retaining the individuality and getting rid of the circumscription . . . If we conceive this process carried to the limit, we conclude that the final state will be one in which the consciousness of each is co-extensive with the Universal Consciousness, yet preserves the sense of individuality acquired in the first part of the total process.”²⁷

When some slight understanding of both the cause and the purpose of his condition has been gained, the student may turn his attention to the question of method. By what means, he may ask, does the process of Self-realization accomplish itself? The general principle which underlies the process has been described as a constant identification of life with form, accompanied by a constant repudiation of the form by the life. By identification with the particular forms with which it is associated, the consciousness in man participates in the heresy of separateness; by repudiation of them, he reasserts his own nature, furthering by that act the development of the sense of I-ness which is the basis of self-consciousness. The nature of this development will be readily seen when the state of consciousness in the earlier kingdoms

is contrasted with that of the human kingdom. In man, the awareness which is consciousness is related to a subject, and consequently involves a sense of I or self-consciousness. It is here, in the sense of I, that lies the distinction between the human and pre-human states. "The difference between the consciousness of man and of animals is that while there is a Self in the animal, the animal is not conscious of the Self."²⁸ Awareness in the pre-human stages is not related to a subject, and is not therefore self-awareness.

Now man is both aware and self-aware, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he has the capacity for self-awareness, the capacity to know, and to know that he knows. Professor Macmurray clarifies this relationship of the individual to his own modes of consciousness by distinguishing two different meanings which are generally confused in the usage of the term "conscious." To feel an emotion is, obviously, a form of consciousness; but to be aware that one is feeling it is another form of consciousness. We must differentiate, to use Professor Macmurray's terms, between the motive or emotional consciousness on the one hand, and the reflective or cognitive consciousness on the other, to differentiate, that is, between feeling an emotion and recognizing it as such.²⁹ Eddington has made a similar distinction between "sentient" and "sapient" awareness, the former being an awareness which, as he explains, "has no grammatical object except itself", and the latter having "a grammatical object, namely an item of knowledge."³⁰

An addition, or extension, of man's capacity for self-awareness lies in his ability to recognize limits to his own self-awareness: to know that he knows not. His little light of self-consciousness is sufficient to reveal how great is the surrounding darkness. Following this picture, we may say that the task of human consciousness is to merge its limited light into the infinite light,

To shatter the limits of life and be lost in a glory intense and profound
As the soul with a cry goes out into music and seeks to be one with the sound.³¹

The operation of the general principle of identification and repudiation may be observed to underlie the process of awakening which takes place in the normal psychological development of the individual from birth to maturity. In one who has begun to participate consciously in his own evolution, it will be further observed in the gradual alteration of the relationship between the man and his bodies, and in the extension of the process of psychological evolution through a long series of incarnations. It will be found at work wherever the raising of the "diaphragm of consciousness" brings about a change in the relationship between the subjective and objective fields of experience.

But although changes are taking place in consciousness in the sub- and superhuman fields as well as in the human, it will be observed that it is in man, and only in man, that a problem of consciousness seems to arise. Krishnamurti has pointed out that self-awareness arises only out of conflict, and conflict is born of mind, the prerogative of man. "When are you conscious of the 'I'?" he asks. "When are you conscious of yourself? Only when you are frustrated, when you are hindered, when there is a resistance; otherwise, you are supremely unconscious of your little self as 'I' . . . You are only conscious of yourself when there is a conflict. So, as we live in nothing else but conflict, we are conscious of that most of the time; and, therefore there is that consciousness, that conception, which is born of the 'I.' The 'I' in that conflict is nothing else but the consciousness of yourself as a form with a name, with certain prejudices, with certain idiosyncrasies, tendencies, faculties, longings, and frustrations . . ."³² Yet the conflict and the pain are the inevitable accompaniments of growth, and they assure the suffering individual that he has turned his face away from childhood and is on the road that will lead ultimately to spiritual maturity. "The turpitude of the waters," writes Edward Caird, "only proves that the angel has come down to trouble them, and the important thing is that when so disturbed, they have a healing virtue."³³

The development of mind has disturbed the animal peace, and brought with it the possibility of self-consciousness which, in its turn, implies awareness of other-ness and therefore of separation. The part played by the mind in thus creating and fostering the illusion of separateness has been described by Dr. van der Leeuw in *The Conquest of Illusion*. "The intellect, as the mind bound to illusion, can but work under the limitations of our world-image. The fundamental structure of that world-image is that of a duality, with myself on the one side and everything else on the other side-self and not-self. The intellect thus necessarily accepts the separateness of all things as a basic fact, accepts the 'otherness' of the world around me as undeniable and in all its cogitations can never free itself from the burden of that basic structure in which it is imprisoned. It is possible for the intellect to recognize theoretically the existence of unity, unity of life, unity of energy, or what else we may call that which unites all things, but even then separateness and multiplicity impress themselves so very much more forcibly upon the intellect, that the conception of a fundamental unity becomes but a pale shadow by the side of their varied and coloured interplay. The very methods of the intellect-distinguishing between one thing and another, analysing a thing into its component elements, learning to observe the minutest differences between one case and another-all these point to separateness and multiplicity as the domain of the intellect. For its data the intellect has to rely on sense-perception and deduction from basic principles, out of these it builds its theories and systems."³⁴

The story of the education of mankind will be more clearly understood in the light of the paradox of human consciousness than with any other explanation. The life in him is one life, the life he experiences is a life of separation and diversity. Between the two poles lies the way which HPB, with her vast and penetrating comprehension of the evolutionary scheme, has called "the weary uphill path of the Golgotha of Life."³⁵ The educative experiences afforded to man through the communities whose life he will normally share, social groups, nations and races, will be seen to serve a twofold purpose. While they will enlarge his horizon, broaden his sympathies, and increase the field with which he is able to identify himself, they will also tend to intensify his individuality and to strengthen the barriers that divide his life from the life in other men. He will become more and more distinctively individual and separate, and as experience lends definition to his own personality, so does it accentuate the difference between himself and others.

If there were no provision made to counteract this inevitable intensification of individual identity, it would be difficult to see how man could be educated beyond the attainment of selfhood into the consciousness of the unified life. But a study of the various influences which play upon the developing human personality will show that man is not left thus without assistance. From the infancy of the human race, it would appear that the forces which develop in man the characteristic modes of thought and feeling which accentuate individuality are counterbalanced by the forces of organized religion and ethical systems. Now the function both of religion and of ethics is to keep before man in ways suited to him the fact of the fundamental identity of all life, until he knows the truth of that fact for himself. Through the medium of religious worship and practices a constant attempt is made to awaken him to a sense of the larger life beyond the transitory forms, first by associating him by spiritual ties with the limited group of the faithful, among whom a feeling of fellowship must override all the factors that tend towards separateness, and then as religion ceases to be bounded by racial and national limits, by the extension of that fellowship-group across all barriers until it becomes co-extensive with the human race. A comparative study of religions shows clearly that the teaching given to man through his spiritual leaders has been directed towards the realization of unity through a spiritual fellowship, for "as religion begins by declaring the Unity of God, so it ends by proclaiming the Brotherhood of Man."³⁶ Similarly, the identity of the essential elements in all ethical systems resides in the fact that the basis of morality is the oneness of the Self. In whatever disguise the golden rule may be presented, each expression of it is fundamentally a restatement of the teaching of the Buddha: "Practice the truth that thy brother is the same as thou."

While religion and ethics foster the realization of unity by providing a practical guide to brotherly action, the awakening human spirit may emancipate itself from an external discipline and seek the unified life by the direct route of Self-realization. Mysticism and occultism alike offer techniques which, although different in their approach, are directed towards the same end, the immediate apprehension of the One. Mysticism is rooted in the fact of unity. "The mystics tell us perpetually," writes Evelyn Underhill, "that 'selfhood must be killed' before Reality can be attained . . . 'When the I, the Me, and the Mine are dead, the work of the Lord is done,' says Kabir. The substance of that wrongness of act and relation which constitutes 'sin' is the separation of the individual spirit from the whole; the ridiculous megalomania which makes each man the centre of his universe."³⁷ The laws of occultism likewise derive their justification from the unity of the Self. "Do not fancy," says Light on the Path, "that you can stand aside from the bad man or the foolish man. They are yourself, though in a less degree than your friend or your Master."³⁸ An analysis of the many instructions regarding conduct in the daily life of the occultist, such as are given in *At the Feet of the Master*, will show that they fall quite simply into two groups, those which seek to impress upon him the necessity for conduct that shall help others, and those which warn him against actions which may be harmful to others. All alike are based on the fact of unity, since it is declared that "only what the One wills can ever be really pleasant for any one.

The claim has been made that in the idea of a Universal Consciousness may be found "the raw material of physics and psychology, the foundations of natural religion, the meaning of spiritual progress, a basis for Ethics and a rationalization of Altruism."³⁹ The claim may be a bold one, yet it seems to be amply justified; for as we analyse the teachings of religion, the rules of ethics, the declarations of mysticism and the laws of occultism, we find that the source of their validity and their unifying and harmonizing principle is in every case the fact of the Oneness of Life.

But if a man persists in turning a deaf ear to the systematic teaching that is put before him, if he will not listen to the voice of religion or to the commands of ethics, and if he is not yet sufficiently awake to pursue the inner road to the Self, then life itself will teach him the fact of unity by the bitterly painful method of trial and error. Experience and suffering will show him that "all life is linked and kin," and that therefore no man liveth unto himself alone. He will learn in his own life, in personal loss and pain and grief, the truth of the teaching of the Buddha that the whole wide world weeps with the woe of one. He will prove its truth in the social life of his community, as he discovers that the dirt, disease, and degradation of one section disturbs the peace and checks the progress of the whole. He will find it demonstrated on a yet larger scale in the social and economic conditions of the nations of the world, in the consequences of illiteracy or famine, in the incidence of trade cycles and slumps, in the rise and fall of wages, and in the laws by which the economic problems of one nation endanger the prosperity of others. Yet again, in his private life, he will prove its psychological validity, in that the more he pursues personal ends, the less will he be able to find the satisfaction which he seeks. "A man who becomes selfish," warns Light on the Path, "isolates himself, grows less interesting and less agreeable to others. The sight is an awful one, and people shrink from a very selfish person at last as from a beast of prey."⁴⁰ By slow and gradual pressures or by sudden catastrophes, life will force upon unwilling man the realization that the fundamental sin of humanity is selfishness and that its essential grace is love. For selfishness is the denial of the fact of unity, while love is the active assertion of that fact.

The whole of humanity is involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in the problem of separateness, and since separateness and suffering must inevitably go together, man searches desperately for a solution to his problem. We have seen that the key to the human problem is in fact presented to him in a variety of ways, but in so far as it is more often implicit than explicit, he may remain blind to the significance of those very teachings which are designed to awaken him to the realization of unity. Now Theosophy, the Wisdom of the One, directs his attention beneath the surface of exoteric rule and doctrine to that truth which has been called the Secret of the Ages, the truth that Life is One, that "Thou art THAT." It presents

to his searching spirit the unified picture of a Plan, which indicates at once the cause, the purpose and the method of the journey of mankind.

Theosophy has been defined many times, but since no definition is exhaustive, we may be permitted to add yet another and to speak of it as the Science of Spirituality. First, to justify its claim as a science, Theosophy must show itself to be a system of knowledge with certain recognized features, namely, a field, a body of data, and a method. As a system of knowledge, Theosophy is the repository of those three great truths “which are absolute and cannot be lost, but yet may remain silent for lack of speech,”⁴¹ the fact of the existence of One Divine Principle underlying all things, the fact of the divinity and consequent immortality of the human spirit, and the fact of the ubiquity of law and justice. The field of Theosophy is coextensive with life; it comprehends all forms, all times, all processes, and the spirit that is involved in them. Its body of data consists not only of those traditional teachings about man and the universe which have been preserved from very ancient times, but of all subsequent discoveries of truth, in every department of human activity, by which the original outline is being constantly elaborated and enlarged. The method of Theosophy is the most accurate and the most exacting of all scientific techniques, for it is none other than the development within man himself of the powers of direct perception at every level of being. Now spirituality is, strictly speaking, that which pertains to spirit. But spirit is life, and life is one. Hence true spirituality is seen to be “the self-consciousness of the Self, the realization of the One in the many, of the Life in the forms.” Referring to the mistake that is made of imagining Nirvana to be equivalent to annihilation, HPB asserts that, far from that being the case, “the merging of all things in the Divine Unity is spirituality of a most refined character.”⁴² If mysticism has been correctly defined as the art of union with reality, then Theosophy can claim to be the science of union with reality, which is the Science of Spirituality.

It may be contended, however, that true science is such knowledge as “hath a tendency to use.” If that be so, then once more the claim of Theosophy to the name of science is amply justified, for by presenting to man the idea of a Plan behind the universe, it offers to him the means of participating in the Plan and of turning knowledge into action. For knowledge of the Plan is knowledge of law, and knowledge of law gives power to use it.

In the physical sciences the observation of law has been repeatedly shown to have this twofold value. It not only makes prediction possible, but it also gives man power to utilize the operation of law to bring about pre-determined ends. In an essay contributed in *The Great Design*, Professor Fraser-Harris gives a number of examples of successful prediction in different fields of science which have been made possible by the study of natural law, such as the prediction of unknown planets in Astronomy, of unknown elements in Chemistry and of unknown secretions in Biology. The question he then asks is particularly pertinent: Why should it not be possible to make similar predictions in the field of consciousness? Now the framework of the Plan makes such prediction possible, and further, by indicating to man the nature of the step that lies before him, it invites him to co-operate in the evolutionary scheme. The suggestion has been made, indeed, that such co-operation is itself part of the scheme. “The most important result of our ‘empirical’ investigation,” writes Hans Driesch in *The Great Design*, “is this: we are not only entitled to say that there is a plan in Reality, we also know that we are placed in the midst of this plan, and that the further realization of the plan depends on ourselves.”⁴³ Huxley, too, observing the distinctive phases in the evolution of ethical systems, suggests that an understanding of the evolutionary movement of ethics makes it possible for man to align himself with the direction of progress, and so to fulfil his role as the agent through whom evolution may unfold its further possibilities.⁴⁴ The Secret Doctrine goes even further. “Humanity,” it is there written, “is the child of cyclic Destiny, and not one of its Units can escape its unconscious mission, or get rid of the burden of its co-operative work with Nature.”⁴⁵

Now, when man takes conscious part in the process, he changes the pulse of evolution as it were from an arithmetical to a geometrical progression. His knowledge of the Plan enables him to take a short cut to the solution of the problem of separateness, and to by-pass the laborious route of trial and error with its attendant pain. It has been suggested that the purpose of training for a career is “to reduce the coefficient of fumbling.” The same purpose is served by the study of the Plan of evolution and the laws under which it operates. For by clarifying the nature of the illusion which limits human perception, Theosophy gives immediately the power of conquest. By stating the nature of the work that is to be achieved by life on its journey through many-ness, it advances its accomplishment:

. . . Earth and moon and sun,
All that is, that has been, or that ever time shall reap,
Is but moving home again, with mighty labours done,
The Many to the Everlasting One.⁴⁶

The illusion is separateness, and the work is the destruction of that illusion. But since in man the crux of the problem lies in the identification of his consciousness with the personality, the instrument through which self-consciousness is achieved, his essential task is no less than the destruction of the personality. Until he knows that the life in him, which is the Self, is independent of any of its temporary associations, he has not conquered the illusion of separateness. The personality is the embodiment, the apotheosis, of the great heresy; so in varied terms but with a single message, the student of spirituality is warned repeatedly of the necessity for the complete abandonment of the personal life as a condition of the realization of the life of the spirit. “Give up thy life, if thou wouldst live,” says The Voice of the Silence, and again: “The self of matter and the Self of Spirit can never meet. One of the twain must disappear; there is no place for both. Ere the Soul’s mind can understand, the bud of personality must be crushed out, the worm of sense destroyed past resurrection.”

As long as a man clings to his personal life and places his own interests before those of others, he is denying the unity of life. For where the Self is recognized as One, the interests of any one are equally the interests of every other. Hence, to love one’s neighbour as oneself is the only way of life consistent with the recognition of unity, and love, the sense of perfect identification with another, is the fulfilling of the law. The life of spirituality is the life which is lived as though unity were a fact. This explains why Theosophy, which we have chosen to call the Science of Spirituality, was otherwise defined by HPB. She spoke of it as “ALTRUISM,” and insisted that true Theosophy is none other than “the “Great Renunciation of self,” unconditionally and absolutely, in thought as in action.”⁴⁷

This fact, that the clinging to personal existence is the obstacle in the way to the free life of the spirit and that the destruction of the obstacle is necessary for the freeing of the life, is found enshrined in the great death dramas of religion. They illustrate the truth that “the way of self-abnegation, and not the way of self-assertion, is the divinely appointed way to glory and immortality.” The death of all that is personal and separative is the gateway to eternal life, and “self-sacrifice is the only way to self-realization.”⁴⁸ To the student of spirituality, the assurance that the greatest token of love is “that a man lay down his life for his friends” suggests something far more profound and exacting than the sacrifice of the physical body. The whole personality, with all its separative desires and thoughts, all its selfish ambitions which leave the universe out of account, must be yielded up in sacrifice. It was noted earlier that the universe originated in an act of sacrifice, the sacrifice of the life of the Logos to an existence in confining forms. But the consummation of the purpose of that act necessitates a further act of sacrifice, that of the forms to the Life. Hence, the Cross symbol is invested with a twofold significance. While it symbolizes the sacrifice of the divine Life which is “slain from the foundation of the world, dying in very truth that we might live,”⁴⁹ it further symbolizes the sacrifice of the separated individual self, “the way of the Cross” which leads to eternal life.

The transcendence of limiting conditions is the only way to liberation. Pain therefore is seen to serve an intelligible purpose in revealing the presence of some separative factor, some form of selfishness which must be broken. The Self has become identified with a limitation, and it must repudiate the part if it would know the whole. Yet it would perhaps be truer to say that the association with the part, with the limitation, has not to be destroyed but rather utilized as a “dead self” by means of which man may enter into a greater freedom beyond. Jung recognizes the necessity for sacrifice in psychological growth when he states that the opportunity for the widening of consciousness which is offered by each new problem involves also “the necessity of saying good-bye to child-like unconsciousness and trust in nature.”⁵⁰ Increase is bought at the price of apparent loss, and the difficulty lies in the fact that the price must be paid before the comfortable assurance of gain has been proved.

The useful illustration is sometimes given of the little girl who must give up her dolls in order to enter into the richer experiences of adulthood. The sacrifice that is here demanded of her continues to be demanded under different forms throughout human life. The man who wishes to roam freely through the kingdom of thought must abandon his attachment to the thought-patterns with which he has identified himself. To become the universal man he must abandon his parochialism. To reach the freedom of the creative levels of consciousness, he must renounce the comfortable security of the personality. Only on this condition will he be able to prove for himself the truth of statements made by ancient religion and modern psychology alike, that “foregoing self, the Universe grows ‘I,’” and that the only way to more abundant life lies in the renunciation of the limited form of life with which the individual is temporarily identified.

Is it possible to state in a few words the practical outcome of a study of the Science of Spirituality?

In all that concerns the personal life, no more is required than to fulfill the instruction given in *At the Feet of the Master*: to do exactly what is said, to live as though unity were a fact and to love one’s brother as oneself. “If you ask me,” writes HPB in *The Key to Theosophy*, “how we understand Theosophical duty practically and in view of Karma, I may answer you that our duty is to drink without a murmur to the last drop, whatever contents the cup of life may have in store for us, to pluck the roses of life only for the fragrance they may shed on others, and to be ourselves content but with the thorns, if that fragrance cannot be enjoyed without depriving someone else of it.”⁵¹

In the organization of human communities and their complex relationships, the way of action will be seen on analysis to be fundamentally the same. A comparison made by an eminent anthropologist between our Western way of life and that of primitive groups throws light on the problem that confronts contemporary man. Primitive societies are essentially simple: they offer one way of life for all, one code for all, and consequently they are characterized by an enviable absence of problems. A modern civilized community on the other hand presents a picture of extraordinary diversity and conflict: differences of religious and political thought, differences of economic and social organization, differences of moral standards -and all violated - and a complex variety of changing relationships and functions; and everywhere disputes, conflicts, material and psychological problems. At the cost of much unhappiness and dissatisfaction, a more dignified standard of personal relationships has been acquired, and diversity and individuality have been gained by the sacrifice of primitive harmony. It would seem that the next development for man is the attainment of a superior harmony which shall be not the harmony of uniformity but a synthesis of diversity, in which individual differentiation shall contribute to the richness of the total pattern.⁵²

“A civilization,” Smuts has written, “is nothing but a spiritual structure of the dominant ideas expressing themselves in institutions and the subtle atmosphere of culture.” But it will be conceded that the dominant ideas must be furnished in the first place by individuals. If we can place before ourselves constantly the idea of the One

Life, till it dominates our every thought and action, it may be that we shall have the satisfaction of seeing the birth of a world civilization that is an expression, in terms of human institutions and cultures, of the principle of Unity. The change that must be accomplished before this ideal can be realized is essentially a change in human consciousness. But there is reason to suppose that the possibility of such a change is not an idle dream. Sir Richard Gregory has remarked how the progress of the nineteenth century lay not only in the increased command of the material resources of the world, but in the “stupendous awakening to a sense of social responsibility . . . a broadening conception of the relations and obligations of man to man,” which a study of that period reveals. That sense existed already in a limited form in primitive groups, but “within a modern society it may reach out to embrace all members of a great nation, and possibly all men of good will. Man’s social instincts have been extended from family to tribe, nation and empire, and will reach their highest and best when they embrace the world.”⁵³

In addition to the support for this encouraging view that an observation of history provides, there seems to be evidence of yet another kind in the development of parapsychology. We admit with Huxley that “the major ethical problem of our time is to achieve global unity for man.”⁵⁴ The conclusions of Rhine on the far-reaching effect of non-physical investigations would seem extravagant were they not supported both by existing knowledge of evolutionary changes and by the principles of the Ancient Wisdom. Speaking of the need for a co-operative and harmonious spirit in human relations, he continues: “Over the firm ground of research we are moving toward this objective. By the discovery of an experimental sanction for the psycho-centric conception of man we can be brought to think of people all over the world as being more than bodies. We know, on no mere basis of faith, but on evidence, that they have independent minds with true volitional choice in the creative determination of their lives, and have peculiar personal potentialities for unique cultural contributions to the world. Superficial group demarcations of physical character decline in importance as the significance of the inner life of the human mind is recognized. The social binding power of spiritual, as against physical, interrelations among men can be regarded as being fully as real, as effective, as any other power in the universe . . . With the security of experimental evidence behind them, these newer findings about the sciences of mental life should spread over the world as effectively as have the sciences of the body. And surely we must expect that a higher order of fraternal understanding and co-operation will follow them across the oceans and continents, just as better sanitation and health have followed on the trail of knowledge of hygiene and medicine.”⁵⁵

The Science of Spirituality makes intelligible both the problems of human life and the attempts of individuals and of groups to find a satisfying solution. The Ancient Wisdom declares that Life is One, but man, in the valley of the shadow, sees only many-ness and goes from death to death. In separation and in pain he gathers the fruit of individuality; in renunciation and in love he may gather the Wisdom of the Self.

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The Science of Spirituality was the Blavatsky Lecture, delivered at the Annual Convention of The Theosophical Society in England, London, May 28th 1950.

NOTES:

1 The Secret Doctrine. Adyar Edition, I, p. 118

2 Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, III, vii, 23

3 Paul Carus: The Gospel of Buddha, p. 142.

4 Psalms, cxxxix, 7–10.

- 5 Robert Southwell: Of the Blessed Sacrament of the Aulter.
- 6 S.D., I, p. 120.
- 7 J. Krishnamurti: Verbatim Reports of Talks. Auckland, New Zealand, 1934
- 8 op. cit., p. xi.
- 9 op. cit., p. 19.
- 10 Rig Veda, I, cxiv, 26.
- 11 Mundaka Upanishad, I, ii, 3.
- 12 The Wisdom of the Upanishads, p. 18.
- 13 A Besant: The Laws of the Higher Life, p. 47.
- 14 S.D., I, p. 335.
- 15 J Rhoades: Out of the Silence.
- 16 S.D., I, p. 113.
- 17 Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, IV, iv, 23.
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- 20 S.D., V, p. 552.
- 21 W. M. Kranefeldt: Secret Ways of the Mind, p. 77.
- 22 ibid., p. 141.
- 23 J. Smuts: Holism and Evolution, p. 234.
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- 45 S.D., III, p. 444.
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- 47 Practical Occultism, p. 50
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- 50 Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p. 110.
- 51 op. cit., p. 193.
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- 53 Address to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1938.
- 54 Evolution and Ethics, p. 233.
- 55 The Reach of the Mind, p. 177.