

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT

Resolution passed by the General Council of the Theosophical Society

As the Theosophical Society has spread far and wide over the civilized world, and as members of all religions have become members of it without surrendering the special dogmas, teachings and beliefs of their respective faiths, it is thought desirable to emphasize the fact that there is no doctrine, no opinion, by whomsoever taught or held, that is in any way binding on any member of the Society, none which any member is not free to accept or reject. Approval of its three Objects is the sole condition of membership. No teacher or writer, from H. P. Blavatsky downwards, has any authority to impose his teachings or opinions on members. Every member has an equal right to attach himself to any teacher or to any school of thought which he may choose, but has no right to force his choice on any other. Neither a candidate for any office, nor any voter, can be rendered ineligible to stand or to vote, because of any opinion he may hold, or because of membership in any school of thought to which he may belong. Opinions or beliefs neither bestow privileges nor inflict penalties. The members of the General Council earnestly request every member of the Theosophical Society to maintain, defend and act upon these fundamental principles of the Society, and also fearlessly to exercise his own right of liberty of thought and of expression thereof, within the limits of courtesy and consideration for others.

FREEDOM OF THE SOCIETY

*Resolution passed by the General Council of the Theosophical Society
on 30 December 1950*

The Theosophical Society, while co-operating with all other bodies whose aims and activities make such co-operation possible, is and must remain an organization entirely independent of them, not committed to any objects save its own, and intent on developing its own work on the broadest and most inclusive lines, so as to move towards its own goal as indicated in and by the pursuit of those objects and that Divine Wisdom which in the abstract is implicit in the title, The Theosophical Society.

Since Universal Brotherhood and the Wisdom are undefined and unlimited, and since there is complete freedom for each and every member of the Society in thought and action, the Society seeks ever to maintain its own distinctive and unique character by remaining free of affiliation or identification with any other organization.



TO BE A LAMP UNTO ONESELF

N. SRI RAM

IT has been said that the only light that can be shed upon the Path of man's inner progress, whether we call it occult or spiritual, is the light that shines from within. It is the radiance of this light, diffused and dim at first, but becoming clearer and clearer, and turning unearthly at the end, for which the way is prepared by the mindfulness inculcated by every spiritual Teacher and which is one of the facets of the noble Eightfold Path, spoken of by the Buddha. The Pāli word which he used has been translated both as Right Mindfulness and Right Memory. The adjective that is translated as Right can also mean Perfect or Well-Accomplished. Samskrit—this very word means well constructed—and Pāli words, Pāli being a popular form of Samskrit, often have each a number of meanings. Colonel H. S. Olcott, in his Buddhist Catechism, translates the terms used to denote the Eight-fold Path as:

1. Right Belief (as to the law of Causation or Karma);
2. Right Thought; 3. Right Speech; 4. Right Action;
5. Right Means of Livelihood; 6. Right Exertion;
7. Right Remembrance and Self-discipline; 8. Right Concentration of Thought.

The Pāli word which is translated as Right Belief, and sometimes as Right Views, by Western scholars (whose interpretation of such terms is often superficial, being based on philological associations or popular notions) literally

means Right Perception, without which the treading of the Path would have no proper beginning or basis. The second requirement of Right Thought has also been translated as Right Resolve or Determination. There has to be the will that impels to action in the right direction. As the whole of the Buddhist Catechism was gone over carefully by the "High Priest" Sumangala of Ceylon—in Buddhism there are no priests in the Christian sense of the term, but only monks—and approved by him, we may assume that the translations in the Catechism are approximately correct. C. W. Leadbeater, who discussed the teachings with the same Buddhist authorities in Ceylon, translates the seventh requirement (in Pāli *anga*—meaning feature or part) as Right Memory or Right Remembrance and the eighth as Right Meditation or Right Concentration. It is difficult to translate a Samskrit or Pāli word with a philosophical import correctly because it has often different meanings. Perhaps the words were intended to suggest these meanings.

Right Memory has been taken popularly to mean memory of past lives, partly because the Buddha is said to have remembered all his previous lives. This is however a popular interpretation. The common man always seeks the sensational. The Lord Buddha did not expect his hearers or us of later generations to have such a memory, which will come perhaps only at the end of the Path, and it would not help us, as we are, to remember our past lives. If some one has injured me in a past life, I may be thankful that the memory of it has been washed out completely. My relationship with him can now have a new beginning. If all the hurts we have sustained in this life can be similarly washed out, even while we have the same brain and before its death, it would make an extraordinary change in ourselves. At least we would have settled our account with the persons concerned at the inner levels. The excrescence

from there, formed at the outer level, will die out fairly quickly. Secondly, our own brain would be in much better condition and function better.

Right Remembrance can cover many things. We must remember what is necessary or important to remember, particularly to avoid the mistakes we might have made. Some of these mistakes might have been of a serious nature; others, not so important; some might be trifles. We can in our own minds correct the tendencies manifested in those mistakes. Right Mindfulness can have that result. If you make an appointment, you should remember it. Also you should remember those who can or need to be helped by you. In remembering a person, one can remember that side of him which evokes affection or good will, leaving out or not dwelling on the side which rouses other emotions.

Mindfulness must include the giving of one's full attention to whatever one has to do, not overlooking any important points. Obviously this is an all-day business. If one's work is to paint a picture he cannot ignore even a small point. Whatever is done should be as well done as possible, within the limitations of time and available facilities. Mindfulness would cover these limitations also. If you say, I could not post an important letter in time, because I wanted to make my writing as pretty as possible, that would not be sensible. One has to have a sense of proportion, but that is one of those things which would come by itself.

Right mindfulness is a key virtue that opens the door to things unperceived before and therefore ignored. If you say to some one: Have a sense of proportion, he might not even know what it means. Like tolerance, good taste, grace in action, it is a virtue of maturity. It will come naturally as one wakes up inwardly. Paying full attention to whatever it might be, a piece of work, to objects around, to beauty in those objects, to one's behavior, speech, the tone in which

one speaks, to one's thoughts, feelings and reactions, is really a process of waking up.

To see an object as it is, there must be no subjective additions by the mind. It must not interpose its thought. There must be no reaction or mental comment, interfering with the receptivity of the mind. It must be in a negative condition but awake, not asleep or dreaming. Such a condition is like a mirror in which all things are reflected faithfully. First one must see a thing as it is, whether a situation or the condition of one's mind, or any other object of perception; then only there can be a clear comprehension of its nature. The Buddhist monk or aspirant makes a regular practice of such seeing. They call it bare attention, that is, just attention or observation, without coloring or interpretation, without the action of memory in any way. Basing themselves on texts from the Pāli canon, they practise bare attention with regard to all one's activities at the physical and other levels step by step. They begin with breathing, that is, observe the inbreathing, the outbreathing, its quickness, length of time and so on, all about it, not regulating it, as is done in the practice called Prāṇāyāma, but merely observing it. Then they go on to the postures of the body, all aspects of the bodily behavior, how one sits, eats, walks and so forth. As one does so, he ceases to identify himself with the body. *At the Feet of the Master* says: You are not your body. One may accept this as part of a philosophical statement or general theory; but that does not mean we realize that fact. Mindfulness, constantly exercised, is designed to achieve that separation in one's mind to start with. It is then turned towards the sensations pertaining to all senses and then to feelings, one's mental states and the contents of those states. One should be careful in doing this not to get self-involved or self-centred unconsciously. To the extent one is, one should wake up to that condition

and it should also become an object of observation, with a view to freeing oneself from it. Absolute freedom in every sense, in every aspect of one's being, is the aim and purpose of all this.

J. Krishnamurti speaks of the importance of being aware without choice and without any system to which one conforms. He often asks: Can you look at a tree, without bringing your knowledge or memory of it into that act, so that you see it as if for the first time? It is not easy for us to do so, as you will know if you try, because there are one's knowledge and memories deeply fixed in the mind; the consciousness with which we started life has been modified in so many ways. But by trying one can see without the interposition of thought. As with the tree so with other things. In looking at something, the attention must not be concentrated or restricted in such a way as to prevent seeing whatever is connected with it or beyond it. One must see also the conditioning factors. If the will is not brought into the act of seeing, the attention will flow naturally, that is, without strain and not become over-concentrated. According to the Buddhist teaching, this practice of being negatively aware is really the only way, as it means directly experiencing the nature of the thing and will open the mind to many things, a new world, in fact; new, because the mind becomes new; and also it perceives what it had not perceived previously. It sees all things alike without choice and in their true or inward nature, the good as the good, the evil as the evil, the beautiful as the beautiful and the ugly as the ugly. The truth comes into the focus of awareness.

If a man does not have a sense of beauty, does not appreciate that which is truly beautiful, how does he get it? There are people in India, especially among those who make a cult of simplicity, who think that beauty is a

non-essential. It is a frill, connected with sex desire, vanity, opulence and so on. But these ideas are all wrong. To fail to see beauty where it exists, whether in Nature or in man or anywhere else, implies an imperfect or veiled vision. To know real beauty, the soul has to be purged of its impurities, its cravings for pleasure. The soul here means the psyche, the astro-mental entity, not the spiritual soul, which does not admit anything alien to its nature. Interest breeds attention, as we know; when we are interested we easily do things; but also attention brings interest in its wake, and opens the way to insight. When we use the word Insight, how far does it reach? It must apply theoretically to all aspects of Existence and Being. When one's vision is cleared of all hindrances and veils, we cannot tell what revelations will come to him. The Buddhist monks do not, as far as I know, think in terms of Beauty but nevertheless it is an important aspect of Life, as Krishna-murti often points out. The constant awareness would not be an effort, when one gets into the way of it, beginning with near and small things. It would become the basis of self-discipline, as Colonel Olcott indicates, a discipline which is neither rigid nor lax, not ostentatious nor even proclaimed as such. You observe, learn and act intelligently, avoiding the evils to be eliminated, those mentioned in the *Sutta* (the text) for instance, greed, anger and delusion.

In a state of mindfulness you see a condition of greed or some other evil, say envy, in yourself. How will the mere seeing dispel it? One should perceive its nature, how it acts, and that is part of the clear comprehension that comes with attention which is not restricted. One must try to perceive all that there is to perceive about it. If one sees something ugly, it will not strike him as ugly, unless there is a sense of something different, which he calls beautiful. The *Sutta* on Mindfulness says: "How does the monk

contemplate the (working of) mind in mind? He comprehends the mind which has passion and that which has none; which has hatred and that which has none; that which has confusion and that which has none"; and so on, and so forth. In other words, he sees the cloud against the sky and perceives that the cloud is not the sky; that is, the activities of the mind and the condition which they create are not basically the mind in its own proper state. This is discrimination between the Real and the Unreal, the changeless and the changeable.

When the mind not only reflects the forms of things but knows the beautiful as beautiful and the good as the good, that knowledge is the revelation of a subjective depth in itself, a depth in the quality of knowing. In what lies goodness? What it consists in might be as arguable as beauty is to an uncultivated man. But there is a test of goodness and beauty in the very nature of man, when it has been reduced to its pristine and original condition, denuded of all the later formations and without any of the later complications. In other words, it is only a nature which has not been moulded by desire that can see things as they are. Such a nature has an intuition of goodness, as well as beauty, and truth. Real Intuition cannot be cultivated or forced. Intuition is not something that jumps out of a bag.

Why are greed, anger and delusion singled out as the three principal evils? They are evil in a fundamental sense. What is greed? It consists in wanting more and more, the urge to enjoy, experience and appropriate. Wanting more creates in one's psychology a kind of siphon action. It wants more of drink, food, other physical sensations, praise, importance, possessions, pleasure, and security. There are innumerable sensations, by which the mind is captured and held. In this view, ambition is also based

on greed. One may be ambitious to reign as a Dictator or a King. The sensation of being crowned and anointed, of being set above every one else, of receiving the homage of all around, of feeling one's will being instantly obeyed, is not this the basis of that particular ambition? Any kind of avidity for pleasure becomes a form of greed. A dog eats greedily, gulping. What causes it to do so? It is the pleasure in the sensation of eating, possibly whetted by hunger in Eastern countries, where they are so neglected. Anger stands for various forms of repulsion, including the wish to destroy. There is also fear which is a form of repulsion, a cause of suffering, and breeder of other evils, hatred, pretence, lying, and so on. You cannot really love any one whom you fear. Also perfect love casteth out fear. When one seeks nothing for oneself, has killed out love for life and comfort (as says *Light on the Path*) one cannot have any fear. There is delusion in not perceiving all this, which creates a completely erroneous notion about oneself.

When you observe and act intelligently, you achieve freedom from the tendency to follow the habitual grooves at whatever level; you judge freshly and act accordingly. You do not conform in spirit to any external rules but you conform socially or outwardly to the extent that you yourself judge to be good. *At the Feet of the Master* lays down control of mind as a necessary qualification. How to control it? It is controlled through attention and understanding, not by force of will. The control comes naturally, if there is earnestness of purpose. Though one cannot make another earnest one can help him to see the truth.

Right mindfulness, as well as right meditation, also means that state of consciousness, which goes beyond thought, in which there is no thinking. But that will also come naturally.

It has been asked: How does a negative state help others, even if it helps oneself? It helps oneself because it means

peace in oneself and helps perception. Should we not act? The answer to this question is: yes, but what we call action arises largely from the surface of our natures, from a limited perception, often a state of confusion, uncertainties and disturbance. When this condition is brought to an end, then there will arise action from a state of full comprehension, depth and tranquillity. The action that arises from that state, which is negative from our present standpoint, will be action that has great significance, positive in a fundamental sense.

Life is action at all levels. But the action that takes place in us is largely from entrenched ideas, through the meshes of memory. But there is the possibility of action from a basis that has been cleared of these obstructions. That is what is meant by making the mind negative, empty, and so forth. The negative state is not a state in which life ceases to flow; on the contrary, it is the ground or bed from which flow the freshest and purest waters of life. The one Energy, which is Life, as it flows down from its unknown Source, possibly flows through or is characterized by—howsoever we may regard it—a state of consciousness which is like an extraordinary meditation. This is symbolized by the Indian legend that the pure water of the heavenly Ganga is received by Shiva, the great Yogi, who is always in meditation, on his head, and then flows down and outwards into the world. He typifies a state of consciousness which is absolutely untainted and tranquil. It is the state in which that type of perception which has been called the third eye opens and perceives. It sees all things in heaven and earth, including things that “our philosophy does not dream of”.