

LESSON 14

UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD

As these lessons have progressed, a certain continuity of movement from one topic to another may have become apparent. In these lessons, the unity of life was emphasized, and it was pointed out that brotherhood derives from the fact that all life is rooted in the one ultimate Source, however diverse and manifold that may be in its manifestation. Mankind is slowly moving toward a realization of the oneness of life, accepting it first here and there, perhaps, as an intellectual premise but, in increasing numbers, becoming actually aware of its reality. Such an awareness brings about a complete reorientation of attitudes, not only toward fellow humans, but toward all creatures and all kingdoms of nature, for it carries a recognition that all life is divine and that every seemingly separated being or object is but a specialized focus of a consciousness that is one and universal.

It has been said that there could be no shared experience at all, that we would not be able to recognize each other or communicate in any way, if we did not all participate in this unity of conscious being. When the truth of this is realized, one cannot fail to see that brotherhood is as basic and as natural as the shining of the sun and the nurturing processes of the earth. All gradations of consciousness, all degrees of intelligence, are expressions of the One Life. From microbe to man, from atom to angel, the universe is an expression of Deity, by whatever name that Deity may be called. High and low, great and small, “in Him we live and move and have our being.”

The theosophical concept of brotherhood, then, is much more than a humanistic ideal of kindness and consideration for others, essential as that is if men are to live together in harmony and learn compassion toward other living creatures. For, in postulating the One Life as the root of all things and all creatures, Theosophy places the emphasis at the deepest possible level and makes it apparent that the law of brotherhood is as undeviating and as inescapable as the law of gravity or any other natural law. The effects of its violation, so far as the individual is concerned, may not be so immediately apparent, but they are inevitable. The anguished chaos spread over the face of the world today is a direct result of ages of violation of this law. Man’s dawning awareness of the transcendent truth of “the fundamental identity of every soul with the universal Oversoul” and the oneness of human family, has not kept pace with his development of methods of mutual destruction. So he continues to seek in violent ways, and whatever cost to his fellow men, whatever he considers to be his own best interests. Although each has a specific function to serve in the universal scheme of things, we are all in reality members of one body, and injury to one is injury to the whole.

NOTES

Our oneness is no mere metaphor even from a physical

standpoint. Consider for a moment that we all breathe the same air, and no one can say at what point the air he breathes in becomes a part of him; some of the oxygen is carried in around the red blood cells, and then carbon dioxide is breathed out into the atmosphere. We are constantly taking from and contributing to the same atmosphere and no one knows at what point the one becomes the other. Even the carbon atoms which are a part of any one of us may in a moment be a part of someone else! The slums of a city may be filthy and unsanitary, harboring diseased people and forming breeding places for epidemics. This condition is a menace to the entire city, no matter how safe and separate other citizens may believe themselves to be. We are discovering, also, that breeding grounds of injustice and prejudice can blight a whole city in a moral way, for the law of brotherhood operates at the moral as well as at the physical level.

All men are equal in their divine origin and identity, although there are vast inequalities of circumstance and wide ranges of evolutionary development. The lessons on reincarnation and karma dealt with these inequalities, and other lessons, have touched upon the factor of egoic development. Some may have individualized earlier than others; also some have traveled faster and learned their lessons more readily, so that they have outstripped many of their original contemporaries. Some make the swift but rigorous climb up the mountain of achievement, while others choose the gentler but longer winding route. It is well to remember, however, the words of the divine Sri Krishna in The Bhagavad Gita: "However men approach Me, even so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side is Mine."

The best illustration of brotherhood is found in a normal devoted family, where the older members guide and help the younger without any feeling of superiority or contempt. Family weal or woe affects each individual, and the sorrow or happiness of one member spreads throughout the group. All are bound together by a community of interest and affection. The family of man is meant to manifest the same sense of mutual belonging.

It is, of course, obvious that human evolution is far from complete, and throughout human history the manifestations of brotherhood have been spasmodic and fragmentary. When man first appeared on the world scene, his primary interest was himself, and self-preservation was his overweening concern. It cannot be said that he has yet freed himself from this cramping bondage. But slowly his interest spread to include the care of the young in the family group, thus providing for the continuation of the species. Then, ties of loyalty expanded to include larger units of clan or race or religion. The great Teachers of mankind have ever sought to awaken the unifying sense of a common life, a larger self, within the widest possible circle, but man has often interpreted this to mean only his fellow-believers, and the limited brotherhood of the faith has been stressed at the expense of a more universal and

inclusive
brotherhood. The
concept of

the good Samaritan, who was willing to sacrifice to help someone not of his own people, was new even as late as the time of Jesus and thus was used by him to form a dramatic lesson.

As eons have passed and as the evolutionary path has been traveled by millions of pilgrims, the concept of brotherhood has slowly expanded. At one time, for example, it was not considered immoral to buy and sell slaves and even to treat them cruelly. Then it began to seem desirable not to ill-treat them, although not necessarily wrong to own them. The next step was to question the moral right of one human being to own another, and now slavery, while perhaps not entirely extinct on our globe, is outlawed in practically every country. Those who in former incarnations may have practiced it as a matter of course, have advanced farther along the path and now view it with horror.

The “one world” concept has gained in acceptance through accelerating means of communication, the commercial benefits of increasing international trade, and the common cultural interests of people everywhere. Nations are no longer wholly independent of each other. Even countries geographically remote from each other are now less than a day’s travel apart and may communicate instantaneously. Telstar links the continents and what happens in one country affects all others.

Even the eruption of hostilities between the races is considered by some a prelude to a more universal recognition of man’s essential oneness; the violence in which it has so often found expression is the dark end of the spectrum of human relationships; at the other end increasing numbers are realizing the light of brotherhood and good will. Man’s inhumanity to man is far from being eradicated from this planet but, as one views the plan of evolution, realizing that each of us inevitably reaps what he sows and thus learns the lessons of his sowing, one can glimpse a future in which the recognition of man’s interdependence and mutual responsibility for the welfare of all will become the warp and woof of human effort, replacing the blind hostilities and brutalities which we have not yet outgrown. The conviction that this will come about inevitably does not excuse us from unceasing effort to bring it about as swiftly as possible, for it is man himself who must achieve it; it cannot be superimposed upon him by some deity.

In The Voice of the Silence, in the section called “The Seven Portals”, the pilgrim is told that he must be prepared to answer certain questions. One is, “Hast thou attuned thy heart and mind to the great mind and heart of all mankind?” Compassion, a virtue taught by both the Buddha and the Christ, is the last great virtue that must be completely attained by every aspirant. To be “in full accord with all that lives, bear love to men as though they were thy brother -pupils, disciples of one Teacher, and sons of one sweet mother” is demanded of the earnest pilgrim on the age-old path. Not one of us knows

where he
is on this
path in
relation to
any other.

We have been where the least spiritually-developed now struggles; we shall be where the spiritual giant moves. In between are innumerable gradations, not fixed points of progress, but rather, stepping stones to greater achievement. Therefore it ill behooves us to judge one another. We share a common source, a common struggle, and a common destiny. This is the stark reality which, as yet, mankind has not realized in sufficient numbers to bring peace to a sorely troubled world.

The test of human brotherhood is a severe one, but man has still another test of brotherhood to face: that of his oneness with all life, in whatever form it may be manifesting. He is the elder brother of the other kingdoms of nature, and therefore he is karmically responsible for his exploitation of the total resources of nature, and of the animal kingdom in particular. For anyone who accepts the validity of the concept of the one life, there can be no compromise over the deliberate infliction of pain or other cruelty to animals. Reverence for all life usually becomes an increasing motivation toward an ethic of harmlessness for those who endeavor to apply theosophical principles to their lives.

Again, in The Voice of the Silence, we find the passage: “Compassion speaks and saith: ‘Can there be bliss when all that lives must suffer? Shalt thou be saved and hear the whole world cry?’ ”. These words are spoken as the enlightened soul reaches the end of the journey and can, if he so elects, be released from the wheel of rebirth. But the voice asks if the soul is content to leave his fellow men suffering. For here he makes the choice either to cross the gate to freedom or hearken to the voice of humanity and return to help; to remain “unselfish to the end.” Compassion is the last virtue to be called upon before freedom is attained. Knowledge can be used for good or evil, but compassion is the right step. The practice of brotherhood is the true expression of our egoic awareness of the unity of life and of our own roots in that Oneness.

The Master K.H. wrote this to A.P. Sinnett: “The term, ‘Universal Brotherhood’ is no idle phrase. Humanity in the mass has a paramount claim upon us... It is the only secure foundation for universal morality. If it be a dream, it is at least a noble one for mankind: and it is the aspiration of the true adept.”

References:

“*A Theosophical View of Human Races*,” (A Theosophical leaflet free from the Society for the asking.)

The Nature of Our Seeking, N. Sri Ram

The Human Interest, N.Sri Ram

*The Great
Vision,
Annie
Besant
Brotherho
od: A*

Series of Addresses, G.S. Arundale

Also see Letter 1 from the Mahachohan in *Letters from the Masters of Wisdom*, First Series. C. Jinarajadasa. p.2

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 1) Explain what is meant by the immanence of God.
- 2) Why is universal brotherhood said to be an inevitable corollary of the immanence of God?
- 3) Discuss the statement that an injury to one human being is an injury to the whole of humanity. Give illustrations.
- 4) Does the brotherhood of mankind mean sameness? Explain and illustrate.
- 5) What is the theosophical attitude toward the lower kingdoms of nature?
- 6) What difference might the acceptance and practice of the principle of brotherhood make in our attitude toward business? Education? Political problems? Race relations? Labor problems? Substitute, if you wish, any other issue which interests you and apply to it the principle of universal brotherhood. What changes might be brought about in present conditions?