

WHAT IS TRULY THEOSOPHICAL SERVICE?

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I would like to begin with a quote from the poem 'An Essay on Man' by the 18th Century English poet, Alexander Pope:

*God Loves from Whole to Parts: but human soul
Must rise from Individual to the Whole.
Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
The centre mov'd, a circle strait succeeds,
Another still, and still another spreads,
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace,
His country next, and next all human race,
Wide and more wide, th' o'erflowings of the mind
Take ev'ry creature in, of ev'ry kind.*

*'God Loves from Whole to Parts: but human soul
Must rise from Individual to the Whole.'*

We have all slept in the mineral, stirred in the plant kingdom, awakened as animals, and now think fully as human beings. We have had an incredible range of experience, which in itself is service to the Whole, and now we realise that we have to prepare ourselves for the journey home.

*'Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;'*

This small pebble makes me think of all the nudges we get that try and get us to stir from our half-awake existence. Just to realise that there is more to us than meets the eye is a big breakthrough.

When we begin to get to know that other, divine part of ourselves, our true Self, this Self-love gives rise to virtues which lie deep within us, which develop from our pure nature and gradually change how we think, speak and act.

What happens is that the fundamental truths that we read and hear of begin to become something that we know and experience for ourselves. But that alone is not enough, we want to share it with others; through service we can help others, as well as ourselves.

If the parts are to become the Whole once again then brotherhood is a must. And it is all very well feeling love and fellowship for our friends, relatives and those in other countries even, but what about the homeless, the drunkard and the thief? Can we feel love for them? I suggest we can, and that it will help them.

Deepak Chopra suggests that we try saying 'Namaste', mentally, to people that we meet. It is at that high spiritual level that we are equal.

I am in a choral society and as in most groups there are certain people whom the other members dislike for some reason. All their judgement and criticism, behind the person's back, can cause a bad atmosphere that maybe they are not aware of. Gradually I have found it easier not to say anything or to find something good to say about the person. What is more, I go out of my way to be friendly to them. I seriously feel that it makes a

difference to everybody involved and it is worth being thought a bit of an oddball; I am a Theosophist after all! If all this sounds a bit 'holier than thou', then I can tell you that it is humbling.

Sri Ram wrote: "You influence the world even by your private thoughts and the feelings you nurse in the sanctum of your heart, your judgements on others, your aims and aspirations. There is nothing so private that it does not touch others directly or indirectly."

Pope creates a lovely image of rippling circles gradually including more and more of humanity; he even, unlike most writers, includes the animal kingdom – every creature, of every kind. I like to think of 'th' o'er flowings of the mind' as being compassion; love which involuntarily flows from our hearts and minds to those that suffer.

We can help our fellow creatures by not eating food that has been produced using cruel methods; not supporting charities that are involved in vivisection and other cruel experiments; and doing our best to tread on the earth lightly when it comes to the clothes we wear, cosmetics, household cleaners and so on that we use. There are so many ways to help.

Again we could say that we are very choosy when it comes to what we love in the animal kingdom. Tigers? Ah yes, very beautiful. Kittens? Oh, so sweet. Dogs? Man's best friend – and how dare they eat them in Taiwan! Slugs? Ugh! Slimy, horrible things. Warthogs? Oh, so ugly. How we love to judge nature.

A Kabbalist mystic taught that all observable things are reflected in a higher world and that no thing or person survives independently on any plane of existence, no matter how high. Anyone determined to elevate their own soul is therefore automatically committing themselves to elevate every sentient, even insentient, entity in God's creation.

Humans are supposed to be giving a helping hand to their fellow travellers in the other kingdoms, but we tend to give them a hard time. Not only do we create artificially massive populations of animals to satisfy our palates, we destroy huge tracts of the world's forests, to grow food for these animals or produce palm oil. There are also vast areas covered with mono-cultures of genetically messed-about crops.

A hundred years ago Indian physicist and plant physiologist Dr Jagdish Chandra Bose showed that plants react in many ways to external stimuli, including thoughts and feelings. Yet people still think it is odd to talk nicely to plants! Today, the Japanese scientist Dr Masaru Emoto has found that seeds that are told how beautiful they are do a lot better than seeds that are told they are a fool. The water that was given to the plants was given the same messages.

In Dr Emoto's books about the hidden messages in water he shows how the crystal formations in water vary from malformed and fragmented, to beautiful and well-formed, depending on the type of thoughts and feelings, sounds and music etc. to which the water is exposed. Not only does this show that the vibration of good words has a positive effect on our world and that negative words have the power to destroy, but, as our bodies are 70% or more water, just imagine what we are doing to our health and that of others when we hold or show negative feelings. The most beautiful crystal formations in water are created by love and gratitude.

Earlier in Pope's poem, he describes the whole vast chain of being. He actually includes 'Nature aethereal', that is the spirit world, angels, and 'what no eye can see'. John Milton, a century before, wrote:

*'Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth
Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep.'*

There is a whole hierarchy of beings without which our very existence would be impossible. We are continually, though perhaps unconsciously, touching, sensing and feeling the invisible life that is around us, taking part in the celestial as well as the terrestrial realms of creation. The veil between the visible and the invisible aspects of Nature is gradually growing thinner. We are entering an age when we will all see and know far more than

we do now. Now we are on our spiritual journey home we must learn to co-operate with angels, so that we can assist them in guiding humanity.

It is quite useless expecting contact with angels if we never think of them, nor speak to them; also tuning in to the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms brings us in direct contact with their work and also attracts their attention. A reverence for the kingdoms of nature and the recognition of work done by nature-spirits and angels can all be part of our service.

Scottish author Alexander McCall Smith has written a wonderful series of books about the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency in Botswana. Here is what the chief character Mma Ramotswe has to say about life:

The world is composed of big things and small things. The big things are written large, and one cannot but be aware of them – wars, oppression, the familiar theft by the rich and the strong of those simple things that the poor need, those scraps which would make their lives more bearable; this happens and can make even the reading of a newspaper an exercise in sorrow. There are all those unkindnesses, palpable, daily, so easily avoidable; but one cannot think just of those, or one would spend one's time in tears – and the unkindnesses would continue. So the small things come into their own: small ways of making one's life better; acts of love, acts of tea, acts of laughter.

Acts of tea? Yes, Mma Ramotswe drinks a lot of redbush tea! Perhaps we can make our acts of love acts of Tosophy, showing by the way we live that service is love in action.

Truly theosophical service entails striving towards purity in thought, word and deed, with the motive of helping our fellow pilgrims, in all the manifested kingdoms. So, let us drop a small pebble into the peaceful lake and one day, when we are transformed, may we all slip as dewdrops into the shining sea.

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