

THE UNITY OF LIFE

The Wisdom tradition known in the West as Theosophy and in the East as Brahma-vidya affirms the unity of all life. This means that, behind and within the manifold world of our experience, there is a single Reality. All existences, however lowly or lofty in the scale of being, derive their life from this one source; more than that, they are themselves that Reality, though variously disguised and differentiated by the conditions of the evolutionary process. From this basic principle that all life is one, it follows that the innermost part of man also is of the nature of Reality. If we speak of the one Life as God, we recognize the identity of the human spirit with the source of all things by saying that man is divine. Such is the affirmation of the ancient tradition, and such too is the affirmation of saints and seers in the East and West who have experienced its truth.

THE WAY OF DIRECT KNOWLEDGE

There is an important difference between the declarations of the ancient Wisdom and much religious teaching. Whereas the latter is often presented as a matter of faith, to be accepted as a revelation or on authority, Theosophy asserts both the necessity for, and the possibility of, direct discovery of truth by each for himself. Man must, and can, come to know the truth of his own nature by and for himself, without intermediary.

The way to Self-discovery is variously named. It is the unitive way, for it leads to the reunion of the exiled spirit with the 'Father in heaven', the one Spirit that sent him forth. It is the way of illumination, for at its end, all obstacles are removed and the light of Truth is directly perceived. It is

the divine Adventure, for the soul sets out to trace the river of life to its source, exploring the unknown depths of his own being. In India, where the existence of this way has always been openly taught, it is called Yoga, and it is under this name that it is now known in the West also.

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YOGA

Yoga is a Sanskrit word meaning union, It implies the union of the separated human consciousness with the universal Consciousness, the life of all. The term is used to embrace a variety of methods all directed towards the same end, God-realization. In Hinduism these methods have distinctive names according to their differing emphasis or peculiar technique. Hatha Yoga, which has been widely popularized in the West as a cult of health, aims to achieve purity and control of the physical body as a preparation for the practice of mental quiet. Bhakti Yoga aims to redirect energy towards the supreme goal by the practice of devotion. Jnana Yoga leads to the illuminative experience by means of the disciplined intellect. There are other methods too, but all methods culminate in, and are synthesized by, Raja Yoga, the royal or kingly way to Self-realization.

Although yoga is found in association with religious beliefs and practices, it is not itself a religion. It is essentially a process, a technique, a method, and may be practised equally either within or outside a religious system. It is a strictly scientific process based on laws of nature whose operations have been established by experiment and may be corroborated by experience.

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE MIND

The chief obstacle of man's awareness of his divine nature lies in his own mental processes. In the course of his long evolution, mind has evolved in response to stimuli from the external world. Sensation and feeling, provoked by contact with the environment, have activated mind and given rise to thought. But this thought, in many of us, remains involved in the world of external objects and is largely limited in its functioning by our past experiences.

The traditional wisdom that underlies all yoga systems includes a detailed psychology far more comprehensive than any as yet elaborated by modern psychologists in the West. The mind, according to this system, has another mode of functioning besides that provoked from without by sensory experience. If its habitual tendency to react to external stimuli can be checked, so that it becomes quiet, it will take upon itself the likeness of the interior Reality. While engrossed in activity, it remains unresponsive to the inner world; with the cessation of activity, the still mind becomes as a clear mirror reflecting 'the unearthly Self beyond, unguessed, untold'.

MEDITATION: THE PRACTICE OF MENTAL QUIET

Meditation is the term generally used to cover various methods whose ultimate aim is communion with Reality by the liberation of the earth-bound mind. Consequently, it forms an integral part of all genuine yoga systems. In Raja Yoga, instruction in meditation is preceded by a careful ethical preparation and a physical discipline that cannot be omitted without risk.

Although the process of stilling the mind is gradual and continuous, different phases can be distinguished and distinctive terms used to describe them; In the initial stage, the area of mental activity is reduced to a minimum and the mind is held within this restricted area. This is achieved by the practice of concentration. In the next phase, a thorough exploration of the area of attention is made; the mind is allowed to move, but its movement is strictly controlled. The term meditation is frequently applied to this phase, as well as to the total process. Up to this point, subject and object—the thinker and the object of his thought—have remained as distinct elements in the meditative experience. The final stage is reached when the distinction between subject and object is transcended in an experience of unity,

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THEOSOPHY, YOGA AND MEDITATION

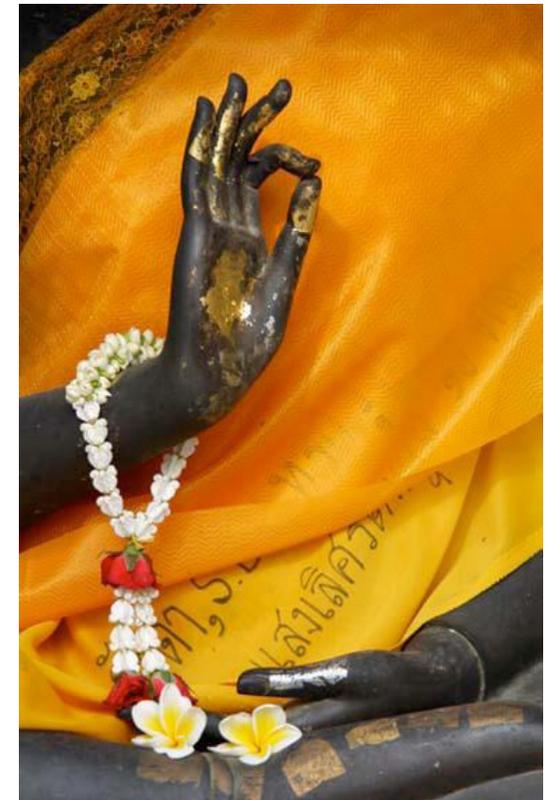
To sum up; Theosophy, God-Wisdom, outlines the vast scheme of life in which we are involved. A study of this map of existence shows the long route by which consciousness has evolved through the pre-human stages to man as he is; it also shows the route that may be travelled by individuals towards the goal of Self-realization. This route is the way of yoga. The traveller may choose his own rate of progress and has some choice in the method of his travelling. But since the journey is essentially within; all methods must ultimately merge into the practice of meditation. Thus, and only thus, shall we break through the mind-barrier and come to experience the liberating truth of our identity with Reality: THAT art thou.

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