

*Selfishness is the cause
of all sin and suffering*



*Abstract*¹

If people could see that life on this earth, even the happiest, is but a burden and an illusion, that it is but our own Karma, the cause producing the effect, that is our own judge, our saviour in future lives, then the struggle for life will soon lose its intensity.

Might is not right, it is “the triumph of the most unprincipled.” When vanity and selfishness hinder Nature’s ultimate possibility, they sow the seeds of their ultimate disintegration. This is the destiny of the callous and the spiritually selfish.

“Disciples may be likened to the strings of the soul-echoing Vīnā; mankind, unto its sounding board; the hand that sweeps it to the tuneful breath of the Great World Soul. The string that fails to answer ’neath the Master’s touch in dulcet harmony with all the others, breaks and is cast away.” And the reckless schoolboy cannot be being helped, because it acknowledges no master.

The main cause of pain lies in our personality seeking the permanent in the impermanent. Animals do not suffer so keenly as human beings, and do not remember suffering. Only those who dare to lift the veil of illusion can soon stand beyond all pain, all misery, and beyond all the wear and tear of change, which is the chief originator of pain.

Mutual toleration and charity for each other’s shortcomings; mutual help in the research of truths in every domain, moral or physical and even, in daily life — these are the hallmarks of a True Theosophist.



¹ Frontispiece by Colombian street artist G. Leo

Good heavens! Was there ever anything so foolish as a man to be in love with himself without a rival to dispute his claims?

— CICERO¹

If people could “see that life on this earth, even the happiest, is but a burden and an illusion, that it is but our own Karma, the cause producing the effect, that is our own judge, our saviour in future lives,” then the struggle for life will soon lose its intensity.

Why has that [curse known as the] struggle [of life] become the almost universal scheme of the universe? We answer: because no religion, with the exception of Buddhism has hitherto taught a practical contempt for this earthly life, while each of them, always with that one solitary exception, has through its hells and damnations inculcated the greatest dread of death. Therefore do we find that “struggle for life” raging most fiercely in Christian countries, most prevalent in Europe and America. It weakens in the pagan lands, and is nearly unknown among Buddhist populations. . . . Teach the people to see that life on this earth, even the happiest, is but a burden and an illusion, that it is but our own Karma, the cause producing the effect, that is our own judge, our saviour in future lives — and the great struggle for life will soon lose its intensity.²

Might is not right,

Although might is *really* right in our age of dissembling and of unexampled Selfishness, there may be something worse in store for those who fail to do the right thing by an oppressed sister.³

it is “the triumph of the most unprincipled.”

. . . this world of incessant strife, in which the “survival of the fittest” seems to mean the triumph of the most unprincipled . . .⁴

When vanity and selfishness hinder Nature’s ultimate possibility, they sow the seeds of their ultimate disintegration.

A study of the Law of Cosmic Evolution teaches us that the higher the evolution, the more does it tend towards Unity. In fact, Unity is the ultimate possibility of Nature, and those who through vanity and selfishness go against her purposes, cannot but incur the punishment of total annihilation. The Occultist thus recognises that unselfishness and a feeling of universal philanthropy are the inherent law of our being, and all he does is to attempt to destroy the chains of selfishness forged upon us all by *Maya*.⁵

¹ Cicero: *Epistolæ ad Q. Fratrem* 3, 84; (O dii quam ineptus! quam se ipse amans sine rivali! — said of Pompey.) — *King’s Quotations*

² *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY: ITS MISSION AND ITS FUTURE) X p. 80 *fn.* (excerpt from “View of the Chohan of the TS,” received probably in 1880 through Master KH.)

³ *ibid.*, (OUR CHRISTIAN XIXth CENTURY ETHICS) X p. 86; [on the Queen Nathalie of Serbia.]

⁴ *ibid.*, (OCCULT PHENOMENA) II p. 490

⁵ *ibid.*, (IS THE DESIRE TO “LIVE” SELFISH?) VI pp. 243-44

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lous and the spiritually selfish.**

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**And the reckless schoolboy
cannot be being helped,
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**“The main cause of pain lies
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The Pratyeka-Buddha, the Buddha of Selfishness — called because of this spiritual selfishness “the rhinoceros,” the solitary animal — can never pass beyond the third plane, that of Jīva. Such a one has conquered, indeed, his material desires, but he has not yet freed himself from his *mental* and *spiritual* longings. It is the Buddha of Compassion only that can transcend this third macrocosmic plane.¹

. . . physical man is the musical instrument, and the Ego, the performing artist. The potentiality of perfect melody of sound, is in the former — the instrument — and no skill of the latter can awaken a faultless harmony out of a broken or badly made instrument. The harmony depends on the fidelity of transmission, by word or act, to the objective plane, of the unspoken divine thought in the very depths of man’s subjective or inner nature. Physical man may . . . be a priceless Stradivarius, or a cheap and cracked fiddle, or again a mediocrity between the two, in the hands of the Paganini who ensouls him.³

. . . the more I see of our national faults and miseries, the more they resolve themselves into conditions of childish illiterateness, and want of education in the most ordinary habits of thought. It is, I repeat, not vice, not selfishness, not dullness of brain, which we have to lament; but an unreachable schoolboy’s recklessness, only differing from the true schoolboy’s in its incapacity of being helped, because it acknowledges no master.⁴

. . . and not only seeking, but acting as if we had already found the unchangeable in a world of which the one certain quality we can predicate is constant change, and always, just as we fancy we have taken a firm hold upon the permanent, it changes within our very grasp, and pain results. . . . Again, the idea of growth involves also the idea of disruption, the inner being must continually burst through its confining shell or encasement, and such a disruption must also be accompanied by pain, not physical but mental and intellectual.⁵

¹ Blavatsky *Collected Writings*, (E.S. INSTRUCTION No. IV) XII p. 659

² *Voice of the Silence*, frag. III vs. 226, p. 51

³ Blavatsky *Collected Writings*, (GENIUS) XII p. 15

⁴ John Ruskin: *Sesame and Lilies*. (3rd ed. of 1871) Lecture I. Sesame — Of Kings’ Treasuries, ¶ 40

⁵ Blavatsky *Collected Writings*, (SPIRITUAL PROGRESS) VI pp. 331-32

“Animals do not suffer so keenly as human beings, and do not remember suffering,”

. . . unless reminded by the sight of the instruments of their pain, as for instance when a thrashed dog sees a whip. Animals again are almost immediately reincarnated in higher animal organisms. *Suffering* moreover, is the cause of knowledge, so that the incarnating entity gains experience, although the organism is tortured to death. Again physical suffering is on the lowest and most Māyāvic plane, so that the animals although often suffering tortures physically, are free from the deeper miseries, with which sometimes man, even supposing him in perfect health and in the midst of luxury, is crucified unceasingly. Indeed, when reflecting on such problems and on the awful horrors of vivisection, we may sometimes be inclined to feel more sorrow for the vivisector than for his pain-racked victim . . . ¹

Only those who dare to lift the veil of illusion can “soon stand beyond all pain, all misery, and beyond all the wear and tear of change, which is the chief originator of pain.”

If man by suppressing, if not destroying, his selfishness and personality, only succeeds in knowing himself as he is behind the veil of physical Māyā, he will soon stand beyond all pain, all misery, and beyond all the wear and tear of change, which is the chief originator of pain. Such a man will be physically of matter, he will move surrounded by matter, and yet he will live beyond and outside it. His body will be subject to change, but he himself will be entirely without it, and will experience everlasting life even while in temporary bodies of short duration. All this may be achieved by the development of unselfish universal love of Humanity, and the suppression of personality, or *selfishness*, which is the cause of all sin, and consequently of all human sorrow.²

“Mutual toleration and charity for each other’s shortcomings; mutual help in the research of truths in every domain, moral or physical, and even, in daily life” – these are the hallmarks of a True Theosophist.

The Founders [of the Theosophical Society] had to exercise all their influence *to oppose selfishness of any kind*, by insisting upon sincere, fraternal feelings among the Members — at least outwardly; working for it to bring about a spirit of unity and harmony, the great diversity of creeds notwithstanding; expecting and demanding from the Fellows, a great mutual toleration and charity for each other’s shortcomings; mutual help in the research of truths in every domain — moral or physical — and even, in daily life.³

¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (CRUELTY TO ANIMALS) XII p. 239

² *ibid.*, (E.S. INSTRUCTION No. I) XII pp. 537-38

³ *ibid.*, (“ORIGINAL PROGRAMME” MANUSCRIPT) VII p. 147

It is personal selfishness that develops and urges man on to abuse of his knowledge and power. And selfishness is a human building, whose windows and doors are ever wide open for every kind of iniquity to enter into man's soul.¹



Apotheosis of War (1871) Vasily Vereshchagin, Moscow



For the miseries of worldly life and sufferings from infancy to old age, see H.H. Wilson (tr. & Annot.). *The Vishnu Purana: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition*. Vol. II. (1st ed. 1864); Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1980; Bk. VI ch. v, pp. 891 *et seq.*

For tips and hints for overcoming selfishness, see *Compassion* (2009), ch. 8, "Tips for Pilgrim Souls."

¹ Blavatsky *Collected Writings*, (THE SECRECY OF INITIATES) XIV p. 41