

*Irreverence, Profanity,  
Flippancy*



From Bhagavan Das. *The Science of the Emotions*. Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1924 (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), pp. 224-26. A searchable PDF of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. of 1908 can be found in our Constitution of Man Series.

**I**RREVERENCE, PROFANITY, FLIPPANCY, are incipient Fear plus the desire to belittle, so as to remove the element that causes the fear, in conversation with others; and also thereby to gain for oneself the consciousness of increase, in contrast with the belittlement of the other. They are distinguishable from that good-humoured and easy talk which is due simply to the fact that the speaker is more familiar with the subject than others, and therefore moves therein or thereabout with greater ease. A loyal “subject” may speak of the sovereign whom he has never seen and reveres from a distance as “His Majesty,” and never in any more familiar fashion.<sup>1</sup> A minister who is less removed from him, speaks of him as the king, or even by name. In both, the emotion is on the side of Love. But neither may speak of a genuine king as “the figure-head of the state.” There, the emotion would be on the wrong side, and so a case of flippancy, assuming, of course, that the king did not really deserve such a title. In the first case we have the familiarity of affection; in the second, of contempt. The so-called deadening of any emotion, with reference to any object, by repetition of contact with that object, wherever it really occurs, is due to the fact that other subsidiary emotions, such as that of surprise, *etc.* which are peculiar to every *new* experience, do not arise in the repetition of it and therefore the total general stimulation or excitement is less.<sup>2</sup> The matter might be put thus in other words:

It is not so much that “the emotions blunt themselves by repetition,”<sup>3</sup> as that the same circumstances, generally speaking, do not arouse the same amount of emotion a second time, for even if all the other circumstances be present, the element of surprise, which startles and arrests the attention and so makes the impression deeper, is wanting; but if there is a cumulation of *new* pleasures or pains, additional soft caresses or petty annoyances, then we have a corresponding cumulative effect in the resultant emotion; “desires grow with what they feed upon, as fire with fuel” and “love groweth out of association,” *etc.*



<sup>1</sup> It may be noted that the word “subject” (from *sub*, under, and *jacere*, to throw), is inherently ugly. It means the “down-trodden,” and is necessarily in contrasting relation with a tyrannical despot as “sovereign.” There is no word in Sanskrit corresponding to “subject.” *Prajā*, the people, means, etymologically, the “progeny” of Brahmā, the *Prajā-pati*, the Creator, the Protector of the “progeny”; and *rājā*, the king, etymologically means “the pleaser” of the people. It is obvious that “loyalty” from “subject” to “sovereign” is absurdly impossible to give and viciously arrogant to ask for. The high word “loyalty,” lealty, legality, means “lawful” *reciprocal* love and duty between People and Protector, between Public and Public Servant. One-sided loyalty is a sin. The king owes, if possible, even more loyalty to the citizen than the citizen to the king, or other head of the state, the chief public servant.

<sup>2</sup> See, on this point, Goethe’s view, quoted in that generally very useful work, by Höffding, *Outlines of Psychology*, p. 282:

When we have such a [fine] sight for the first time, the unaccustomed soul expands, and there is a painful happiness, an excess of delight, which stirs the soul and draws out blissful tears. Through this process the soul becomes greater without knowing it and is no longer capable of that first sensation. Man thinks he has lost, but he has gained; what he loses in pleasure, he gains in inner growth.

But this seems still to require further explanation, as in the text above.

<sup>3</sup> James, *Principles of Psychology*, II p. 475