

# On the Watch-Tower

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## **The Importance of Social Change**

As people in the world think that efficiency is increasing, or should increase, the place of ethics in life is pushed down. Children are being educated to get good jobs, and make a success of their effort irrespective of whether what they do is right or wrong. The question of what is right, or what is very different from the right, bothers them little. In an article on the subject printed in the *Guardian Weekly*, we are told about some questions asked of students in class ten. The children saw matters largely in terms of how to get a job, which is the real reason why they feel they must acquire social skills. When asked whether that was the only point, most of them said 'Yes, what else is there?' If this is the attitude of supposedly educated persons, what can we expect of people as a whole. In another article, the author says that altruism may have been an important mechanism for our ancestors at a particular stage of their evolution, and may also be a key to our survival today. So that is what we think of altruism — a means to a selfish end.

Ethics has been given an important place in the study of philosophy, but it has become merely theoretical. There is less and less concern for an ethical perception

of what happens in a person's immediate surroundings, or in the world as a whole. Ethics, in fact, is considered unimportant as a practice, although it may still have a place in the study of philosophy.

In Greece and India, perhaps also in some other civilizations it had a different place. It was no doubt part of a philosophical background, but more than anything else it was the basis of living in a way which would make human beings deserve the name 'human'. Animals of course do not have to practise ethics, they have a moral code of their own. But the human being, who has the ability to think has the right and duty to decide how he wants to live; and the philosophies of some countries, including those named above, gave an understanding in regard to the matter.

A time comes when the ethical consideration is unconsciously, and naturally, practised in life. A really fully grown and inwardly mature human being cannot be free of considerations related to the ethics of whatever he faces. The matter is before him and he must decide whether it is right or only important to be successful. Such questions do not trouble him, but teach him in a way which other questions do not. Ethics is a part of life — an important

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part — for someone becoming worthy of his position as a human being, and commanding more power than a person who is unaware.

An ethical consciousness leads human beings to the religious feeling. The religious feeling is awareness of the sacred nature in all things. It is hidden in the case of most people, but exists all the same. It is difficult to describe what it is, but its importance can be felt by anyone who has experienced it. So whether it is in cutting down a plant, hurting a human being or in the most complicated relationships, it has a place. But the feeling has to come by beginning to understand the importance of the right attitude and right feeling towards everything, and the hidden value of such understanding.

What is right? This is a discovery that only the human being can make. It is not related to one's personal favourites nor does it condemn enemies to go ahead. It has to be known to be appreciated. Much of life in the early stages consists in discovering the ethical element through the confusing issues that may crop up. A person who is ethically conscious becomes untouched by personal feelings. He looks at matters from a higher point of view.

This higher point of view is what carries a human being forward to the world of goodness, love and wisdom. It is therefore important to start learning what is ethical. It has been said by some wise people that everything in life is for the good, for everything can teach what is good and what is not. So we may say that life is lived not in order to be

successful, to go ahead, be appreciated and so on, but to discover what is truly righteous. When life is looked at in this way perhaps it also reduces suffering, because a person realizes that all is in fact good. In every individual there are points of imperfection that have to be seen, and from which lessons can be learnt.

### The Watchful Attitude

It is always difficult to know what is right or wrong, because what is right for a less developed person might not be right for a more advanced individual. And so who is to decide? Naturally this must be the concern of everyone who begins to be aware of what is right and what is not. Before such awareness enters his mind he is rather like an animal, and does whatever seems advantageous at the moment.

Being in the Theosophical Society, a person is presumed to have reached the point where he thinks of not only what is right from his personal point of view, but what is beneficial to a larger and ever increasing number of people. A time comes when he thinks of the good of all people, and of all creatures, who are in the world. Perhaps he reaches a level when he is concerned with the good, not only of creatures who are living at the moment, but even of those who are supposedly dead. He may know that the body is dead, but that which inhabits the body is not. In the Theosophical Society, we expect people to be concerned with how they are living. It is a way which causes benefit to others, even to others whom one never sees, or only to those whom one perceives

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physically. We come to a stage when we are aware of many things, even though we cannot see or hear them. When saying this, one must be very cautious, because one can apply this principle in a wrong way. One can presume all kinds of things about people and things who have never been seen, saying what passes through the mind, but is not correct. It becomes more or less what we may call an invention. Most lies are with regard to matters we do not know, but which we presume to think we know. So when we speak about such things it is almost certain to be wrong.

I was particularly struck by a long screed which contained almost nothing corresponding to the truth. I can say this with a certain amount of confidence, because the entire article was about me and the faults found were in myself. Many statements which were supposed to be factual were not true, and many others were highly imaginative and nothing else. It was stated for example, that I had contacted some high officials of the Government of India and made them accept what I had said through 'inducements'. This was imagination, but it was presented as though it was factual. The rest of the writing was of a similar kind. This is the problem which people have with prejudiced imaginations and words; they mistake fiction for truth, and proceed on that basis which leads them on a doubtful path.

Many beliefs, particularly pertaining to religion, are of this kind. Ideas are picked up from one person and passed on to another, and they may be all wrong. There

are still many people who have a wrong perception and picture of the character of HPB. They think of her as an impostor, as a low class deceiver and so on. But it is all untrue. This kind of speculation put forward as truth spreads not only widely, but goes on for a long period, for many other ideas spring up from one false perception. So it is best not to come to conclusions, but to keep the mind open.

Keeping the mind open with regard to certain prejudices may be difficult, because people tend to accept ideas which are prevalent in their particular time and area. These prejudices are very difficult to shake off to keep the mind free of unverified statements. In the Theosophical Society, one of the things we have to learn is to keep ourselves open, and not load the brain with many kinds of 'information' — true or false. Much of the stuff we remember has no importance at all. In such cases the best thing may be to keep the mind uncluttered of all unnecessary matters, and remembrance of all that we know or imagine. So let us try to keep our minds free and open, and to look at all things without arriving at conclusions on matters that we are not in a position to judge.

### **Virtual Dissection Programmes**

We are happy to read in *The New Indian Express* of 16 March 2010 that a few more universities are giving up the dissection of animals for zoology experiments in their laboratories. Meanwhile, the University Grants Commission (an all-India body) is slowly considering the

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abolition of such experiments, but no definite decision seems to be available as of now. We are told that the dissection of living animals has ended, or is in the process of doing so, in about half a dozen universities. There are several alternatives to many of these experiments including virtual dissection, field studies of animals, and other humane methods to learn about them, according to people for the ethical treatment of animals in India. If what has appeared in the paper is correct, then it is a very happy beginning. There are many universities in India, and dissection can have a 'devastating impact on the environment by decimating wild populations of insects and amphibians'.

Although every person may not agree, ultimately the abandonment of indifference and cruelty which will be the result of looking at animals in field studies, etc., will be very profitable. Many forms of research were thought to be vital, but were later on found out to be unnecessary because other simpler, easier methods were discovered. Even now when it has been proven superfluous in Europe, the United States continues to go on with the use of animals to test various items, to make drugs safer for human beings. But these same drugs produced in Europe without continual experimentation on a large scale on animals as in the United

States have been tested and found to be quite safe. Unfortunately, there are companies which still go on using animals outside Europe and then selling the products in Europe.

The desire for monetary benefits is so strong in many cases that other considerations sink into the background. This is the reason why drugs which human beings use, and become addicted to, are proliferating; the huge number of persons involved in the business will find any way they can to make their viewpoint prevail, and their income grow.

In India, in the old days, there were many persons who were contented to earn just enough to live in reasonable comfort, and carry on whatever they had to do. This attitude has been replaced in modern times by the desire to experience all the so-called joys which are made available in the present day. It seems, as we will be forced to give up some of these pleasures, because of the impact that is affecting the environment, further promotion of entertainment and artificial ways of making life seem good will have disastrous effects. So it is high time to think about this matter, and to realize that simplicity and even austerity are more desirable and beneficial than the present wild craving for more pleasure, and more of all that human beings imagine is good. ✧

**Asked once for some great rule of conduct, the Prophet answered, 'Speak evil of no one.'**

Muhammad