

THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.

AMERICAN SECTION.

Oriental Department.

OBJECTS OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY:

First.—To form a nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, or color.

Second.—To promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern literatures, religions, and sciences, and demonstrate the importance of that study.

Third.—To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the psychical powers latent in man.

The matter contained in these pamphlets is furnished by the Indian Section. They are issued free to all Branches and members-at-large of the Theosophical Society in good standing, and to non-members upon payment of subscription of 10 cents per copy.

The Theosophical Society is not responsible as such for any statements made in these papers.

WILLIAM Q. JUDGE,
Gen. Sec'y American Section,
P. O. Box 2659, New York.

DISCERNMENT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF SELF.

AN EXTRACT FROM THE MAHÁ NIRVANA TANTRA.*

1. A man may pass through hundreds of incarnations, but he will not attain *Moksha* (final absolution) as long as his *Karmas* good and bad are not annihilated.

2. As a chain will bind a man equally, whether it is of iron or gold, so a man is equally fettered by his *Karmas* good and bad.

N. B. *Stanzas 1 & 2.* There is no escape from incarnations on this earth or upon others as long as *Karmas*, which are the result of our desires, exist, for they will always produce *linga deha*—that is, the subtle or primary body, which is the vehicle for the operation of *Karmas*. This *linga deha* or the body of desires, stands between us and *moksha*—salvation.

* This title means "Great Nirvana Tantra". The *Tantras* are religious and magical treatises in India. Monier Williams observes that they "seem to have superseded the authority of the Vedas. They are very numerous, and often are in form of a dialogue between Diva and Durga. Western Orientalists assert that they are said to relate to five matters: (a) creation, (b) destruction of the world, (c) worship of the gods, (d) attainment of all objects, and magical powers, (e) the four methods of attaining to union with the Supreme Spirit. The one from which the present extract is made relates to the last-named subject. Many of the *Tantras* contain noble philosophy, but many others have rites and ceremonies leading only to worldly ends or selfish attainments. [Ed.]

3. A man may always perform good actions ; he may subject himself to innumerable privations ; but he will not attain *Moksha* unless knowledge is produced in him.

4. By the performance of actions without any motive for gain (*i. e.*, unselfishly), and by the discussion of the nature of the phenomena, knowledge is produced in men who by their learning have made their minds pure and weakened their base tendencies.

5. This *jagat* (universe), from Brahma downwards to grass, has been the product of *Máyá* or illusion (hence the unreality of the universe). Men obtain bliss by knowing the *Parabrahma* to be real and One.

6. He frees himself from the fetters of *Karmas* who on despising names and forms (which compose the unreal universe) fixes his mind on Brahma, which is eternal, changless, beyond and above all discernible phenomena.

N. B. The universe may be analyzed primarily into two factors—one changeless, and the other changeful. The former is the *noumenon*, consisting of three attributes (1) *Sat* (existence), (2) *Chit* (intelligence), and (3) *Ananda* (pleasure). The latter is the, *phenomenon*, consisting of two attributes (1) name and (2) form. The latter two attributes are the product of *máyá* or illusion, and, properly speaking, compose the phenomenal universe ; for creation begins with the, rather is, the evolution of names and forms. The changeless factor is the Brahma which never alters. By eliminating the changeful factor from our mind, we may, by concentrating our mind on the changeless factor of the universe, easily realize Brahma, because that changeless factor is itself the Brahma.

7. *Mukti* (final absolution) is not obtained by the performance of religious rites, constant recitation of the names of Brahma, or by hundreds of fastings. A man obtains *Mukti* by knowing that he himself is Brahma.

N. B. The real man is different from his phenomenal name and form. Therefore, leaving aside his unreal parts, the real man is *Sat*, *Chit*, and *Ananda*—which together constitute Brahma.

8. A man enjoys *Mukti* by knowing that the *átman* is the witness of all, is omnipresent, perfect, real, without a second, transcendental, resides in the body of everything, but is not confined to it.

9. Like men casting away the dolls of many forms and names which were their playthings in childhood, those men who are absorbed in the contemplation of Brahma despise the phenom-

enal universe of diverse names and forms, and (thereby) undoubtedly attain *Mukti* (final absolution.)

10. If the worship of idols, the creations of fancy, can bestow *Mukti* on men, then men, dreaming of being kings, may enjoy kingdoms on waking.

N. B. Reality can never be produced out of unreality. *Mukti* is a real thing; whereas the idols, the creatures of fancy, are unreal ones. Hence the worship of unreal, imaginary things can never bestow *Mukti*, a reality, on men. This stanza and the following one clearly prove that Hinduism *does not advocate* idol worship.

11. By worshipping idols made of clay, stone, metal, or wood, regarding those idols as Iswara or God, and by subjecting themselves to ascetic privations, men only suffer pains. *Moksha*—salvation—cannot be obtained without knowledge.

12. None are more miserable than those who, enjoying the four kinds of delicious food (food taken down by chewing, by sucking, by drinking, and by the application of the tongue) are without the knowledge of Brahma.

13. If men may obtain *Moksha* by (subjecting themselves to all sorts of privations such as) the maintaining of their lives on air, dried leaves, picked-up grains, and water, then serpents, birds, and aquatic animals are all *Muktas*, *i.e.*, have obtained final absolution.

14. Of the several worships, the best is that in which Brahma is identified with the self, *i.e.*, *jivâtma*; the next in degree is the contemplation of (the attributes of) Brahma; less good is the practice of chanting hymns to him and constantly reciting his names; and the least good is his exoteric worship.

15. Yoga is the unification of *jiva*—the self—with Brahma; worship is the worship of Siva and Kesava (the Logoi). But he has no necessity for Yoga or worship who has realised that all is Brahma.

16. He has no necessity for *japa* (constant recitation of the names of Brahma), *yajna* (sacrificial ceremonies), *tapas* (asceticism), and other religious rites, in whose mind reigns the excellent and transcendental knowledge of Brahma.

17. What are *pujâ* (worship), *Dhyan* (contemplation), and *Dhâranâ* (continuous concentration) to him who is become as

Brahma, by realizing Brahma as being the reality, the knowledge, the pleasure, and the unique ?

18. With regard to him who knows that all is Brahma, there is no good or bad Karma, no heavenly bliss, no new incarnation, nothing subject or object of contemplation.

N. B. We engender Karmas when we perform actions from a selfish motive. But a man who knows that all is Brahma and consequently that he himself is Brahma, can have no selfish motives to actuate him in the performance of actions, because he is desireless, and hence does not produce any Karma. With regard to such a man. there is no distinct subject and object of contemplation, because by becoming Brahma he is himself both the subject and object of contemplation.

19. Ignorant people yearn after *Mukti*. But Atman is always free and disinterested in all things. What and whence is its enchainment ?

N. B. The literal meaning of *Mukti* is freedom from enchainment. Ignorant people foolishly strive to attain *Mukti*, *i. e.*, try to free the Atma from its enchainment. They do not know that Atma is always free and has no enchainment at all.

20. God has evolved this universe out of his *Máyá*—illusion—the real nature of which is even unknown to the deities (superior beings possessing higher knowledge). He pervades everything, but is not attached to or interested in any thing.

21. His existence in everything is like the existence of the *Akás* (ether), which exists inside and outside of everything, but is not attached to anything.

22. *Atmá* has no boyhood, youth, or old age. It is changeless, all intelligence, and always uniform.

23. People immersed in delusion do not see that our bodily frame, and not our Atma, is subject to the changes of time, such as boyhood, youth, and manhood.

24. As on account of its reflection in pieces of water contained in pots the sun seems many, so does Atma seem many in bodies—the product of illusion.

N. B. *Jivatma* (living soul) is the reflection of the *Parámatmá* or great soul, in *Budhí* which is a product of *máyá*. As *Budhí* is different in different bodies, so is *jivatmá*. Hence *Paramatma* seems many and different in different bodies. Really it is one and the same *Parámatmá* that is reflected in different bodies.

25. As on account of the perturbation of the water in which the Sun is reflected the Sun seems perturbed, so does the Paramátmá seem to the ignorant on account of the perturbation of the Budhi (the sixth principle of the Theosophical division of man).

N. B. The apparent changes and multiple forms of the changeless and uniform Atmá are thus accounted for in Stanzas 23, 24, 25.

26. As the portion of the *Akás* that is confined inside an earthen pot mixes with and becomes one with the *Akás* outside, so does the Atmá (that is reflected and, as it were, confined in our body), on the destruction of the body mix with and become one with the free and illimitable Parabrahma.

N. B. The body spoken of here is the *Sukshma Sarira* or *linga deha* (3rd and 4th principle of the theosophical system), and not the visible gross body.

Men are like portions of Akas confined in earthen jars. Just as each portion of the Akas, on account of the difference in the vehicles, seems different from the free Akas outside and from each other, so does each ego seem different from the Paramatma and from each other ego. But just as on the destruction of the vehicles, each portion of the confined Akas becomes one with each other and with the free Akas, so does each ego, on the destruction of the Vehicle, the Sukshma Sarira. The destruction of the Sukshma Sarira happens when Karmas are annihilated. How Karmas are annihilated has been stated above. Other methods will be found in the *Bhagavat Gita*. To be one with Brahma is to attain *Mukti*, or final absolution.

PANCHANAN GHOSH,
of the Rajmahal Branch, T. S.

Rajmahal, Bengal, India, }
The 17th Feb., 1891. }

THE PARSIS.

[The following is abstracted from *The History of the Parsis*, by Dosabhai Framji Karaka, C. S. I., late Magistrate in Bombay and Sheriff of Bombay, etc., and published for him in London in 1884.]

The Parsis are probably the smallest community in the whole world, for they number scarcely a hundred thousand. They are chiefly to be found in India, where Bombay, the metropolis of the Western Presidency, has been for nearly a century their headquarters. A full moiety of their total number reside in Bombay; the rest are scattered throughout the different cities of India, yet they are one of the foremost of all the Indian communities. They pride themselves on being the progeny of a mighty race of people

who occupied Persia centuries before the Christian era, were remarkable for valor and energy, and were the foremost Asiatic nation of their time.

RISE OF ZOROASTER.

The reign of Gushtasp (B. C. 1300) saw the rise of Zoroaster and the promulgation of his religion, which is that of the Parsis. Its flourishing period was for 1000 years from the reign of Gushtasp until the conquest by Alexander, was restored by Ardeshir Babekan, and overthrown by the Arab Mohamodans in 651. Zoroaster's name is said to mean "old camel keeper". He was of a family descended from King Feridun of the Peshdadian dynasty, and his birth-place is given as the town of Rae. Remarkable birth stories are told about him, among others that his conception was due to wine given his father by the angels. After his birth the rulers attempted his death but were miraculously prevented. In his 30th year he began his religious teaching. He said "Contemplate the beams of fire with a most pious mind." The books of the Zend Avesta, being those promulgated by Zoroaster, were 21 in number, with names derived from the 21 words of an old and sacred prayer called "Yatha Ahu Vairyo." Many of these books are lost. They are said to have contained 2,000,000 verses, and, as Haug says, "treated of not only religious topics, but of medicine, astronomy, agriculture, botany, philosophy, etc."

THE PARSİ RELIGION.

A book of prayers, Khordeh-Avesta, is in existence, and also the Vendidad, Yasna, and Visparad. The Vendidad enumerates the countries where Zoroastrianism prevailed, recommends agriculture, gives the law, ceremonies, and observances, describes the soul's fate after death and how to cure diseases. The Yasna gives prayers that go with ceremonies and hymns on metaphysical subjects. The Visparad is an invocation to the lords of creation. It is never recited alone, but is interspersed with the other two. The Khordeh-Avesta may be recited by any layman. There are some 52 other books, commentaries and otherwise. The mission of Zoroaster was to inculcate monotheism, the belief in one God called Ahura-Mazda, without form and invisible, and not to be represented by an image. There are two spirits working in his universe, one being the increasing and creative, the other the decreasing and destructive. Through them as agents God is the causer of all causes. These spirits, or minds, are united from the

beginning and are present in Ahura Mazda and the whole universe. As to men, they are said to have inherent wisdom and wisdom acquired, and the soul is said to be immortal. Their moral doctrines are based on "purity of thought, purity of speech, purity of action." Zoroaster said that men are to be saved only by their good deeds in this world.

The Parsis are not fire-worshippers, although so often called that, and any Parsi will deny the charge. God being the source of light, the Parsi turns his face to the sun or stands before the fire. This he does to direct his mind to the source of all light, life, and heat.

OBTAINING THE PURE FIRE.

In establishing a fire-temple fires from various places of manufacture are brought and kept in different vases. Great efforts are made to obtain fire caused by lightning. Over one of these fires a perforated metallic flat tray with a handle is held. On this are small chips and dust of sandalwood. These are ignited by the heat of the fire below, care being taken that the perforated tray does not touch the fire. Thus a new fire is created out of the first fire; from this another one is created by the same process; from this another, and so on, until the process is nine times repeated. The fire obtained after the ninth process is considered pure. All the fires brought from other places are similarly treated, and the purified fires thus collected are put all in a large vase which is put in its proper place in a separate chamber.

THEIR CUSTOMS ABOUT THE DEAD.

In Persia the Zoroastrians do not keep the corpse in the house but remove it to another building. In India prayers are recited before the dying, who if able joins in them; if not, his son or friend or priest repeats the words in his ears. When death comes the body is wrapped in clean clothes and placed on an oblong piece of polished stone laid on the floor. The females sit on a carpet in the room, the males outside on chairs. Until the last ceremony prayers are continually recited and sandal wood burned over a fire. For removal, the body is placed on an iron bier. Two priests then face the corpse and repeat prayers. When this is finished the body is taken out on the bier and carried on the shoulders of bearers to the Towers of Silence, the male relatives and friends following on foot. At the Towers of Silence, the bier is put on the ground, the face of the dead is uncovered, and all

bow before the corpse, when it is carried into the tower and placed on a grating, where vultures, kept for the purpose, denude it of flesh, after which the bones fall to the bottom of the tower. One curious custom is the holding of a dog toward the dead man during the prayers. [The historian does not explain this, but the explanation is that the dog is peculiarly an absorbent animal, and was thus held toward the corpse so as to take certain impurities from it which otherwise would fly upon the human beings present. Even when with living persons a dog absorbs much more from them than other animals do. ED.] After the dedication of a Tower of Silence, no one is allowed to inspect it, no matter who.

DISPERSION OF THE PARSIS.

In the reign of Yazdezard the Mohammedans took his kingdom and he was soon afterward killed. This was about A. D. 641. Every Zoroastrian was offered death or acceptance of the Koran. Such as would not accept and escaped fled to Khorassan, where they remained 100 years. But persecution drove them out and they fled to Ormuzd, an island in the Persian Gulf, where they were again attacked, and then they determined to leave Persia forever. From Ormuzd they sailed for India, where they landed at Diu in the Gulf of Cambay. From there they went to Gujarat and took up their abode at Sanjan. From there they spread to other places, and the exact date of their settlement in Bombay is not known, but it is supposed to have been about A. D. 1668.