

The Hidden Side of Lodge Meetings

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Let us consider the hidden side of a meeting of a theosophical Lodge; more specifically, the ordinary weekly meeting at which the Lodge is following a definite line of study. I am, of course, referring only to the meetings of members of the Lodge for the occult effect which I wish to describe is entirely impossible in connection with any meetings to which non-members are admitted.

Naturally the work of every Lodge has its public side. There are lectures given to the public, and opportunities offered for them to ask questions; all this is good and necessary. But every Lodge which is worthy on the name is also doing something far higher than any work on the physical plane, and this higher work can only be done in its own primary meetings.

Furthermore it can be done only if these meetings are properly conducted and entirely harmonious. If the members are thinking of themselves in any way — if they have personal vanity such as might show itself in the desire to shine or to take a prominent part in the proceedings; if they have other personal feeling, so that they take offence or are affected by envy or jealousy, no useful occult effect can possibly be produced. But if they have forgotten themselves in the earnest endeavour to understand the subject appointed for study, a very considerable and beneficial result, of which they usually have no conception, may very readily be produced. Let me explain the reason of this.

We will assume a series of meetings at which a certain book is being used for study. Every member knows beforehand what paragraph or page will be taken at the meeting, and it is expected that he will not come to that meeting without previous preparation. He must not be in the attitude of a nestling waiting with open mouth and expecting that someone else will feed him; on the contrary, every member should have an intelligent grasp of the subject which is to be considered, and should be prepared to contribute his share of information. A good plan is for each member of the circle to make himself responsible for the examination of certain of our theosophical books.

The subject to be considered at the meeting should have been announced at the previous one, and each member should make himself responsible for looking carefully through the book or books committed to his charge for any reference to it, so that when he comes to the meeting he is already possessed of any information about it which is contained in that particular book, and is prepared to contribute this when called upon. In this way every member has his work to do, and each is greatly helped to a full and clear comprehension of the matter under consideration when all present are thus earnestly fixing their thought upon it. In order to grasp this fully let us think for a moment of the effect of a thought.

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Every thought which is sufficiently definite to be worthy of the name produces two separate results. First, it is itself a vibration of the mental body, and it may take place at different levels in that body. Like every other vibration it tends to reproduce itself in surrounding matter. Just as a harp string when set in vibration communicates that vibration to the air about it, thus making an audible sound, so the thought vibration established in matter of a certain density within a person's mental body communicates itself to matter of the same density in the mental plane which surrounds him.

Secondly, each thought draws round itself the living matter of the mental plane and builds itself a vehicle which we call a thought-form. If the thought is simply an exercise of the intellect (such as might be involved in the working out of a mathematical or geometrical problem) the thought-form remains on mental levels; but if it is in the least tinged with desire or emotion, or if it is in any way connected with the personal self, it at once draws round itself a vesture of astral matter as well, and manifests itself upon the astral plane.

An intense effort at the realization of the abstract — an attempt to comprehend what is meant by the fourth dimension or by the 'tabularity' of the table, for example — means an activity upon the higher mental levels; while if the thought is mingled with unselfish affection, high aspiration or devotion, it is even possible that a vibration upon the buddhic plane may enter into it and multiply its power a hundredfold. We must consider these two results separately and see what follows from each of them.

The vibration may be thought of as spreading on the mental plane through matter capable of responding to it — that is to say, through matter of the same degree of density as that in which it was originally generated. Radiating in this way it naturally comes into contact with the mental bodies of many other people, and its tendency is to reproduce itself in these bodies. The distance to which it can radiate effectively depends partly upon the nature of the vibration and partly upon the opposition which it meets. Vibrations entangled with the lower types of astral matter may be deflected or overwhelmed by a multitude of other vibrations at the same level, just as in the midst of the roar of a great city a soft sound will be entirely drowned.

The ordinary self-centred thought of the average man begins on the lowest of the mental levels and instantly plunges down to correspondingly low levels of the astral. Its power in both planes is therefore very limited because, however violent it may be, there is such an immense and turbulent sea of similar thought surging all around that the vibrations are very soon lost and overpowered in the confusion.

A vibration generated at a higher level, however, has a much clearer field for its action, because at present the number of thoughts producing such a vibration is very small — indeed theosophical thought is almost in a class by itself from this point of view. There are truly religious people whose thought is quite as elevated as ours, but it is never so precise and definite; there are large numbers of people whose thoughts on matters of business and money-making are as precise as could be desired, but they are not elevated or altruistic. Even scientific thought is scarcely ever in the same class as that of the true Theosophist, so that our students may be said to have a field to themselves the mental world.

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The result of this is that when a man thinks on theosophical subjects he is sending out all around him a vibration which is very powerful because it is practically unopposed, like a sound in the midst of a vast silence, or a light shining forth on the darkest night. It sets in motion a level of mental matter which is as yet very rarely used, and the radiations which are caused by it impinge upon the mental body of the average man at a point where it is quite dormant.

This gives to the thought its peculiar value, not only to the thinker but to others around him; for its tendency is to awaken and to bring into use an entirely new part of the thinking apparatus. It must be understood that such a vibration does not necessarily convey theosophical thought to those who are ignorant of it; but in awakening this higher portion of the mental body, it undoubtedly tends to elevate and liberalize the person's thought as a whole, along whatever lines it may be in the habit of moving, and in this way produces an incalculable benefit.

If the thought of a single person produces these results, it will be readily understood that the thought of twenty or thirty directed to the same subject will achieve an effort enormously greater. The power of the united thought of a number of people is far more than the sum of their separate thoughts; it would be much more nearly represented by their product. So it will be seen that, even from this point of view alone, it is a very good thing for any city or community that a theosophical Lodge should be regularly meeting in its midst, since its proceedings — if they are conducted in the proper spirit — cannot but have a distinctly elevating and ennobling effect upon the thought of the surrounding population. Naturally there will be many people whose minds cannot yet be awakened at all upon those higher levels; but even for them the constant beating of the waves of this more advanced thought will bring nearer the time of their awakening.

Nor must we forget the result produced by the formation of definite thought-forms. These also will be radiated from the centre of activity, but they can affect only such minds as are already to some extent responsive to ideas of this nature. In these days there are many such minds, and there are members who can attest to the fact that after they have been discussing a question such as reincarnation, it not infrequently happens that they are asked for information upon that very subject by persons whom they had not previously supposed to be interested in it. It should be observed that the thought-form is capable of conveying the exact nature of the thought to those who are somewhat prepared to receive it, whereas the thought vibration, though it reaches a far wider circle, is much less definite in its action.

It can be seen, then, that a momentous effect upon the mental plane is produced quite unintentionally by our members in the ordinary course of their study — something far greater, in reality, than their intentional efforts in the way of propaganda are ever likely to produce. But this is not all, for by far the most important part is yet to come. Every Lodge of the Society is a centre of interest to the Great Masters of Wisdom, and when it works loyally their thoughts and those of their pupils are frequently turned towards it. In this way a force much greater than our own often shines out from our gatherings, and an influence of inestimable value may be focused where, so far as we know, it would not otherwise rest.

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This may, indeed, seem the limit which our work can attain, yet there is something even greater. All students of the occult are aware that the light and life of the Logos flood the whole of his system — that on every plane is outpoured that special manifestation of his strength that is appropriate to it. Naturally the higher the plane the less veiled is his glory, because as we ascend we are drawing nearer to its source. Normally the force outpoured in each plane is strictly limited to it; but it can descend into and illuminate a lower plane if a special channel is prepared for it.

Such a channel is always provided whenever any thought or feeling has an entirely unselfish aspect. A selfish emotion moves in a closed curve and so brings its own response on its own plane; an utterly unselfish motion is an outrush of energy which does not return, but in its own upward movement provides a channel for a downpouring of divine power from the plane next above. This is the reality lying behind the old idea of an answer to prayer.

The man who is occupied in the earnest study of higher things is for the time lifted entirely out of himself and generates a powerful thought-form upon the mental plane. This is immediately employed as a channel by the force hovering upon the plane next above. When a number of people join together in a thought of this nature, the channel which they make is out of all proportion larger in its capacity than the sum of their separate channels; such a gathering is therefore an inestimable blessing to the community among which it works, for through it (even in the most ordinary meetings for study, when it is considering such subjects as rounds and races, *pitris* or planetary chains), there may come an outpouring into the lower mental plane of that force which is normally peculiar to the higher mental.

If the thought-form turns its attention to the higher side of theosophical teaching and studies such questions of ethics and soul development that we find in *Light on the Path*, *The Voice of the Silence* and our other devotional books, it may make a channel of more elevated thought through which the force of the buddhic plane itself descends into the mental, and thus radiates out and influence for good many a soul who would not be in the least open to it if it has remained on its original level.

This is the real and greatest function of a Lodge of the Theosophical Society — to furnish a channel for the distribution of the divine life; and thus we have another illustration to show us how far greater is the unseen than the seen. To the dim physical eyes all that is visible is a small band of humble students meeting weekly in the earnest endeavour to learn and to qualify themselves to be of use to their fellow men. But to those who can see more of the world, from this tiny root there springs a glorious flower, for no less than four mighty streams of influence are radiating from that seemingly insignificant centre — the stream of thought vibration, the cluster of thought-forms, the magnetism of the Masters of Wisdom, and the mighty torrent of the divine energy.

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Here also is an instance of the practical importance of a knowledge of the unseen side of life. For lack of such knowledge many a member has been lax in the performance of his duty, careless about his attendance at Lodge meetings, and has thus lost the inestimable privilege of being part of a channel for the Divine Life. I have actually heard of members who were irregular in attendance because they thought the meetings dull, and found that they did not gain much from them! Such people have not yet grasped the elementary fact that they join, not to receive but to give, not to be interested; and amused but to take their share in a mighty work for the good of mankind.

To everything there is an unseen side, and to live the life of an occultist is to study this higher inner side of nature, and then intelligently to adapt oneself to it. The occultist looks at the whole of each subject which is brought before him, instead of only at the lowest and least important part of it, and then orders his action according to what he sees, in obedience to the dictates of plain common sense, and to the Law of Love which guides the universe. Those, therefore, who would study and practise occultism must develop within themselves these three priceless possessions — knowledge, common sense, and love.

Theosophy must not represent merely a collection of moral verities, a bundle of metaphysical Ethics epitomized in theoretical dissertations. Theosophy must be made practical, and has, therefore, to be disencumbered of useless discussion. . . . It has to find objective expression in an all-embracing code of life thoroughly impregnated with its spirit — the spirit of mutual tolerance, charity and love.