

**BROTHERHOOD
AND THE
STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE**

A Lecture
by
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Today it is our task to speak about two impulses of the soul; one of them, brotherhood, is an ideal that has filled mankind ever since men have had the capacity to feel. The other one is the struggle for existence, which we meet with just at present wherever we look. Brotherhood and the struggle for existence! Those of you who have occupied yourselves even a little with the aims of our spiritual-scientific movement know our main principle: to create the heart, the kernel, of a brotherhood based on all-embracing human love that transcends race, sex, profession, religion, and so on. Thus, the Theosophical Society † has placed this principle of general brotherhood foremost, made it the most important of its ideals. Of all these cultural endeavors that we need most at present, the Society considers this great ethical striving towards brotherhood to be most closely connected with the ultimate aim of human development.

He who strives in the spiritual-scientific manner believes, and not only believes but knows quite clearly, that deep cognition, cognition of the spiritual world, when it really takes hold of man, must lead to brotherhood; this brotherhood is the noblest fruit of deep, inner cognition.

Spiritual philosophy appears to contradict in this matter much that has appeared in recent times. Certain circles point time and time again to struggle as a force for progress. How often do we hear today that man's forces grow strong through meeting resistance, that man grows strong in will and in intellectual initiative by matching his strength against an opponent. One philosophy that grew out of a spiritual foundation, that of Friedrich Nietzsche, contains, among many other sentences inspired by struggle, the following: I love the critic; I love the great critic more than the little one. We can find this sentiment ever and again in Nietzsche's work, in many different formulations; it is something that belongs completely to his view of life. According also to certain long-established economic theories, the struggle of all against all, as this takes form in economic competition, is a powerful lever for progress. How often has it been said that mankind would progress best if each person asserted and benefitted himself, as much as he could. The word "individualism" has even become a catchword.

mostly in connection with material life, to be sure, but also, and not without validity, in connection with the inner, spiritual life.

It is the belief of many economists and social theorists that man can serve his fellowmen best when he takes as much as possible from life, because if he becomes economically strong he can better serve the community. And we hear it asserted that a person should not fall into a routine, should strive for the all-round development of his powers, should live freely in self-expression, should unfold his inner being; and that by so doing, he can best serve his fellowmen. There are many among us who are downright feverish in the pursuit of this latter principle, who cannot have enough of "doing their thing".

Spiritual science does not deny the necessity of this struggle for existence, especially in our time; but is also conscious that just today, when this struggle is producing such powerful effects, the principle of brotherhood, in all its depth, must be brought closer to our understanding again.

The most important question will be: Is it actually true, as many believe, that man's forces grow best through encountering opposition, that above all it is struggle that makes man great and strong? Natural science has raised this idea of man's struggle for existence to a universal principle; and in the West particularly, it has been believed for some time that those creatures are fittest that have driven their opponents from the field, and so survived.

The scientist Huxley says: When we look at life, it looks like the combat of gladiators—the strongest is victorious, the others perish. If one would believe the scientists, one would have to assume that all creatures that now live in the world have driven out those who were here before them. There is even a school of social thought whose adherents want to make the principle of the struggle for existence into an actual doctrine of human development. In a book titled *From Darwin to Nietzsche*, Dean Alexander Tille tries to show that the happiness of mankind in the future will depend on man emblazoning this struggle for existence boldly and freely on the banners of his development, that we must see to it that the unfit perish, and that we must further only what is strong and forceful.

We need a social order that suppresses the weak, because they impede man's progress.

I ask you: Who is strong? He who has ideal, spiritual strength, but a weak body, or he who has less spiritual force, but a robust body? As you can see, general rules do not help much in this matter. It is difficult to decide who really should survive the struggle for existence; and if we were to deal with practical measures, this question would have to be decided first. Now we ask ourselves: What do we observe in human life? Is it brotherhood, or the struggle for existence, that has accomplished great things in mankind's development - or have both impulses contributed something?

Natural science does not occupy the same ground today that it did even ten years ago. The Russian scientist Kessler gave a lecture in 1880, in which he showed that the animal types most capable of development and truly progressive are not the ones that do the most fighting, but those that give mutual support to one another, that help each other. No one can maintain that struggle and combat do not exist in the animal kingdom. Certainly they are present, but the question is: What furthers development more - warfare or mutual assistance? And which types survive? Those whose members constantly fight with each other, or those that have mutual service? Scientific investigation has already shown that it is not struggle but the rendering of assistance that truly promotes progress. Prince Kropotkin, in his book *Mutual Help in the Animal Kingdom and Human Life*, provides many beautiful contributions to the questions that occupy us here.

What has brotherhood achieved for human development? We have only to look at our own ancestors. One could easily gain the impression that it was the hunt and warfare that advanced them, that primarily molded their character. But when one delves deeper, it will be found that this first impression is not correct, that precisely those early Teutonic tribes prospered most that had developed the principle of brotherhood to an extraordinary degree. We find this principle of brotherhood expressed above all in the way property was managed, before and after the great

migrations. Common ownership of land was the general rule. Each village owned common grounds, and—excepting those few possessions necessary for household use, and perhaps a garden—all other property was owned in common as well. From time to time the land was divided anew among the people. And it was these tribes, which practiced brotherhood to this extraordinary degree with respect to material goods, that became strong.

A few centuries later we find this principle bearing remarkable fruit. When the principle of brotherhood had manifested in earlier times, people went so far as to burn what somebody possessed on his own piece of land, at the time of his death, because one did not want to own the personal property of another after his death. This practice was abandoned for a number of reasons, but chiefly because some people had acquired large landholdings, forcing others into serfdom and feudal services. The idea of brotherhood then asserted itself in another striking form. Those who were oppressed by their masters, by their owners, wanted to free themselves. There was a great movement towards freedom throughout Europe in the middle of the Middle Ages. This movement towards freedom grew out of a spirit of the brotherhood of man, and from it arose a general culture, the city culture of the middle Middle Ages. Those who could not endure servitude on the land fled their masters and sought their freedom in the growing cities. People came down from Scotland, France, and Russia; from everywhere they came together and built the free cities. Thus, the principle of brotherhood developed and furthered culture to a high degree. Men of similar occupations joined in societies called oath-brotherhoods, which later grew into the guilds. These oath-brotherhoods were far more than mere societies of crafts or tradespeople. Born of the practical, everyday life, these associations developed to moral heights. Mutual aid was the fundamental concern of these brotherhoods, and many aspects of life that are of nobody's concern today were occasions for such support. For example, members of such a brotherhood would help each other in case of illness. Two brothers were appointed to keep daily vigil at the bedside of a sick brother. Members who were ill received food,

and the fraternal spirit prevailed even beyond death: the responsibility for burying a brother member in proper fashion was considered a special honor. Finally, the care of widows and orphans was a duty of the oath-brotherhood. You can see from these examples how there grew up an understanding of the moral life of the community that modern man can hardly imagine. Present conditions are not being criticized in any way. They have become necessary, just as it was necessary that the conditions of the Middle Ages came to expression in their own way. We must only understand that there have been other phases of development than the present one.

In the free cities of the Middle Ages people spoke of a 'lawful' price, of a 'lawful' market. What was meant? In the early days, when produce was brought into town from the surrounding countryside, it was strictly prohibited during the first days to sell these goods, except in retail. Nobody was allowed to buy wholesale and to become a dealer. Then there was no thought that price should be established according to supply and demand: people understood how to regulate both. Groups in the cities or in the guilds had to establish prices for the products of members, after the members had explained what was needed to produce the goods, to become a producer. Nobody was allowed to sell at a higher price. Even when we look at labor conditions, we see how profound was the understanding of man's needs at that time. When we consider the wages, taking into account the entirely different conditions, we must say that the laborer's wages could not compare with those of today. This fact has often been interpreted quite wrongly by researchers. These brotherhoods were organized out of practical considerations, and therefore they developed gradually along practical lines. They then spread from one city to another, because it was natural that those in several cities who had a common craft and common interests should unite and support each other.

At that time, men were not united under police-enforced law, but held together for practical reasons. This particular phase of the deepening of the principle of brotherhood in the cities of Europe can be seen vividly in its fruits. The immense artistic accomplishments of the 12th and 13th centuries would not have been possible

without such deepening. Culturally, we can only understand Dante's stupendous work, *The Divine Comedy*, when we understand the impact of the principle of brotherhood. Also, the arts of printing, copper-engraving, paper-making, and watch-making, as well as the later inventions, came about through the principle of brotherhood. What we are accustomed to call the citizenry arises from the cultivation of this principle in the cities of the Middle Ages. Much that has been created through profound scientific and artistic activity would have been impossible without this principle. When a cathedral was to be built—the one in Cologne or any other—first a society was formed, a so-called building-guild, whose members joined in cooperative effort. One can see intuitively the expression of the cooperative principle even in the architectural style; one can see it expressed in almost every medieval town, whether you go to the north of Scotland or to Venice, whether you look at cities in Russia or in Poland.

The thing we must stress is this: The principle of brotherhood arose under the influence of a current of the time that sought to enter decisively into the material culture. Therefore we see everywhere in the higher culture that arises, as well as in what remains to us as the fruit of that time, the material, the physical. Material existence had for once to be cultivated, and in order to cultivate it rightly, and work it through thoroughly, this brotherhood principle was at that time necessary. From the living spirit of brotherhood of the earlier time, arose the abstraction, and through this abstraction, through this intellectualistic kind of thinking, our life has been split; so that now we do not rightly know, can no longer properly understand, just how the struggle for existence and the principle of brotherhood actually work together. On the one hand, spiritual life has become more and more abstract. Morals and justice, perceptions of political and other social relationships, have been reduced to ever more abstract maxims, and the struggle for existence has become more and more separated, as by an abyss, from what people truly have felt as their ideal. In the middle of the Middle Ages there was a harmony between one's ideal and what one actually did. If it has ever been shown that one can be an idealist and practical man at the same

time, it was shown in the Middle Ages. Also, the relationship between Roman law and actual life was still harmonious. Today, however, considerations of justice float somewhere above the life of morals. Many will say: we know what is good, just, and fair, but it is not practical. This divergence appears when thinking becomes separated from the highest principles of life. From the 16th century onwards, spiritual life develops more in accordance with the principles of the intellect. The guild-member who, together with the other twelve jurors, sat in judgment on an offense committed by a fellow member of the guild was a brother to the man being judged. Life was connected with life. Everyone knew the other's work, and everyone tried to understand why, for once, the accused might have deviated from the proper path. One looked, as it were, into the brother, and actually desired to do so.

Nowadays a jurisprudence has developed in which both judge and lawyer are interested only in the law, so that both of them see only a 'case', to which they have to apply the law. Every moral thought has been divorced from the science of justice. We have seen this situation develop ever more explicitly during the last century. Under the feeling for brotherhood in the Middle Ages, however, there evolved the principles necessary for healthy progress: confidence and competence, both of which are falling by the wayside today. The judgment of the competent expert has given way almost entirely to abstract jurisprudence, to an abstract parliamentarianism. The average, the common understanding, the voice of the majority, has become the yardstick today, not competence. This preference for the majority had to come. But just as one cannot vote in mathematics to get the right result — because 3 times 3 is always 9 and 3 times 9 is always 27 — so it is here. It would be impossible to carry through the principle of competence, or expertness, without the principle of brotherhood, of brotherly love.

In life, the struggle for existence has its justification. Because man is an individuality who as a single being has to make his way through life, he is part of the struggle for existence. In a sense, the words of Rusckerts hold here: when the rose beautifies itself, it also beautifies the garden. If we do not make ourselves capable of

helping our fellowmen, we shall be poor helpers. If we do not see to it that all our talents are developed, we shall be poor helpers. If we do not see to it that all our talents are developed, we shall have little success in helping our brothers. In order to develop these talents, a certain egoism is necessary, because egoism is connected with initiative. The person who understands how not to be led, how not to be influenced by everything in his surroundings, but who descends into his own, inner being where the sources of strength are to be found will develop into a strong and able person, and in him there will be a greater ability to serve others than in the one who conforms to all kinds of influences that come from his surroundings. Obviously, this principle which is necessary for man can be developed to an extreme. But this principle will bear the proper fruits only when it is combined with that of brotherly love.

The guilds in the free cities of the Middle Ages show how what is practical became strong precisely under the principle of the mutual, personal, and individual rendering of help. From where did the guilds draw this strength? They drew it from living in brotherhood with their fellowmen. It is correct to make oneself as strong as possible; but can we become strong at all without brotherly love? He who rises to a real knowledge of the soul must answer with a decisive NO.

In all of nature we see examples of the cooperation of single beings within a whole. Consider the human body. It consists of independent beings, millions and millions of, single, independent beings or cells. When one takes a part of this human body, he will find that it consists precisely of such individual beings. But how do they cooperate? How has that which in nature must form a whole, a totality, become selfless? None of our cells asserts its separateness in an egoistic manner. The miraculous tool of thinking, our brain, is also composed of millions of delicate cells, but each one operates in its place harmoniously with the others. What causes the cooperation of these small cells? What causes a higher being to express itself through these small living beings? Man's soul is the cause. But the human soul could never work on earth if these millions of small beings had not renounced their individualities, putting themselves at the service of this great being they have in common, which we describe as the soul. The soul sees with the cells of the eye, thinks

by means of the cells of the brain, lives through the cells of the blood. There we can see what union, what association means. Association means the possibility for a higher being to express itself through the members when they are united.

This principle is general for all life. Five people together, who think and feel harmoniously together, are more than 1 plus 1 plus 1 plus 1 plus 1; they are not just the sum of the five, just as our body is not the sum of the five senses. Men's living together and within one another has the same significance as the living together of the cells within the human body. A new higher being is in the midst of the five—yes, even among the two or three. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I shall be in their midst." It is not the one, or the other, or the third, but something entirely new that springs from the union. This new entity arises only when the one lives in the other, when the single individual person draws strength not only from himself, but also from others. But that can happen only when each lives selflessly in the other. Thus, human associations are the secret places where higher spiritual beings descend in order to work through the single individuals, just as the soul works through the members of the body.

In our materialistic time, what I have said will not be easily believed, but for spiritual science it is real in the highest degree. Therefore, spiritual science does not talk in abstractions when it speaks of a folk-spirit, or folk-soul, or a family spirit, or the spirit of some other community. One cannot see the spirit who works through an association, but he is there; and he is there through the brotherly love of the people working within the association. Just as the body has a soul, so a guild or brotherhood has a soul; this is not just a figure of speech.

People who work together in a brotherhood are magicians, because they draw higher beings into their circle. One no longer has to call to witness the machinations of spiritism when one works out of brotherly love in a community. Higher beings do manifest themselves there. When we give ourselves over to brotherhood, this giving, this merging into the totality, is a steeling, a strengthening of our organs. When we then act or speak as members of such a community, it is not the single soul that acts or speaks in us, but the spirit of the community. This will be the secret of the progress of

mankind in the future: to work through communities. Just as one epoch takes the place of another, and each of them has its own task, so it is with the Middle Ages in relation to our own epoch, and with our epoch in relation to a future one. The brotherhoods of the Middle Ages worked within the immediately practical life, when they laid the foundations for the useful arts. These organizations began to show a materialistic bias only after they had achieved their fruits. By then the foundations of their consciousness, namely brotherhood, had more or less vanished, as the abstract principle of the state, the abstract spiritual life, took the place of one person's entering into another with true feeling. The future will have the task of reestablishing brotherhoods, and of establishing them out of the spiritual, out of the highest ideals of the soul. The life of man has up to now given birth to a multitude of associations; it has called forth a terrible struggle for existence, which has just now reached its high point. Spiritual science, however, aims to advance mankind's highest ideals in the spirit of the principle of brotherhood, and thus you see that the worldwide movement of spiritual science replaces in all fields the struggle for existence with the principle of brotherhood. We must learn how to conduct community life. We must not believe that this or that scheme resting in anything less or other than the true feeling for brotherhood will be able to accomplish anything lasting.

Everyone would like to know how one unites struggle for existence with brotherhood. That is very simple. We must learn to replace struggle with positive labor, to replace combat with the ideal. What that means is little understood today. People do not know which struggle they are talking about, because they talk about nothing else: the social struggle, the struggle for peace, the struggle for the emancipation of women, the struggle about the soil, and so on. Spiritual science strives to replace struggle with positive labor. He who has immersed himself in spiritual science knows that in any field of life struggle never leads to true results. Try, without fighting the opponent, to introduce into life, to assert, what you in your experience and through your cognition have found to be correct.

Of course, this can be only an ideal, but such an ideal must be there, so that it can be introduced into life as an axiom of spiritual science. The people who join with others and who put their

strength at the disposal of all are those who will provide the foundation for healthy development in the future. The Theosophical Society† wants to be exemplary in this respect. In this organization one works through the labor of each individual member. This idea must for once be really understood. He works best who does not want to push through his own opinion but seeks to support what he observes in the eyes of his fellow brothers—who searches the thoughts and feelings of his fellowmen and makes himself their servant. Within this circle he works best who in practical life does not regard his own opinions as important. When we try thus to understand that our most valuable forces arise out of our society with one another, and that this society is not only to be adhered to as abstract principal but has to operate in every act, in every moment of life, in a theosophical manner, then we shall progress. Only, we must not become impatient.

Spiritual science makes us conscious of a higher reality, and this consciousness will enable us to go forward in the application of the principal of brotherhood.

Today people still call theosophists unpractical idealists. It will not be long, however, before they will prove to be the most practical people, because they take the forces of life into account. Nobody doubts that somebody will be hurt when we hit him on the head with a stone. What is not considered is that it is much worse to send somebody a hateful feeling, that the soul of man is much more hurt than when the stone hurts the body. Everything depends on the spirit or disposition with which we face our fellowman. But our strength for fruitful work in the future will depend precisely on our comprehending this truth. When we exert ourselves to live in brotherhood in this way, then we are putting the principle of brotherhood into practice.

To be tolerant in a spiritual sense is different from what is commonly understood. It means also to respect the freedom of someone else's thought. To shove somebody from his seat is the act of a lout; when this action, however, is committed in thought, nobody registers it as an injustice. We do speak a good deal in general about the necessity of valuing other people's opinions, but we are not inclined to apply this good advice to ourselves.

A word has for us, as yet, almost no importance, it is heard, and yet, it is not heard. We must learn, however, to listen with the soul, we must understand how to grasp the most intimate things with the soul. What later becomes physical reality always exists first in the spirit. Therefore we must suppress our own opinion in order to hear another's completely; not only the word, but also the feeling behind it, even when the conviction arises in us that what the other person says is wrong. There is more strength in being able to listen as long as the other speaks than in interrupting him. Such listening produces an entirely different understanding. You will feel as if the other person's soul were filling with warmth, with light, when you face him in this way with absolute tolerance. We should guarantee not only freedom of the person but complete freedom; yes, we must value even the freedom of the different opinion. This is only one example, but it can stand for much else. From the point of view of spiritual science, the person who interrupts someone else's speech does something similar to the person who would give him a kick. Once one understands that one commits a much more violent offense when interrupting someone's talk than if one were to kick him, only then can one really understand brotherhood with the soul, only then does it become a fact. Therein lies the greatness of the spiritual scientific movement, that it brings us a new faith, a new conviction of those spiritual forces that flow from man to man. That is the higher, spiritual principle of brotherhood. Anyone can picture for himself how far mankind is removed from such a spiritual ideal. Everyone may develop himself to send his loved ones thoughts of love and friendship, if he can find the time. Generally, people consider such acts meaningless. But once you understand that thoughts are just as much a force as the electric current that flows from one apparatus to another, then you will also better understand the principle of brotherhood; then gradually our social consciousness will become clearer—and, finally, practical.

From this point of view it becomes clear how spiritual science considers the struggle for existence and brotherhood. We know quite well that many a person, having been placed in one or the other position in life, would simply perish if he did not howl with

the wolves, so to speak; if he did not carry on his struggle for existence as cruelly as many others do. For the materialist, there is almost no way to escape this struggle for existence. We must, to be sure, do our duty at the spot where karma put us. To do the right thing, however, we must be aware that we would accomplish much more, if we were to renounce the desire to see results immediately. A materialist will perhaps think that you do nothing when you make yourself send thoughts of love to him whom you might have hurt in the struggle for existence—perhaps when you yourself stand with a bleeding soul. But after the foregoing explanations, you will understand that this act must have its effect later, because, as we know, nothing is lost that is done spiritually.

In this way, we can take up the struggle for existence, disheartened in soul and with sadness in our hearts, and yet transform this struggle through our contribution. To work thus means to change the struggle for existence in a practical way. To accomplish this change from one day to another will not be possible, but that it will come is beyond all doubt. When we work on our own soul in the spirit of brotherhood, in serving ourselves we shall best serve mankind; for it is true that when we persist in our selfish separateness, our talents are uprooted like a plant that is torn from the soil. An eye is scarcely an eye when it has been torn from its socket, and just so little is a human soul still a human soul when it separates itself from the community of man.

You will see that we develop our talents best when we live in a brotherly community, that we live most intensively when we take root in that totality. To be sure, we must wait till what has taken root in the totality ripens into fruitfulness; through silent inward meditation. And we must not lose ourselves in the world, because what the poet said is true in the highest spiritual sense: one has to be quiet within oneself that one's talents may unfold. Those talents, however, are rooted in the world. They strengthen us; but to improve our character, we have to live with and within a community. Therefore, if man lives in accordance with the real, true principle of brotherhood, he is strongest precisely within the struggle for existence, and he will find in the stillness of his heart his

greatest powers, as he develops his entire personality, his entire individuality, in union with his other human brothers and sisters. It is true: a talent develops in tranquility. But the following is also true: character, and with it the entire human being and all of mankind, develops within the currents of the world.

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† Please note that where mention is made of Theosophy or of the Theosophical Society, there is the historical context to be considered, and that perhaps it is not incorrect to think that now these usages can be replaced with the terms Anthroposophy and Anthroposophical Society, insofar as a corrective updating only is intended and not any form of polemic.