

## Depths in Brotherhood—N. Sri Ram

*The American Theosophist*, November 1967

It may be said without any exaggeration that if there is one key to the solution of all problems in human relations, it is the simple yet profound truth of human brotherhood, flowing from the fact that all human beings spring from the same roots and are essentially of the same nature, however much this fact may be veiled and eclipsed by the modifications which this nature undergoes, thus presenting differences in mental and physical characteristics. Let all the existing social and political systems remain as they are, however imperfect and unsatisfactory they might be, given a genuine sense and feeling of brotherhood among the people who constitute those systems, the world will witness a miraculous change; instead of being, as it is very largely, a surging chaos, and for innumerable people whose sorrows are hidden from our sight a near hell, it will become almost a paradise.

Every word which has a beautiful meaning tends in course of usage to become a trite and empty thing, a practically valueless coin. Turned into a conventionalism, a mere sign, an indication of an idea, not the reality, it becomes a handy counter that covers our lack of sensibility and ignorance. Every concept that holds a value which is spiritual in a fundamental sense, that is, devoid of any element of self-interest and self-satisfaction, is degraded and materialized; it is translated in practice in terms that deny its original significance. Thus religion becomes an empty form, a label of exclusiveness and respectability, besides being a means of deluding oneself and a cause of antagonisms. Charity turns into a means of self-display and of winning regard and support for oneself, also a slave to conscience.

Similarly, brotherhood, even when it is considered as a practical doctrine, and not merely suffered as an innocuous idea, is translated in terms of co-existence which asks only for the sufferance and toleration of those with whom one disagrees and whom one dislikes. Merely to exist simultaneously on this planet with another, without either attacking the other, may be an improvement on the law of the jungle, but it is the poorest of poor aims for a human being, constituted as he is as a fountain of energies that can flower into manifold forms of beauty, acting upon others and producing manifold blessings and happiness. He has also in him energies, perhaps the same fundamental energy led into self-distorting patterns, that explode in violence and catastrophe. Nature does not permit a vacuum in space without its being hemmed in with pressures. Walls of isolation do not exist for long, without generating and provoking forces outside those walls to marshal themselves and attack them. History affords numerous examples of this law. Where there are legally or customarily protected privileges, based on no just principles, there are also forces of envy and discontent; and when these privileges either deny legitimate opportunities, or cause hardship, to those excluded from them, they create also resentment and violence. Thus are revolutions born and bred, the law of action and reaction working blindly and catastrophically in human relations and psychology as much as in the field of natural phenomena. ...

Sympathy for a person is generated by a knowledge of his feelings, his needs and experiences, and normally affection is generated by sympathy. But the hectic pace at which life is lived because of the attractions that exist in the world today, which is so different from previous times, allows no time for such knowledge. When we make some superficial or conventional remark on some phenomenon of significance or some event of importance affecting human lives, or some object of beauty, and quickly pass on to some other things, obviously we have not been touched by it. We are preoccupied with our own ideas, ends, and objectives. The mind is rarely clear of them and therefore only to a slight extent open. Our ideas of ourselves and all things generally are partly shaped by reactions which we do not pause to examine, and

partly derived from readings and the various mediums of propaganda; and these keep us at a distance from the actuality of things. It is only rarely that we come into direct touch with another human being without this barrier.

Brotherhood has a meaning in the reality of things which we miss when it becomes an academic doctrine. It means, on the psychological plane, a positive interest in and feeling for others, also an understanding of them. From that base, rising to deeper and subtler realizations, it can become an expression of all the beauty which St. Paul conveys in his letters to the Romans and Corinthians. St. Paul speaks of charity of heart or, as translated by some, of love, which is always beautiful. Love as well as affection is real when it exists, because it is definite and pointed. It is as real as a ray that penetrates or as a current of electricity which rearranges a magnetic field and sparks various physical reactions. But the word brotherhood, because it applies to plurality of beings, becomes a sentiment that is ineffective because of its diffuseness, an amorphous vagueness lacking sharpness of focus and outline. This is because it is a concept placed on some shelf in our thinking and not a force that changes our thinking and behaviour in definite and positive ways. If there is the same essence with the same energies, metaphorically the same blood, in different individuals, in some layer of their being, it can develop a capacity in them to know each other as kin and respond to each other with affection and beauty. It is in this knowledge and in such response that the true meaning of Brotherhood is to be discovered. ↑