

*Helen Buckland Young*

**ADYAR PAMPHLETS**

**No. 46**

**ON MOODS**

BY

**ANNIE BESANT**

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## On Moods

As we all know in theory, the Theosophical Society has as its work in the world the spreading of the great truths of the WISDOM, and most of us believe the fact that these truths are preserved to the world, generation after generation, by the great body of spiritual Teachers whom we speak of as the White Lodge. Those Teachers have their claim on our allegiance because they are the greatest servants of humanity. They stand out above and beyond all other Helpers of men by the immensity of Their sacrifice for the sake of the world, and by the perfection with which Their service is rendered. It is not too much to say of Them that Their very existence lies in sacrifice. Great as are the interests with which They deal, far-reaching as is the wisdom with which They scan the worlds and the evolution of humanity, none the less we know—as all of us have been told and some of us have observed—that despite that immense width of work and of duty They are in fullest and tenderest sympathy with the individual efforts of individual men and women. To us, of course, it is well-nigh

impossible to realise how comprehension so vast is at the same time so minute in its observation. We ourselves, as our interests widen, are so apt to become more careless of details, are so apt to look on the smaller things of life as though they were significant. We are not yet at that point of greatness which is able to look on all things we call great or small as neither small nor great—that point of greatness which considers the perfection with which work may be done as far more important than the importance of the work in the eyes of the world. It is difficult for us, because we are not yet great, to understand this bringing together of points that to us seem to be so opposite in their nature; and yet it is one of the profoundest truths in the universe that the greater the comprehension the more complete, tender and sympathetic is the attention to detail, is the feeling with all that breathes. Greater in range of vision most certainly is the Logos of our system than the Masters who serve under His direction, and yet even closer than Their touch with Their disciples is His touch with all. Literally and perfectly true is that phrase spoken by the Christ that not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father. To that all-embracing Love and Life all lives which are part of Itself are infinitely dear and precious. In the immensity of the Mind which comprehends and supports them all, every distinction disappears, so that that phrase of the poet:

Closer is He than breathing, nearer than hands and feet,

is literally true of the Logos of our universe. And true is it also that They in whom His Spirit is more manifest than it is in us, alike in the extent of Their knowledge and in the depth and detail of Their sympathy, are more like Him than we are like Them.

But while this is true, the great Ideal that They present to us is surely one which we may well endeavour to some extent to reproduce in our lives; for just in proportion as we can extend our knowledge, and deepen, refine and make sensitive our emotions, so are we gradually evolving along the line which at last shall bring us closer to Their perfection. And in this article I wish to urge the infinite importance to each one of us, as member of the Society, as member of the nation or the home, of trying to join together and to evolve in our own life these two aspects of the far-reaching and the detailed sensitive and tender feeling towards each. In the proportion that we reach the Wisdom, which is the realisation of the One Life, so also must be the proportion with which we manifest the Love, which is the unity of that Wisdom manifesting itself in the diversity of forms; for just as Wisdom recognises that all lives are one, so does the separate life—realising that Wisdom and yet the infinite variety of separate forms—try to draw its own enveloping form towards the other envelopes of the Soul. The drawing

together of the forms by the Life is that which we know as Love; so that the Wisdom of the buddhic plane is the Love of the emotional plane. And as that Wisdom begins to bud on the higher plane its aspect in our emotions must flower in proportion. It is this recognition in our own lives of the duty of knowing, and of the duty of loving, which builds up that rounded perfection of character after which each one of us should strive. In the past we have naturally evolved in a lop-sided manner; we have evolved perhaps strongly in the direction of knowledge or strongly in the direction of love and sympathy. It is our duty, now that we are beginning to understand things better, to take our emotions into our own hands and our evolution under our own control; we should see that these two things that seem so different down here are really but two aspects of the same Life as manifested on the higher planes of being. And as we see this intellectually and try to realise it emotionally, we shall be developing the type of character which approaches to the possibility of Initiation into the Higher Life, we shall be preparing ourselves for that growth of wisdom which makes possible the opening of our eye on the buddhic plane.

Now, one great obstacle that we find in our way, both with regard to the growth of our knowledge and to the refining and deepening of our emotions, is the obstacle of changeableness in ourselves, that

which we sometimes speak of as our changing moods. And these are very curious and strange; curious, because they seem to alter our whole attitude towards the very things of which really our certainty is the most profound; strange, because of the enormous power which they wield over us. On what we call an April day, when clouds and sunshine are rapidly succeeding one another, we see a landscape at one moment dark, then bright; then a portion shines out brightly while another portion is clouded, and so on; as the clouds and sunshine change so the whole appearance of things, either shadowed or illuminated, alters; the stream which shines like silver in the sunlight rolls grey and dull beneath the cloud. We see these changes and we know that they are due to the cloud and the sunrays succeeding one another in relation to these things, so that the relation between them is that which changes and makes the immense difference in appearance. And so with us. These moods which have such immense power over us, which influence us so profoundly, are the changing clouds and sunshine of the intellectual and the emotional temperaments—it is chiefly to the emotional temperament that these changing moods must be traced. For although it is perfectly true that so far as the intellect is concerned it is sometimes alert and sometimes sluggish, sometimes quick to grasp and sometimes slow, sometimes inclined to labour and sometimes to be idle, those changes are really not of

the essence of the intellectual nature at all, but only that of the intellectual nature as it works beneath the clouds or sunshine that come to it by contact with the emotional plane. When we want to deal with these moods which sweep over us we must trace them to their origin in the region of the emotions, and learn how they can be dealt with there.

I put side by side the moods of sunshine and of cloud because the sunshiny condition is quite as much a mood as the cloudy one—they go together, a pair of opposites, and if we watch ourselves, we find that just in proportion to the depth and completeness of the depression of one time is the brightness and completeness of the sunshiny mood of another. People who do not sink low in depression do not rise high in elation, while those who at one time are in a state of brilliant delight are those who at another sink down to the very depths of depression. It is a question of the swing of the emotions, and, just as in the swing of a pendulum, the further it swings one side the further it will swing on the other side of the middle point, so it is also with our emotions. Now this is one of the marked peculiarities of western peoples, and we have it very largely from being born in western nations. For it is a very marked peculiarity that as we travel eastwards this great changeability of moods largely disappears—not entirely, but so much so that it is scarcely perceptible when one is accustomed to the immense changes which sweep

over the western nature, and it is a point which I often observed during my stay in India. I have found it has been for myself a matter of difficulty and continued struggle to reach the kind of equability of mood which seems almost the natural condition of the ordinary cultivated Indian mind. I do not, of course, know at all intimately the people of other eastern nations, but I should imagine from much that I have heard that this equability is also found among the people on the other side of the Indian Peninsula.

This equability of mood is an immense advantage ; it prevents a person from being thrown continually off his feet either in one direction or another, and if he is devoted to any particular ideal at one time you may expect to find him devoted to that when you meet him perhaps at long intervals. We, on the other hand, continually find that our attitude changes, so far as our emotions are concerned, to our ideals. And our moods change not only with reference to our ideals ; I should like also to pause for a moment on certain moods which come to us that do not affect us so deeply, in order to clear them out of the way and distinguish them from the more important moods.

Now, first of all, we have a certain amount of changeability of moods caused by the nerves. Very often depression or elation, irritability or calm, are matters very largely dependent on the state of the physical nerves. And those who are students of their own nature should try to divide off the moods of that

kind from those of a more serious nature. These things are to be conquered, to be got rid of definitely by a certain amount of reasonableness, common-sense and understanding. First we must separate them from the others; we must see how far our nervous condition is at the root of our changing moods—a little extra tension of the nerves, a little extra fatigue, a little less of sleep, will make all the difference in this type of moods. When we recognise that for responsible beings it is a thing of which to be ashamed, we should try to get beyond them by endeavouring to keep our bodies as healthy as possible, a duty to ourselves and to those around us; if the body is out of sorts then necessarily, unless we are very strong, there will be this nervous reaction on our moods. We may be strong enough to prevent it; we cannot be strong enough to work against it as if the nerves were in good order. And one necessity is the deliberate measuring of our strength and fitting what we do to that measure. It is not a question of the amount of work, but of the proportion between the amount of work and our ability to do it; the amount of work one can do will be different from what another can do, and it is no use to judge by the amount of work; we must judge the power of the person to do the work without being thrown into an overstrained condition. There is where common-sense and wisdom come in. My own rule for marking out my work is simply to see how much out of all the

claims upon me I can attend to, knowing what power I have at my disposal ; and when I have marked that out, I do not go outside it, no matter how much people may blame me for not doing what they think I ought to do in attending to them—and that is often difficult, because it wants a certain amount of grim determination, when you have marked out what you have to do, not to let yourself be forced beyond it. Yet this is the right way for the Wisdom-student to act, not only because he has no right to break down in the service he is offering to his Master, but because it is not “duty” to do more than we are able to do, and that which is not duty is beating the air. That is an important lesson in occult teaching ; we cannot effectively do more than it is our duty to do ; if we try to do more, everything outside the duty is so much wasted time and work ; it is mere folly to try to do it. There is also the great fact that by doing what is not our duty, we are preventing some one else from doing what is his duty, merely out of our own conceit. We often overstrain ourselves because we think we are the only people who can do this work. As a matter of fact there are many people who can do it. This lesson in occult economy is one I recommend to all who are apt to overstrain themselves and break down. It is a blunder in practice and hinders the evolution of those around us ; they must evolve as well as we, and we have no right to take away from them their fair opportunities of growth

by service. These overstrained nerves from overwork are things that should be looked on as absolutely wrong.

Let us put aside that sort of moods, and take another kind, which is very often very distressing, but would be less so if rightly understood. I mean, those that come from our increasing sensitiveness to super-physical conditions, before we are sufficiently evolved to recognise what those influences are. As we evolve our astral bodies, they not only receive more impressions from the astral plane but pass them on more to the physical body, and so we find a mood of great depression coming over us for which we cannot in any way account. Now very often such a mood is simply an overshadowing from the astral plane with which we have really no more to do ourselves than the stream which is shadowed by the cloud has directly to do with the cloud. These clouds come over us from the astral plane, sometimes because one we love at a distance is suffering, sometimes because some misfortune is on its way to us and the shadow foreruns it—we have seen and felt it on the astral plane before it comes into view on the physical. Sometimes it is that there are troubles, not of those immediately connected with us, but of those in our neighbourhood, setting up some vibrations to which we unconsciously and sympathetically respond, and the wider our sympathies the more liable to depressions of this kind are we. People, for instance, who

feel strongly about public matters, who are deeply interested in the welfare of large numbers of their fellowmen, such people would feel very heavy depression sometimes from public calamities which are impending or going on at the time. Take, for instance such a thing as the trouble caused by a great strike. Many people who do not suffer directly from it, who are not in themselves physically suffering directly, might get clouds of depression coming over them from the actual sufferings of the people under depression at the time, and so with many public events either coming or present.

What, then, can a person do when a mood of this sort comes along? The only way I know of meeting those is by the clear, definite recognition of the law; the feeling that nothing can come to us or to others which is not within that law, the feeling that whatever comes is working to a good purpose and for a good end, the intense inner conviction that just as when a trouble comes and we see it and understand it we deliberately train ourselves to accept it and live through it, so we are to deal with these vaguer and obscurer things. We need not let the vagueness overpower us; we should not let the obscurity blind us to the working of the law; and we should habitually cultivate the frame of mind which faces everything that may come with fearlessness, remembering that great truth written in an eastern Scripture: "Brahman is fearless," and those who share His nature

should also share His fearlessness. The cultivation of a spirit that is without fear is one of the very best things any one of us can do. To face the world knowing it is full of cloud and sunshine, and to be willing to pass through each in turn, refusing when the feeling of depression comes to let it master us, recognising it as a shadow thrown upon us from outside, and declining to allow that shadow to influence the light that is within. That clear recognition that many of the clouds of depression are simply from the astral plane, the dealing with them as impulses that affect us from that region, the looking at them in this light, calmly and deliberately, will generally remove them from our path, and make them take their proper place as simply interesting psychological facts which we do not permit to disturb or affect our serenity.

These, then, are what I may call the less important moods: those that come from the nervous system, and those that come down upon us from the astral region. And all of you who are anxious to become more sensitive and to develop the inner psychical faculties, might consider, when dealing with these moods of depression, how, if you are affected by them, you would face the things which are casting these shadows; how, say, physical life would be carried on, if you had continually in mind all these incidents on the astral plane which in the mere shadow cast down on the waking consciousness have so much power to depress;

because until you have grown entirely beyond being affected by such moods, until you have got rid of that lack of confidence in the law which makes it possible for these to affect you so strongly, it is better that your eyes should remain closed. It would be impossible for you to have a moment's peace or quiet, if that wider life pressed upon you, and if you could see on the one side all its troubles with the wondering how to meet them, and on the other all its joys with the inevitable elation and impatience that those joys would bring.

Passing from the less important to the more important moods, what is it in us which at one time makes us full of enthusiasm and at another quite different? Why, to put it plainly, at one time does our Theosophical work appear to us as the one thing that makes life worth living and at another (if we speak perfectly honestly to ourselves) we do not care a bit about it, we have neither love for it nor wish to be in it. I know that is a strong way of putting it, but I do not think it is too strong; I have felt this myself time after time. It is a hard and difficult mood to be in, mostly because it is a mood that makes people think they have gone suddenly back in evolution, or made some tremendous failure; it is nothing of the kind, and what is more, these feelings of not caring for, or of indifference towards, our ideals are not of themselves of any importance. What is important is our conduct under them; what we *feel* does not matter much, how

we *act* under the sway of feelings matters immensely, and that is the real test of enthusiasm. Do we, when we do not care, act exactly as if we did? Are we strong enough, when we feel that everything is dead, to go on exactly as if everything were pulsing with the most vivid life? Can we work as strenuously, serve as completely, devote ourselves as utterly, when the ideal is dim and vague as when it is brilliant and filling our life with light? If we can do this, our devotion is worth something; if we cannot, there is still much to learn. And this is one of the thoughts I would like to arouse in all of us, because these changes of mood are not possible to escape until we have risen very high. I do not know, in fact, how high it is necessary to rise in order to get quite beyond those stages in which the attitude in feeling to the ideal appears to change.

And how shall we meet these moods? First, I think, by a recognition of what is called the law of rhythm, which H. P. B., in *The Secret Doctrine*, puts as one of the fundamental truths; and yet it is a law which few people understand at all, apparently, in its bearing on themselves. What are these moods of enthusiasm and indifference but the inevitable working of this law of periodicity? These moods must take their part in our emotional and intellectual life—as inevitably as night and day, as necessary as night and day. A person who was without these changes would be like a person who is either always in the night or always in the day. But the wise man should endeavour to bring

the day into the night and the night into the day, and that brings about what is often called the Higher Indifference, an equability that is maintained under all conditions. It is not that the night and day cease to follow each other; it is not that the darkness and light do not still fall upon the soul; but that the soul, recognising them, is no longer affected by them, feels them without being shaken by them, experiences them without confusing them with himself.

We will recognise then this law of periodicity, that the changes will come, and we will be ready to meet them. When the mood of indifference comes, we will quietly say to ourselves: "I was very enthusiastic for a considerable time; necessarily now I must feel the reverse." The moment we are able to say that and think it, the power of the darkness over us lessens; the darkness is there as before, but we have separated ourselves from it; we see it as an external thing which does not flood the recesses of the soul, we realise it as something belonging to the lower changing astral body. And by that very act of separation, by the recognition of the law that is working and that is good in its working, we remember the day in the darkness of the night, and we remember the darkness of night in the day. Some people do not care to remember the darkness during the period of light. But if they want to gain power over both they must do so. They must check the mood of over-elation quite as much as the mood of over-depression. The

mood of lightness is more dangerous than the mood of darkness ; it contains more perils, for it is just in the time when we feel most elated that we do the things that afterwards we wish we had not done, and lose that vigilance which the pressure of the darkness makes us maintain. The sentry is less careful in the light than in the night-time, and sometimes, therefore, more easily surprised. Most of the slips we make are in the time of brightness rather than in the time of darkness. Understanding the law of rhythm, then, is the first step towards becoming master of our moods.

The next step is the intellectual one, which definitely recognises that the ideal which is beautiful at one time must be beautiful still, although its charm for us may have vanished. That which is beauty cannot cease to be beauty because our eyes are blinded. We shall bring the clear light of the intellect to bear on the clouds, we shall realise that that which, when our sight was clear, was seen to be good is good, no matter what clouds may sweep around it. And just as the mariner takes his bearings by the sun and by the stars when he is able to see them because they are not covered by clouds, but steers by these bearings afterwards when the clouds have covered the sky, so should we, when the emotional clouds are absent, take our bearings by the sun and by the stars of Beauty and of Truth, and then steer our course by those when the clouds have

hidden them, knowing that these everlasting lights change not, although clouds may hide them and storm and darkness be around.

To understand, then, the law of periodicity, to base our ideals on the intellect and not only on the emotions (for the intellect stands by us when the emotions fail), these are two of our greatest means of becoming calm and peaceful in the midst of these changing moods. Then the steady attempt day by day to realise ourselves as the Eternal and the Changeless, and to put aside as not ourselves everything in us which is changing—that is the practice which leads us beyond the moods into peace. We must make it part of our daily thought. Let us give one minute, or a couple of minutes, in the morning, to this definite recognition: “I am the Changeless, the Eternal Self.” Let us say it over, dwell upon it until it becomes a constant music in life, which we can hear at every moment when we turn our ears aside from the noise and tumult of the streets. Let us make it the habitual thought, and it will become in time the ruling thought, so that always there will be playing in us the idea: “I am the Changeless, the Eternal Self.” The strength of that! The beauty of it! The glory of it! No one can even dream of it save those who for a moment have felt it. If we could always live in that, we should be as Gods walking the earth: even glimpses of it seem to bring the peace and the beauty of Divinity into our petty and sordid lives.

And it is not so difficult a thing to think of this each morning, and it is worth doing it. As we continually think, that we will become. All the Sages have so taught. All the Scriptures of the world proclaim it: as the man thinks so he is. And this thought is of all the truest thought, the most absolutely true that can enter into the mind. We are the Self, the living, the eternal, and the changeless. That is the thought, then, that means peace, the thought which makes all the moods unable to do any real harm, to change our steps in life. That they will not come, I do not say, but we shall not blunder by identifying them with ourselves. We shall no longer feel: "I am happy," "I am unhappy," "I am in light," "I am in darkness." We shall say, when we feel that this lower sheath, this lower mind, is in the darkness or light, is happy or unhappy, is depressed or glad: "Let me see what I can learn from that changing experience, what useful lesson for myself or for the helping of others I can win from this experience through which the lower part of me is passing." For that, after all, is what we are here for, to learn what is to be learnt through these lower principles, which are so changing, so volatile, so irrational, so foolish. We hold them because they are valuable for the lessons that they can pass on to us; and how should we ever be able to help others, who are the victims of the moods, unless we ourselves experienced those moods, and experienced

them when we were separate from them ? So long as we are their victims we cannot help others, but if we did not feel them we should not be able to help others any the more ; for if we did not feel with them, we could not sympathise with them and therefore could not help. And that also I have noticed in the same eastern people I was speaking of before. They often fail in sympathy, because they do not experience the changes which would make them able to understand and thereby able to help. It is well that we should know by experience the pains which others suffer, but also well that we should learn to know them so that we can study them ourselves and not be conquered by them. As long as we are conquered we cannot be helpers. We have to learn at once to conquer and also to help, to feel enough to sympathise but not enough to blind. And suppose we could look at our own moods from this standpoint we should find that at once almost they had lost their power to sweep us completely off our feet. We should find we were becoming separate by the very fact of the analysis we were carrying on ; and although at first it seems an intellectual exercise we should find it a step towards realisation, we should feel ourselves apart in the very effort to imagine ourselves apart. Then we reach that higher point so often spoken of in *The Bhagavad-Gītā*—to be above the pairs of opposites, above the guṇas, and also able to use them. For these

are the great forces of the world which are affecting ourselves. These are the great energies of nature by which all is brought about that she brings about in her vast workings. While we are moved by them we are their slaves; when we begin to control them we can turn them to the noblest ends.

These moods of ours that seem so troublesome are really our best teachers, and as we learn that we shall value them rather than dislike them or shrink from them. We shall feel that they are only our enemies while they are unsubdued, according, again, to a great phrase which says: "To the unsubdued self, the Self verily becometh hostile as an enemy." The fact is that all these storms and whirlpools around us in the lower self are the very things that we have come into the world to live amongst in order that we may understand and use them; the things that we think are enemies are our best friends, they are the things that enable us to grow, that give us power to rule. The more we thus look on all in the clear light of the WISDOM, the more peaceful will our lives become; the more these moods are used to understand others for the helping of them, the more shall we rise above them as enemies until they become our friends. It is a great and a true saying: "We have never conquered our enemy until we have turned him into our friend." That is true of the lower self, it is true of all the surging emotions, it is true of all the difficulties around us, of all the trials and the ordeals through which we pass.

We see them as serried hosts opposing our onward path; we conquer them, and find that they are great hosts behind us, ready to be led by us, into the battle which shall win the victory of the Self.

These are some of the lessons that I have learned in the light and in the darkness, and far more in the darkness than in the light. So that I have come to think that the times of light are only valuable as times of rest to prepare one for higher struggles and for greater conquests, and to look on the darkness as the welcome time, the time in which the Masters best are served, the time in which the world is lifted a little higher towards the Light. But it becomes true for us all at last that darkness is as light and light as darkness; it becomes true for us at last that darkness has no power to appal and no power to depress, that we know that those who would bring the light must be those who live in the dark, that the torch that sends its fire out around itself is but a dark piece of wood, and in the burning of the dark wood the light comes to others, but not to itself. How shall we be able to go into the darkness of all Christs who have saved the world, except by learning to bear the passing darknesses which creep over us from time to time? The greatest lesson of all that we have to learn, the lesson that it is the one privilege of life to learn, and learn perfectly, is the lesson that those who would help the world must go below the world and lift it on their shoulders, that those who would

bring the sunshine to others must accept the shadow and cloud for themselves. But in the cloud there is a fire, and in the fire there is the voice of the stillness, and only those who have the courage to enter into the cloud find therein the light which is the glory of the Self; they see the Flame, they know themselves as the bearers in the world of the Flame that illuminates, and they learn to know that the darkness and the light are both alike, because they are equally divine, because without the one the other could not be.



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