

## Freedom of Thought

As the Theosophical Society has spread far and wide over the world, and as members of all religions have become members of it without surrendering the special dogmas, teachings and beliefs of their respective faiths, it is thought desirable to emphasize the fact that there is no doctrine, no opinion, by whomsoever taught or held, that is in any way binding on any member of the Society, none which any member is not free to accept or reject. Approval of its three Objects is the sole condition of membership. No teacher, or writer, from H. P. Blavatsky onwards, has any authority to impose his or her teachings or opinions on members. Every member has an equal right to follow any school of thought, but has no right to force the choice on any other. Neither a candidate for any office nor any voter can be rendered ineligible to stand or to vote, because of any opinion held, or because of membership in any school of thought. Opinions or beliefs neither bestow privileges nor inflict penalties. The Members of the General Council earnestly request every member of the Theosophical Society to maintain, defend and act upon these fundamental principles of the Society, and also fearlessly to exercise the right of liberty of thought and of expression thereof, within the limits of courtesy and consideration for others.

## Freedom of the Society

The Theosophical Society, while cooperating with all other bodies whose aims and activities make such cooperation possible, is and must remain an organization entirely independent of them, not committed to any objects save its own, and intent on developing its own work on the broadest and most inclusive lines, so as to move towards its own goal as indicated in and by the pursuit of those objects and that Divine Wisdom which in the abstract is implicit in the title 'The Theosophical Society'.

Since Universal Brotherhood and the Wisdom are undefined and unlimited, and since there is complete freedom for each and every member of the Society in thought and action, the Society seeks ever to maintain its own distinctive and unique character by remaining free of affiliation or identification with any other organization.



# THE THEOSOPHIST

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# THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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**The Theosophical Society** is composed of students, belonging to any religion in the world or to none, who are united by their approval of the Society's Objects, by their wish to remove religious antagonisms and to draw together men of goodwill, whatsoever their religious opinions, and by their desire to study religious truths and to share the results of their studies with others. Their bond of union is not the profession of a common belief, but a common search and aspiration for Truth. They hold that Truth should be sought by study, by reflection, by purity of life, by devotion to high ideals, and they regard Truth as a prize to be striven for, not as a dogma to be imposed by authority. They consider that belief should be the result of individual study or intuition, and not its antecedent, and should rest on knowledge, not on assertion. They extend tolerance to all, even to the intolerant, not as a privilege they bestow but as a duty they perform, and they seek to remove ignorance, not punish it. They see every religion as an expression of the Divine Wisdom and prefer its study to its condemnation, and its practice to proselytism. Peace is their watchword, as Truth is their aim.

**Theosophy** is the body of truths which forms the basis of all religions, and which cannot be claimed as the exclusive possession of any. It offers a philosophy which renders life intelligible, and which demonstrates the justice and the love which guide its evolution. It puts death in its rightful place, as a recurring incident in an endless life, opening the gateway to a fuller and more radiant existence. It restores to the world the Science of the Spirit, teaching man to know the Spirit as himself and the mind and body as his servants. It illuminates the scriptures and doctrines of religions by unveiling their hidden meanings, and thus justifying them at the bar of intelligence, as they are ever justified in the eyes of intuition.

Members of the Theosophical Society study these truths, and theosophists endeavour to live them. Everyone willing to study, to be tolerant, to aim high, and to work perseveringly, is welcomed as a member, and it rests with the member to become a true theosophist.

# Presidential Address

To the 145th International Convention of the Theosophical Society  
Online from 27 to 30 December 2020

I WOULD like to welcome you to this 145th International Convention of the Theosophical Society (TS). Last year, when the location for this meeting was moved to the Indian Section's Headquarters in Varanasi, we thought of it as an exceptional year. This year, 2020, will go down in history as a *most* exceptional year. This is the first time in the TS's history that we have been unable to gather face to face for this annual event. Even during the World Wars, in some manner we were able to gather in each other's presence for this International Convention. These challenging times should make us reflect on the root reasons for this global pandemic, and the role that humanity has played in bringing it about. Let it be our intention to come out of this moment stronger and wiser. Now let us please rise for the invocation to those Great Ones who guide and protect the Society:

**May those who are the embodiments of Love Immortal  
bless with their help and guidance this Society,  
founded to be a channel for their work.  
May They inspire it with their Wisdom, strengthen it  
with their Power, and energize it with their activity.**

I am now pleased to open this 145th Annual Convention of the TS.

Every year has its trials, lessons, and challenges. This year the fact of our interdependence and inseparability has been confirmed in the most definite, if painful, manner. Even the darkest days are not without light. And this moment of trial is filled with blessings, if we can see and respond. For a brief time the "normal" behavior of our human family has been interrupted. A globally shared threat to health and well being has caused us to stop, to isolate, to halt our blind, headlong rush toward an unsustainable,

damaging vision of progress affecting all of the life forms on our Earth. H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) once said: "Do not be afraid of your difficulties. Do not wish you could be in other circumstances than you are. For when you have made the best of an adversity, it becomes the stepping stone to a splendid opportunity."

There is another way — not something new, or old, ancient, or modern, but the ageless potential for an applied Brotherhood/Sisterhood, interdependence, interbeing that this moment cries out

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for. The entire reason for the existence of the Theosophical movement is to move from potential to the actual growing circles of compassion that must arise when we “get it”.

One of humanity’s unfortunate features has been that we seem to learn more readily from crisis and suffering than from ease and comfort. During

this time of stress and change let us all try to strengthen our link with that source that supports us all. This moment we are presently living through will come to an end, and with it will arise new challenges demanding a deepening access to our inner resources. Let us rise to meet the needs of this moment and the ones to come.

\* \* \*

I am happy to note that 80 new members joined the TS in **Brazil** during the year. They celebrated their centenary over a week-long programme with lectures, musical presentations, and release of the book *Theosophy, the Truth of All Ages*. The 39th Summer Theosophical School was held in Teresópolis, Rio, in January on “Introduction to Yoga, an Esoteric Approach”. Cultural activities were carried out and there was greater integration of the young members. Despite the pandemic challenges, they successfully held the International Theosophical School and Winter Seminar on the virtual Zoom platform on “Science and Spirituality” with 338 registrants.

All in-person meetings of the TS in **Canada**, scheduled to be held in 2020, had to be cancelled due to the unprecedented global crisis caused by Covid-19. However, meetings continued to be held online with Zoom and some even continued throughout the summer. Their National Convention in August was also held on the Zoom platform, titled “The Ego, Its Composition, Its Mechanism, and Its Transformation”, in both English

and French. They are planning to have their 2021 Convention on Zoom again.

It is unfortunate that the TS in **Chile**, despite its best efforts, could not continue with their regular and special activities due to a long period of social unrest followed by the Covid-19 lockdown. Their highlight was the celebration of the 118th anniversary of the Arundhati Lodge Constitution Charter being signed by Col. H. S. Olcott. Some activities were held on a virtual basis in the Lodges. Four public theosophical classes were held in January, generating good participation, of which 7 became members. Members-only work-shops continued till January.

Regular activities of the Lodges in **Costa Rica** such as meetings and discussions were held as usual, except that during March to September they had to be held via the Internet. Some videos and talks were sourced from Spain, Argentina, and Brazil. Based on popular demand, a basic course on Theosophy was started by some Lodges for newcomers and non-members. Like elsewhere, the pandemic cast its shadow on the **Cuban** theosophical activities. Fortunately, all regu-

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lar functions, including public conferences, were held from October to March with the Annual Convention being organized in January on the theme “Peace”.

The **Dominican Republic** has under it the Atma and Nueva Aurora Lodges, and H. P. Blavatsky Group. Members are dedicated, active, and sincere in their studies. Due to the pandemic, meetings, conferences, and lectures are now being conducted virtually. The **Mexican** Section helped in organizing the “Magna Escuela de Sabiduría Digital 2020” of the Inter-American Theosophical Federation, with me giving the opening address. Due to Covid-19 they were also able to participate in programs organized by other Spanish-speaking countries. They have 120 members in 9 Lodges and 5 study centers. The two Lodges of **Peru** conducted all their regular meetings, including studies on important books and special day celebrations, between October and March. Thereafter, some programs were held on the virtual platform.

The TS in **Puerto Rico** has been holding regular meetings and theosophical studies in important and interesting areas on the virtual platform. The pandemic has not been a deterrent. Universal Flame Lodge has a unique way of keeping the members excited by telephonic studies. Many members in South America, the Caribbean, and Florida have been benefited by the virtual public lectures and conferences offered by the Spanish-speaking Lodges. It is a nice gesture for them to send excerpts of theosophical texts to facilitate daily meditation.

Regular activities in **Uruguay** were held from October to April. During the lockdown virtual meetings were held once a week on the same day and time. Though due to the pandemic all conferences were cancelled, members and well wishers were invited to attend conferences organized by other Spanish-speaking Sections. Their Theosophical Order of Service (TOS) has three main activities on their agenda — donations for wheelchairs and animal shelters, and Chi Kung classes for a holistic life.

Membership in the **TS in America** is 3,370 with 910 life members. In mid-March everything stopped due to the pandemic and headquarters was closed, anticipating a two-week closure. Staff continued to be paid, but after remaining closed for five weeks with little to no income and continuing expenses, two-thirds of the staff had to be furloughed. A special call for help was issued to members and friends, and the response was amazing. Many staff members have since returned to work. In mid-March, all face-to-face programs moved to an online format. The Thursday night lectures have continued; they are live-streamed weekly and then placed on YouTube. A weekly online meditation has been added, as also an electronic Daily Seed Thought. For the coming year, theosophical programs will continue to be provided online, reallocating staff in some areas. Audiences have actually increased, because the programs are now available around the world.

The H. S. Olcott Memorial Library

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worked with theosophical libraries in various countries to resolve collection gaps, increased membership by 23 percent from last year, and began making audio recordings and textual resources more readily available online, especially through <www.archive.org>. Over 900 items have been digitized and viewed over 13,000 times. The archives department received donations of archival materials. Digitization projects continue as also providing information on a huge range of topics. The <Theosophy.wiki> encyclopedia continues to expand online resulting in over 30,000 page views each month by users globally. The IT department did a network upgrade and re-designed the <theosophical.org> website to simplify navigation. It also supports projects, like the new Online School of Theosophy <study.theosophical.org>, around the world. The AV department continued to post videos on <youtube.com/user/TheosophicalSociety> with about 75,000 subscribers. The Theosophical Publishing House in Wheaton is focusing on production of audiobooks of classic theosophical titles and sales through Amazon/Audible. The Quest Book Shop offers 40 percent discount on all products available on <questbooks.com> and had its most successful year in terms of numbers of visitors and sales.

Most study groups have shifted to virtual meetings via Zoom. The prison program continues to provide assistance across the country, offering prisoners books, gift memberships, and correspondence courses. Over 450 prisoners

have completed one or more courses.

The TS in **Venezuela** celebrated Foundation Day of the TS in November. Study classes and other activities were cancelled from March to September due to the global pandemic. In every Lodge meeting, members meditate for half an hour for world peace and study books of I.K. Taimni, articles on science and spirituality, and other books.

The **East and Central African** Section delivered a number of theosophical talks at the Nairobi Lodge on different theosophical concepts. A workshop on “Planning for the Future” was organized in which deliberations were made regarding increase of membership and attendance at regular Lodge meetings. On behalf of the TOS, organized by Nairobi Lodge, 11 children were given wheelchairs, a pair of crutches to 1 child, and food packets were distributed to all the children. The General Secretary visited Nile Lodge, in Kampa in February, delivered public lectures, and conducted a seminar for the members of the Lodge. I am happy to know that several members joined the Section.

The year was difficult for the TS in **South Africa** due to various reasons, one being a slump in the economy. Lodge meetings moved to earlier time slots due to escalating crime. After the initial stages of the Covid-19 lockdown, most Lodges opened in September. Attendance is expected to improve from January. The national convention planned in September in Pretoria had to be cancelled. A course on “Human Constitution, Its Constituents and Development” has

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been introduced and greater participation is expected.

The 3 Lodges of the TS in **Austria**, with 59 registered members (2 members directly attached to the Section), continued with weekly lectures and other activities. Their annual meeting was held in March at Graz. Some of their members attended the summer school of the German TS. Until mid-March, the **Belgian** TS Lodge meetings and lectures were going on as usual. Despite the lockdown, the formal annual members' meeting was organized. Most of the major events could not take place because of the global disaster. It is good to know that some members could attend the last International Convention held in Varanasi. Membership has come down to 62, as 3 resigned on the ground of it being an inconvenience to attend meetings regularly.

The nationwide lockdown for Covid-19 around the world also affected the TS in **England and Wales**. However, the National President maintained contact with all members during this critical time by issuing a monthly newsletter. I am pleased that TSE members in Wales were welcomed and made to feel inclusive. The 39th Congress of the European Federation of TS was postponed until August 2021. The theme of the Congress, "Healing Oneself, Healing the World", will remain unchanged. It is noteworthy that online foundation and diploma courses on Theosophy are being continued and currently being translated into Russian. Their magazine, *Esoterica*, will be issued to members and the

public thrice annually from this autumn.

The Annual General Meeting of the **Finnish** Section was organized successfully in Kreivila, postponing the date from April to July due to the pandemic. The major event of the year, the Summer School, was also held in Kreivila in July, on "Eternal Wisdom and the Present Moment". They had three other events in Kreivila: a course on the "Healing Powers of Nature and Other Secrets", a weekend for Lodges, and a silent retreat. The local Lodges in Estonia organized the Estonian Summer School with the theme "Peace within Me". Estonian Lodges had a winter seminar in January and a study class on *The Secret Doctrine* in March. They also had an autumn study camp in August. From March to August, many events were cancelled due to the pandemic. The Finnish Section has 21 Lodges with 335 members.

The activities of the TS in **France** were regular up to the lockdown in March. Bi-monthly courses attracted regular participants to the Headquarters in Paris. Silent retreats took place once a trimester; meditation sessions were organized monthly. There were public lectures and introduction to Tai Chi courses. The Section reacted quickly to the pandemic situation and began to organize programmes on Zoom. The online presence has grown, including Facebook, YouTube, and weekly e-newsletters permitting more attendees from a number of countries to participate in the programmes. The bookshop was closed at the beginning of the lockdown, but clients could order books online, by



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phone, and by post. Due to disruptions in postal services, in April, the monthly magazine *Le Lotus Bleu* was published in electronic form, and since then some subscribers prefer to receive it by email only. The national convention, usually organized in June, was postponed to October, and took place on Zoom.

The Northern **German** Spring Meeting and the Summer School could not be held because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The book *Meditations on the Occult Life* by Geoffrey Hodson was presented to all members as a gift for their homework. It was very thoughtful on the part of the General Secretary to have posted passages of books, sayings, and book and movie re-recommendations in the website. It is good to know that five new members joined after reading the book *The Universal Healing Field* by Peter and Katarina Michel gifted to them. As a part of TOS activities, two healing groups met twice a month. The total number of members is 124. The Southern German Meeting was held in September. This one-day meeting was fruitful with talks and deliberations on the theme of healing. It was well attended by 16 members and one guest member from England.

Two important theosophical conferences took place in **Greece**, namely, “The History of Theosophy Conference” and “The European School of Theosophy Conference”, both in October. The success of both the conferences was acknowledged by the participants attending from 20 countries. Another important activity was in January, when two

Lodges, Helios and Orpheus, were twinned with the Leeds Lodge (UK). Before the lockdown due to pandemic, in the months of October to March, seven Lodges had their regular meetings and lectures.

Of the 3 Lodges in **Hungary**, it seems only Siddhartha Lodge is active. The pandemic lockdown affected the program during the year. Two new books were published, *The Key to Theosophy* by H. P. Blavatsky and *Self-Transformation* by Vic Hao Chin, Jr. Thirty-seven different theosophical books are available in the Hungarian language. Public lectures are recorded and available on YouTube. A new website with a new design was made containing about 170 downloadable translations of the classic as well as modern theosophical literature. I am happy to know that a new Lodge is likely to come up in the forest area of adjacent Slovakia.

The Summer School of the **Icelandic** Section of the TS, which was to be held in June, got cancelled because of the pandemic. This year they had 26 meetings from the beginning of October to 8 February. The talks were usually advertised through social media and were open to the general public free of charge. The newsletter *Mundilfari* is published thrice a year with reports about TS meetings of the Section and around the world. The eight active Lodges, including a new one, Martinus, in Reykjavik and one in Akureyri, had regular Friday lectures and Saturday meetings with discussions and videos till February, when Covid-19 intervened. The talks were advertised

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and open to the public besides members of the TS. Attendance was usually from 30 to 60 persons. People had the opportunity to meet the lecturers afterward and discuss with them further. A few Lodges had members-only meetings too. *Gangleri*, their annual journal, was published with 160 pages.

No new books were published but some of the earlier books were reprinted. The website <lifspekifelagid.is>, in Icelandic and English, contains information on the Section, its activities, events, a collection of lectures and articles by various authors, and so on. The Summer School planned in June had to be cancelled and the Annual General Meeting had to be postponed twice due to Covid 19.

In **Ireland**, both Belfast and Phoenix Lodges in Dublin had a successful and harmonious year of meetings until the Covid-19 lockdown. The 15th All-Ireland Convention in Dublin also had to be cancelled. Nevertheless, the Organizing Secretary kept in touch with all the Irish members weekly, sending on theosophical programmes and newsletters from abroad, including Adyar, US, the Philippines, Europe. She also sent everyone a weekly selection of uplifting extracts from theosophical and spiritual texts. Each member frequently received attachments of TS news worldwide and study notes from texts such as *The Bhagavadgītā*, *The Voice of the Silence*, and other books on Theosophy. The membership is growing.

Despite the unprecedented pandemic, the activities of the **Italian** Section (ITS)

continued with the use of new digital communication technologies. It also made it possible to develop new initiatives and new contacts; as a result, there is growing general interest in the TS and its activities. They have a well-structured website, rich in information, visited by 6,500 surfers every month, and this increased during the lockdown. There is a section named “members only” with a separate address. It gives information about TOS activities also. The monthly newsletter is emailed to over 3,800 people interested in theosophical activities in Italy. Five books were published by ITS. In November, a large audience attended a public meeting. Marco Pasi, Associate Professor from the University of Amsterdam, presented a report on “Antonio Fogazzaro and Theosophy — An Investigation Based on Previously Unpublished Documents”. I am happy to share that an “Introduction to Theosophy and the Theosophical Society” course was produced having lessons in the classrooms, Zoom lessons, and recorded ones. It was a great success, and the second one has already started.

Despite Covid-19 a lot of activity is going on in the TS in the **Netherlands** and at the International Theosophical Centre (ITC) in Naarden. The Garden of Remembrance at ITC, which holds ashes of Annie Besant, Rukmini Devi, and others, is being renovated. A guesthouse was renovated in November. The membership has increased to 357. The General Members Meeting took place in October. The Dutch Section includes a library of 21,000 books linked online to

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the Lodge and ITC libraries, and a bookshop. There were two events with 80 and 100 participants before Covid-19, and the rest had to be cancelled. The quarterly magazine was published on the website, <theosofie.nl>. A bimonthly newsletter was mailed to over 1,000 subscribers. Lodge activities included book discussions, films, talks, and so on. The project “The TS Netherlands in Changing Times” continues its obligation to keep Theosophy alive using social media, public relations, meditation sessions, and demonstrating that Theosophy is a matter of the heart and conduct, rather than only mental. True spirituality is not theoretical, but must be practised.

“Strommen” is a local active group of the TS in **Norway**, having a few solitary members. *The Secret Doctrine* is studied in Dharma Lodge four times a year. Due to Covid-19, the Strommen local group conducted meetings through Skype as only six persons were allowed to meet physically according to government instructions.

Until March, the TS in **Portugal** organized its regular meetings along with the traditional commemorative days, public meetings, panel discussions, and other activities. During lockdown because of the pandemic, videoconferencing mode was adopted by Lodges and study groups also. The website is a potent platform and other social media windows are also used to reach the members and maintain enthusiasm and interest. A regular newsletter is edited and published.

I am happy to note that till the lockdown

which occurred in **Scotland** in March, the Lodges and study groups functioned normally organizing talks and meditation gatherings. It is heartening that despite the unprecedented situation, the members of some Lodges discussed on a virtual basis through webinars.

It is creditable that the TS in **Slovenia** has slowly picked up momentum and is making consistent efforts to implement the rules and encourage members. They have added 2 study centres since 2019 to the existing four Lodges. Not discouraged by the pandemic, they have set up digital contacts among members.

Though all activities in Lodges in **Spain** were restricted due to the situation caused by the pandemic, various branches organized themselves to continue their regular study and dissemination of activities using digital platforms. Some of them included non-members as well. There were three main annual events. A silent retreat, conducted by Ms Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu, was held in December near Madridon, on “The Heart Sutra”, including profound reflections on its different aspects, with 50 people attending. Jornadas Ibéricas (Iberian Days), traditionally held jointly with the TS in Portugal, had to be cancelled. The Summer School was held in August, using video-conferencing, with 300 participants from all over the world, on “Theosophy: Paradigm and Transformation”. Ms Jaishree Kannan, in charge of the Surendra Narayan Archives in Adyar, offered an interactive “Mantrams” workshop in Barcelona.

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The **Swedish** Section, with 160 members, organized public lectures on Freemasons, the Quakers, the Seven Rays, and Self-Transcendence. Two new study groups and two Saturday workshops were started. Foundation Day on 17 November was celebrated at the Headquarters in Stockholm. All scheduled lectures, study groups, and the summer school were cancelled because of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, this autumn study groups were held with limited participants. They were quite active on the Internet and the website. TOS Sweden continues to support a school project in Goa, India, called “Mango Tree”. *Raja Yoga* by Wallace Slater was translated into the Swedish language and published by the Section.

The TS in **Switzerland** carried on their regular programme in a structured manner. The highlight was a seminar in collaboration with the European Federation and the Italian Section. Its Assembly was held in September. Cantons also carried on vigorously with their activities. Fortnightly meetings were organized in the Lugana study group. Because of Covid-19, members are meeting through a specially created WhatsApp group. We appreciate their free distribution of magazines and books to generate interest in Theosophy.

In September, the **Ukrainian** Section members elected Mrs Svitlana Gavrylenko as their General Secretary. It is commendable that the Institute of National Lecturers of Ukraine was set up in November. Interestingly, there is an All-Ukrainian theosophical group which in-

cludes non-affiliated members of the Section and holds regular weekly meetings. Due to pandemic restrictions from March, the TSU activities took place online through social networks. The TOS in Ukraine united volunteers at different places for helping children, taking care of animals, and protecting Nature. Many volunteers joined the support meditation groups for healing.

The **East and Southeast Asia** TS Presidential Agency overarches four countries: Singapore, Malaysia, Japan and Myanmar. Singapore and Myanmar Lodges were founded by Col. H. S. Olcott and, therefore, are among the oldest in the TS world. We appreciate the effort of the **Singapore** Lodge. Apart from carrying forward their activities until the end of March, including the 47th edition of “A Course in Theosophy”, which attracted 16 new members. They continued with their programmes, observing all Covid-19 guidelines of the Government, from 1 August. Online efforts have been continuing satisfactorily.

It is an appreciable arrangement that the **Malaysia** Lodge functions normally every Saturday and is open to non-members. Like elsewhere, their activities were adversely impacted by the Covid-19 lockdown. However, online meetings are being attended by members. The President of the Nippon Lodge in Tokyo, **Japan**, which has 30 members, is Naoto Okamoto. It is the only Lodge in the country. Online webinars are held monthly. Publications during the year were two books on practical occultism

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and *An Epitome of Theosophy*. I congratulate the **Myanmar** Lodge on receiving the Registration Certificate from their national government. The Yangon TS has one Lodge with 36 members. Despite the lockdown, they celebrated Adyar Day, Wesak Day, and White Lotus Day.

The **Australian** Section National Convention on the theme “A Dialogue with the Universe: Science, Wisdom, and Creativity”, held in Melbourne, was a great success. The Section published an anthology of articles on *Theosophy and Science* by the late Dr Hugh Murdoch, astrophysicist and founder of the Theosophy-Science group. In March, before the suspension of all activities due to Covid-19, 31 presentations around the Section were done through national lecturing programmes. From March onward, members remained connected to the centre through innovative electronic methods of communication.

Mainamati Lodge and two other Lodges celebrated the birth anniversary of Annie Besant and Mahatma Gandhi on 1 and 2 October respectively. Five members from the TS in **Bangladesh** attended the last International Convention held in Varanasi. Diplomas for 37 members were issued during the year. From mid-March, all gatherings were cancelled due to the global pandemic. However, virtual programmes are now being held.

The **Indian** Section has over 10,000 members distributed among 492 Lodges and Centres under 16 Federations. The term of National President Pradeep Gohil was renewed for another 3 years. Goal review and setting meetings were held

with representatives of the Federations with the objective of inspiring all to do good theosophical work. The overall average achievement for the year was 63%, and there is room for improvement.

The main goal this year was to increase the Section’s income and become financially independent. A dilapidated building in the Section headquarters was replaced by a new 4-storey building. This helped to bring in some substantial income as well as provide more accommodation for visitors. Now a total of 200 persons can be accommodated for study camps, conferences, and so on. Another important change was the renovation of the 1,500-seat Radha Burnier Amphitheatre inaugurated by me on 31 December at the start of the 144th International Convention. The Annual National Study Camp was held with 80 participants in the Headquarters in October on “The Teachings of Theosophy and J. Krishnamurti”, directed by Prof. P. Krishna, who has for long been associated with both the TS and Krishnamurti Foundations. The reference book used, *A Jewel on a Silver Platter*, is his own. The Uttar Pradesh Federation organized its Centenary Conference in Agra in October, inaugurated by me. The theme was “One Life, One Consciousness”. The highlight of the year was the hosting of the International Convention in Varanasi in December, after 30 years, with 1,500 delegates, good food, stalls, electric vehicle transport, sightseeing trips, slightly dampened by the extraordinarily unusual cold weather. All the customary activities went on smoothly.

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The 128th Convention of the Section was held in Varanasi in January on “Kindle the Spark Within”. A certificate course on “Self-Realization through Theosophy” was conducted in Varanasi in January, concluding with the induction of 10 new members. The Covid-19 lockdown affected regular activities considerably. The Easter Conference in April at Adyar had to be cancelled as also the 9 Summer Camps planned to be conducted at the Himalayan Study Centre, Bhowali. The same was the fate of other study classes and camps as well.

The National President participated in the conference on “History of Theosophy” in Greece. He also spoke at the European School of Theosophy Conference in Greece on “Reincarnation — Its Causes and Process” and “Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science” in October. From October to March more than 15 National Lecturers participated in various programmes all over the country. Some of them conducted online study classes after the advent of the pandemic. Annie Besant’s 172nd birthday, Foundation Day, Adyar Day, and White Lotus Day were celebrated. *The Indian Theosophist* is the monthly journal. During the year the Section’s website <theosophy-india.org> was redesigned.

In January, the National Section of **New Zealand** organized a very successful National Convention in Hamilton on the theme “One Heart, One Breath, One World” which was attended by many theosophists including International Vice-President, Dr Deepa Padhi, and Inter-

national Treasurer and TOS Secretary, Nancy Secrest. They were guest speakers at the National Convention and at several branches. The Annual School of Theosophy held in Auckland in October 2019 was also very fruitful. I wish to acknowledge the publication of a 7-part online series exploring Theosophy. Successful social media campaigns have really increased awareness of Theosophy.

The Indo-Pacific Federation Conference was hosted by the **Philippine** Section in November, which I attended with my wife, Lily, and other international officers from Adyar. The Youth and Well-Being Centre was inaugurated during the excellent and productive Convention. They had their strategic planning meeting in March, where the programs for the next seven years were identified. From mid-March all activities were cancelled because of the pandemic. I am happy to note that online weekly meetings were held with international participation in the true spirit of Universal Brotherhood, apart from similar online seminars. It is heartening that online classes started in September. TOS Philippines is very active with many projects and the volunteers did a commendable job during the volcano eruption and Covid-19 lockdown.

The Blavatsky Lodge in **Qatar** reports that they could not hold a single meeting since February due to the pandemic and strict Government controls. Some of their members tested positive but they have recovered without much complications.

At the International Headquarters, the **Adyar Library and Research Centre**,

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dedicated to the study of Oriental literature, philosophy, and religion, plays a crucial role in interacting with members and the public. Dr Radha Raghunathan joined as the new Director of ALRC in November. You are encouraged to visit the Centre and benefit from the treasured knowledge. Apart from numerous Sanskrit and other palm-leaf manuscripts, it houses important books in several national and international languages. Editing of rare articles and books consistent with the UGC-CARE guidelines was started. The Library becomes richer every year with generous book donations.

On 25 January we saw a milestone event when the new premises of the **Adyar Archives** was inaugurated and named after the late Surendra Narayan, International Vice-President of the TS for many years. The refurbishment was possible due to a generous donation from his family members. Despite the universal problem created by the pandemic, the digitizing of the Blavatsky Museum catalogues was adroitly accomplished. Handwritten books have been uploaded to the computer database where necessary. Efforts are under way to collect authentic information on the rare paintings gifted by the famous art historian, Govindraj Venkatachalam of Bengaluru.

The regular academic and cocurricular activities of the **Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School** continued until March, when the school had to be closed due to the pandemic per government instructions. However, teaching strategies were fine-tuned to provide

special training for the teachers to adapt to the requirements of a virtual classroom and the digital framework. A digital initiative of learning by providing computer tablets for students of grades 10 to 12 classes was successfully started and is in progress. The **Social Welfare Centre** continued providing care to 46 children, taking care of their nutritional requirements and play activities. In the **Vocational Training Centre**, 24 students underwent training in tailoring, weaving, and other craft-related skills. But since April these activities remain suspended due to the pandemic. The H. P. Blavatsky Boys' Hostel is operational, but activities remain suspended due to Covid-19.

In the November session of the **School of the Wisdom**, Dr José Foglia, from Uruguay, helped the students understand the deeper knowledge of the human nervous system and brain, and reactions and habits of thought. In the December session students were introduced to the J. Krishnamurti dialogues by Mr Paul Smith in a good interactive session. The Venerable Olande Ananda Thera, from Sri Lanka, took the third session last January, on meditation, and guided the students on how to practise it in daily life. During the fourth and last January-February session of the School, Dr Elena Dovalsantos, from the US, offered a course on *The Secret Doctrine*, explaining its relevance in day-to-day life.

The **Theosophical Order of Service** (TOS) is present in 35 of the 59 countries where the TS is active via several outreach avenues. This year Nancy Secrest,

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International TOS Secretary, gave talks and made presentations at the Indo-Pacific Federation Conference held in the Philippines in November. In January, Ms Secrest, with TS Vice-President Dr Deepa Padhi, went to New Zealand, where Ms Secrest gave a presentation on the TOS and both participated in a panel discussion on TOS activities. I would like to record my deep appreciation for the long years of excellent leadership by B. L. Bhattacharya, as Director of TOS in India, and welcome K. Sivaprasad as his successor. Usha Shah in Kenya and Martha Muñoz Forero in Colombia provided commendable support to TOS by their exemplary services. Both took retirement this year. In a certain sense, the Covid pandemic provided opportunities worldwide to provide food and other assistance to the hapless during the lockdown period. Many TOS groups are also active in animal welfare. Almost all countries have healing groups and are very much active during this Covid time. I take this opportunity to congratulate Pam Evans of TOS England who has been decorated as MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) by the Queen of England.

**The Theosophical Publishing House:** The Covid-19 pandemic caused a complete shutdown of sales from the end of March to mid-September. During the first half-year, the sale of books continued to be good both in India and abroad. Sales via the Amazon website continued to do well. Total sales for the one-year period from April to March was Rs 3.52 million compared to Rs 4.09 million of the pre-

vious year. The fall in sales was due to the International Convention being held in Varanasi instead of Adyar. During the period from October to September, fifteen reprints were published.

For the **Besant Memorial Animal Dispensary (BMAD)** the year has been very productive in spite of the Covid-19 pandemic. The team that started off with one veterinarian and one caretaker four years ago has now become an army of twenty-five passionate workers, mostly volunteers, including four veterinarians and four managers. Animals have been in need of rescue and treatment more than ever. On an average there are 200 in-house rescued animals and roughly 25 to 30 inpatient animals on any particular day. The team also manages around 200 outpatient cases per month.

Overall, more than 600 animals, including large ones, were rescued, during the year. New additions include beach horses and racehorses whose original caretakers did not have the facility to feed and care for them during the lockdown. Due to neglect, the once-admired horses had become malnourished and weak. After 5–6 months of continuous care they have once again become healthy and happy.

During the lockdown, despite being under the risk of Covid transmission, the team ensured that all animals, including those living in the TS, were fed and cared for. With crowd-funding through “Ketto”, BMAD successfully collected up to Rs 1.8 crores for renovating the facility. New equipment like an X-ray machine was added as also kennels for inpatient



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animals and a shed for in-house dogs. Sponsors have made significant contributions for feed and medical supplies, and one sponsor even helped to obtain an ambulance to rescue animals in trouble. The animal birth control programme has been a successful venture, and this year close to 1,000 such surgeries have been completed with smooth recovery.

The **Adyar Theosophical Academy** (ATA) concluded its first academic year in March with 54 students in classes from Pre-K to Grade II, a year full of activities, learning, and adventures. Contact with Nature and a focus on arts to explore the creative side were essential parts of the ATA's spirit and approach to education. Academics were enriched with educational trips and project activities. Children's days integrated sports, theatre, music, and arts. On 25 January, ATA had its very first "Sports Day" on the grounds of Olcott Memorial School, Adyar, with me as the Chief Guest. Students gifted little mementos created by them. I hoisted the School Flag and addressed the assembly of participants as well as parents. I emphasized how sports is an integral part of learning and encouraged children to participate with zeal and passion.

On 14 March, ATA celebrated its first "Annual Day" in the Adyar Theatre. Ms Marja Artamaa, international Secretary of the TS, was the Chief Guest. The programme included cultural expressions from India and the world, dramas recre-

ating life in the forest and care toward Nature, and songs that spoke of the unity of life and brotherhood. But a few days later a lockdown forced the school to close abruptly due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

On 11 June, ATA started its second academic year, transitioning from in-person to online classes, using the virtual platform Zoom. The second year brought the addition of Grade 3 and strength of 110 students. This also required training for teachers to adapt and orient themselves, who participated in more than 20 workshops.

On 24 June 2020, ATA celebrated its first birthday. Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, and other guests joined online. Children sang, recited, and shared their spontaneous drawings as well as birthday cards. The event ended with encouraging words from Vic and the other guests.

The final celebration of the period from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020 was on 21 August, to celebrate Ganesha Chaturthi. In Hinduism, this is a 10-day festival marking the birth of the elephant-headed deity, Ganesha, the god of prosperity and wisdom. The children sang slokas in his honour, had sessions of fireless cooking, and also different representations of Ganesha using various artistic techniques and elements.

One of ATA's highlights of the year was "Gratitude Week" — an exercise inculcating thankfulness in everyday life.

TIM BOYD

# The Power of Renewal

LINDA OLIVEIRA

THE trajectory of humanity through time has been punctuated by numerous cycles — cycles of peace, war, intellectual advancement, pestilence, innovation, creativity, and so forth. Waves of suffering have engulfed entire populations at times, perhaps due to war or political extremism. Then we have the recent advent of a pandemic which has dramatically changed lives all around the globe.

We also witness numberless natural cycles. It is possible to learn so much from the world around us. There are vast geological cycles which are followed by periods of massive destruction, before some kind of rebirth — perhaps the emergence of a new continent. Then again, this planet has some spectacular forests which have cycled into their potential as mature wooded areas. Yet when a fire sweeps through a forest, countless trees can be destroyed very rapidly. The black, charred remains give no visible hint of what is possible in the future; no indication of what will happen very naturally in the fullness of time.

In Australia, as in other countries, there are many eucalyptus trees. Many of these have epicormic buds (dormant growth

buds) deep beneath the bark. These are actually protected from fire; yet *after* a fire, they are triggered into life. Some have underground lignotubers, large roots from which a tree can sprout new growth. Certain types of plants have dense, fibrous trunks which recover from fires. Yet others have incredibly robust seeds which can germinate either during, or after, a fire.<sup>1</sup> The renewal of a forest is a kind of miracle after what seems to be total destruction.

So in the case of many forest trees and other plants, something endures despite what appears to be complete death; and it is this enduring factor which fans new life when the conditions are right. The possibility of continuity remains; indeed, the potential for renewal which is inherent in Nature is an extraordinary power.

And what about the human being? We are products of Nature and, by correspondence, also possess the power of renewal. We are familiar with the body's various functions and cycles. We know how sleep provides much-needed rest, so that the body is refreshed and ready for another day of physical action; we know how a period of illness requires more rest than usual in order for energy and wellness to

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be restored; we know how the cycles of age work from youth, to middle age, to old age. These kinds of renewal are known to us very well.

However, the focus here will be on a very real power that we all possess, to a greater or lesser degree, which is the power of renewal within our consciousness.

### Mental Traffic

In the Wisdom teachings there are different ways of understanding the human constitution with its various gradations. Madame H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) described us as sevenfold beings, based on the trans-Himalayan School; Swami T. Subba Row favoured the fourfold classification of Tāraka-Rāja Yoga. Subsequent theosophical writers have varied the sevenfold classification to a certain extent. And so, the levels or fields within the human constitution have been subjects for discussion and debate down the decades in theosophical circles. They are useful ways of understanding ourselves.

Let us simplify this discussion further, though. We can regard our consciousness as operating in two essential ways: either in everyday mode, which is turned towards the outer world, or else in its inward-focused mode, which tends more towards inner worlds. Let us denote them as the “external mode” and the “internal mode”.

What happens in the long trajectory of human evolution? A soul can become lost in the external, everyday mode, completely immersed in physical surroundings and day-to-day routines. Routine may be comfortable — and it is certainly useful in cer-

tain respects. For one thing, there are physical routines such as the tasks we do every day, which are necessary for orderly living.

Yet routine also poses problems. We have mental habits or routines which can be insidious. Why? For one thing, the repetition of thought patterns can render us mentally stale, causing us to be literally stuck in certain mental habits and views. For example, every single time we *reassert* one particular view, what happens? We are reinforcing it a little more strongly. It may be a political view, or a judgment about another person, or a limited view of Theosophy; in fact, it may be a position on any subject at all. Then that view or thought solidifies further and is difficult to dispel. Repetition breeds sameness and closes the mind; for that matter, it can also easily lead to boredom. When we are bored, what do we do? We look for some-thing else to occupy our attention — some kind of distraction, so the cycle goes on.

Ven. Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche presented the following image, which is easy to relate to when we consider our minds:

The mind resembles a crowded street in which cars, motorcycles, bicycles, and people are moving. When we are in the crowd we are aware only of the rush and fuss about us, but if we look down from the top floor of a tall building we shall see how large the crowd is and how numerous the people.<sup>2</sup>

This rush and fuss which he mentioned helps us to understand the distracted state of the mind very well. That is because various whirlpools of energy, which are

likened to traffic in this quotation, exist in our day-to-day consciousness. Some of them are larger, more powerful and noisy, trying to overtake each other and become the main object of our attention; others are smaller and quieter, yet persistent; they are still there, moving along in the mind, but usually are not our central focus.

Various items of mental traffic compete for the position of “centre stage”. For example, let us suppose we are focussing on some task at hand. We can call this thought A. Some other matter comes to mind and distracts the attention for a while — let us call this thought B. Thought A continues, but thought B remains in the background, just like a small car which is out of sight of our rear-vision mirror. However, that smaller car begins to move persistently in and out of the sightline of that mirror. We cannot easily shake it off. Thought B may be especially linked to the desire aspect of the mind.

Probably all of us have experienced this kind of occurrence not just once, but many times. We are engaged in a task, but allow our attention to be drawn by something else, which is like a small car in our rear-vision mirror. There may be a desire for distraction with a snack, or a cup of tea, a sudden impulse to check for messages on our smart phone, or to browse the news, and so it goes on. Too much traffic in the mind clearly causes us to deviate quite easily from whatever we are doing. Meditators would no doubt be familiar with the way that, while they are dwelling on one thing, other thoughts creep in and may even lead them down a different avenue

of thought altogether. Distractions are essentially of two kinds. Our own thoughts distract us, and we have just considered briefly our mental traffic; but so, too, do external distractions.

### **The Thirst for Experience and the Thirst for Renewal**

*Why* is it that distractions feature so strongly in human life? We seek and follow them partly because of the thirst for experience, and all that this implies. But there is another factor too: humans have a fundamental need for *inner* refreshment, yet many of us are not aware of this. For long ages during the human journey, struggling souls typically seek this outside of themselves, perhaps hoping that novelty will suffice — by keeping up with popular trends, through a whole range of indulgences, or by engaging in that which is sensational because people want novelty, general gossip, a wish to help alleviate boredom, and so forth.

Eventually there is a realization that the pursuit of such things is simply not enough. Why not? Because of a very clear recognition that distractions do not produce lasting happiness; the cycle needs to change. And so we focus less on diversions and more on our inner life, with its sense of unity and its consequent spirit of generosity. An attitude of appropriation gives way to greater consideration to the life around us — in effect, giving something back. Those distractions which are outside of ourselves, and those which are caused by our mental traffic, are replaced in the course of time by an increasingly

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focused interior search for meaning, a deeper vitality. The individual who is increasingly spiritually aware knows that what is required is to look within, and consequently seeks ways of enabling this.

Human consciousness contains the possibility of opening to a fresh vitality. This is inevitable, and natural. However, when the mind is unclear, repetitive, distracted, closed, lacking direction — full of traffic — then such a state obviously renders renewal impossible.

### How does Renewal Come About?

An encounter with renewal can range from something brief, to an experience which is significant and lasting. It manifests in different ways. For example, there is a certain renewal inherent in the simple act of giving. Dr Besant talked about what she called “The Law of Sacrifice” in her book, *The Laws of the Higher Life*. She used the term “turning point” to denote the change from many lives of self-centredness, to a way of being which is concerned increasingly with the welfare of the life around us. For her it was a movement towards the life of the Spirit, which “consists in giving, and not in taking, in pouring itself out and not in grasping, in self-surrender and, not in self-appropriation. . . . The Life inexhaustible is found, that is ever bubbling up out of the illimitable fullness of the Self.”<sup>3</sup>

This is altruism, pure and simple, which HPB also equated with Theosophy.

Dr Besant highlighted a somewhat surprising and important principle: when we give unreservedly, unselfishly, then

something paradoxical happens. There may be physical and mental tiredness, yet a certain interior energy also manifests in response to that action which enables one to give more.

Renewal is related to the opening up of the *buddhic* faculty; in fact, it is intimately connected with *buddhi* (intuitional wisdom). Dr I. K. Taimni wrote about what is required for its emergence in his book, *Self-Culture*, a text which is pragmatic and grounded in common sense. Briefly speaking, the three main factors he mentioned in the unfoldment of *buddhi* are: developing strength, purity, and unselfishness of a high order. Therefore, the process is not so easy. He went further into each of these points.

Reminiscent of the traffic in the mind which has already been mentioned, he wrote of the need to *gather in* scattered mental energies; and noted that as long as we allow the mind to run in pursuit of all kinds of objects without any central aim or self-direction, we are bound to remain enmeshed in the toils of illusion. But the fact is this: *anything* in life which is worthwhile necessitates inconvenience at times, as well as one-pointed effort.

*Buddhi* exists as a principle in all of us, eventually to be infused into the various layers of our consciousness. When reflected in the field of the intellect it manifests as spiritual knowledge. But when reflected in the sphere of the emotions, working through the astral body, it appears as spiritual love. Therefore, when we become receptive to *buddhi*, both the heart and the mind are elevated. Knowledge and love manifest on a higher octave, in new ways.<sup>4</sup>

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St Paul made a beautiful observation about the renewal of the mind: “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” (Romans 12:2)<sup>5</sup>

Not conforming to this world has been described as being in the world, but not of it. This well-used phrase in theosophical circles implies living and functioning in the world as we need to, yet also maintaining a higher perspective, a deeper view of life, a kind of benevolent detachment — which is not necessarily so easy to do when immersed in day-to-day problems. We can also think of the will of God as the will of our interior nature, our spiritual core.

### Preparation

While it is true that a regenerative faculty lies within us, there is preparation involved in order for one to become sensitive enough for renewal to occur; this is because, like the opening of a flower, it cannot be forced prematurely.

The Jātaka stories from India tell how the Lord Buddha perfected his spiritual nature by living a series of lives based around unselfishness and kindness, prior to becoming the Bodhisattva. In each incarnation a particular virtue was emphasised. Modern theosophical teachings also highlight the fact of our evolution into ever more perfected beings, which spans vast periods.

Humans tend to be impatient. We so often want immediate answers and faster ways of doing things. After all, the many

gadgets we use such as computers, smart devices, and vehicles, are very much centred around speed and power. But the external mode of functioning of the mind needs to allow space for that, internal mode which was mentioned earlier. This requires the mind to observe itself — and in the process it slows down, with a greater intensity of experience.

### The Phoenix Bird

When anything is renewed it is given a new life, a kind of rebirth. In order for the *buddhic* faculty or regenerative principle to flourish, its preparation fundamentally involves a kind of “death cycle” as we relinquish and transmute aspects of ourselves which are not conducive to awakening to a renewed consciousness.

Many will be familiar with the legend of the phoenix bird which rises from the ashes. The Greek name “phoenix” means “bright-coloured”. This legend presents itself in the mythologies of a number of cultures, with various representations in art and literature, including Greek and Roman writers. A bird of gorgeous plumage, it had a peculiar mode of reproduction. The author Geoffrey Barboroka described this method as follows:

Gathering twigs from spice-trees the bird fashioned a nest, upon which it sat and thus concluded its cycle of existence. As the phoenix died, the nest burst into flames, thus consuming the body of the bird. Then, from the ashes a young phoenix sprang into life and, when strong enough, flew to Heliopolis (the “city of the sun” in Greek) with what remained of the nest, dropping it upon the altar of the sun.<sup>6</sup>

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The symbology here is quite beautiful. The French author Voltaire described the bird as being the size of an eagle, yet with eyes that were mild and tender. This suggests that it represented a beneficent force in Nature. It was said to live for a fabulously long time: some believed that the phoenix lived for five hundred years; for Tacitus it was one thousand, four hundred and sixty-one years; yet again, others believed that the bird lived for more than twenty-five thousand years.

The existence and life cycle of such a bird may validly be subject to different symbolic interpretations. On one level, the phoenix bird has been interpreted as the human personality which ceases after one life. From its ashes a new personality eventually springs into being; the *skandhas* “reignite”, as it were, and the new personality is born in a subsequent incarnation. Madame Blavatsky actually viewed the phoenix as a generic symbol for several different kinds of cycles.

The phoenix manifests in various traditions with different names. For example, in *The Secret Doctrine* we read of the Egyptian Benu bird as synonymous with the phoenix, pointing both to human reincarnation and cosmic resurrection. A similar bird appears in the Persian tradition.

HPB described the Garuda as the Indian phoenix. Chief of the feathered race — the birds — the Garuda is depicted as half-man and half-bird, the *vahana* or vehicle on which Vishnu (Kala or “time”) is said to ride. It was praised by the gods as the highest being and had a brilliant lustre. The Garuda has a strong presence in Indonesian and Thai cultures, too.

What is particularly relevant for our purposes is the application of the symbology of the phoenix to the profound changes which an individual undergoes on the Spiritual Path — successive renewals or expansions in consciousness which have been denoted as Initiations. In one interpretation of the Hindu *trimurti*, the triple deity of supreme divinity — Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva — is understood as will, wisdom, and activity. By correspondence, if we take Vishnu as wisdom, then the Garuda becomes the vehicle of Wisdom. In this sense the Garuda can be likened to an individual in whom the *buddhic* principle has awakened, through which Divine Wisdom may be expressed. There is an inner phoenix in all of us waiting patiently to be born not just once, but a number of times.<sup>7, 8</sup>

### Some Final Thoughts

A fresh energy can come upon us in bursts, sometimes unexpectedly. For example, entering silence contains a real possibility of renewal. Many have experienced this. When we become silent, even for a short while, then spaces within the higher reaches of our minds inevitably open up. There is good reason, therefore, why so many people choose to go on a spiritual retreat once or more in their lifetime. There may be a sensation of lightness, because burdens are temporarily removed. These interior spaces of our consciousness are uncluttered; and they therefore have great vitality. Being closer to the spiritual pole of our nature, they contain an unconditioned energy which can percolate through into our everyday

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consciousness, helping to bring out what is best in us from latency into potency.

The process of renewal can begin through simple awareness. For example, when we see some aspect of our conditioning for what it is, then that particular impediment may temporarily drop away. It actually takes a lot of energy to maintain our conditioning! Or renewal may occur when we are focused unselfishly on a task and find ourselves afterwards with that reinvigorated energy already referred to, and ready to take on more. The fact is that the more we take our awareness off ourselves, the more likely we are to gain refreshment of body, emotion, and mind. For, we can weigh ourselves down.

Renewal is inherent in Nature and is a significant power within us. Bro. N. Sri Ram asserted: “There can be a quality of consciousness which is perennially new. It is the quality of the pure consciousness.”<sup>9</sup> We can choose to continue along a path of distraction with much traffic in our minds, and perhaps maintain fixed views about things. At times though, when

that traffic is eased, there may be small bursts of renewal.

However, the ultimate renewal is synonymous with the spiritual Path. This requires a process of dying to the old in order for us to rise, phoenix-like, from the ashes of who we were, and become who we are meant to be. Rather than viewing this as an onerous task, it is important to remember that over time our priorities change, and what might once have seemed too challenging, now becomes a natural imperative — a call from deep within. For, the power of renewal has great strength and beauty, helping to reveal to each of us our true nobility and glory, that pure consciousness which we normally mask.

On a global scale, the possibility of renewal may also be a silver lining in that dark cloud which is our current pandemic, providing an opportunity for humanity to recalibrate and begin to constructively reshape the world, in a new cycle of more profound awareness. The question is, will we rise to the challenge? ✧

### Endnotes

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# Sixty Years of Theosophy — I

GABRIEL BURGOS

I would like to demonstrate what it means to have a whole life of Theosophy that some of you can surely go through in the future. What has happened to me can also happen to many of you, because, although the state of affairs in the external world continues exactly the same, Theosophy enables us to see and understand life in a completely different way. It is a difference that enriches enormously all of life's moments.

For this, I need to go back to the old times, to an era before I had encountered the Theosophical Society (TS), including my infancy and childhood. I was born in Colombia, I have always lived in Bogotá, and, given the environment, I was born within the Roman Catholic Church. Why Catholic? It was the most natural thing in the world. My parents were very affectionate, just like most parents who seek the best for their children. According to what they think is best, they introduce us to what they consider to be true religious ideas.

The way of looking at life through a Church demonstrates the spirituality in human beings. My parents never asked themselves why they were Catholic. Probably my grandparents, great-grandparents,

and ancestors were Catholic without ever questioning those ideas. Within that Church, and within that Catholic family, I started to shape myself.

When school age came, in those days there was no nursery school or kindergarten; one would enter a preparatory school for five years, where one of the required classes was Religion. We studied using a catechism by a Spanish priest, Gaspar Astete. That catechism was in the form of questions and answers that we had to memorize from the first through the last year of primary school. It was repeated in such a way that all of us boys knew the catechism by heart. There was no possibility for free thought. We had to repeat and *believe* whatever was written in that catechism.

I believe that the priests of that time would do the same in very good faith. They had also come upon religion from a young age when they went to a seminary. In the seminary the same thing was instilled in them as boys, and when they were ordained to the priesthood they would teach what they were taught. It was a system of absolute obedience to what was said there. That was very important.

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**Mr Gabriel Burgos** has been a TS in Colombia member for over 60 years, giving lectures, workshops, and so on. He is also author of many articles and a digital book in Spanish titled *Approaching Theosophy*.

## Sixty Years of Theosophy — I

What happens to the mind of a young boy in such conditions? His mind is conditioned and crystallized, and he sees everything in the world through previously formed judgments or prejudices and will lead his life in the same manner. The majority of human beings do not ask themselves why they belong to a religion. If the parents are Jewish, the children are Jewish; if they are Muslim, they will follow Islamic teachings, and this applies to all other religions. That does not allow the world to be seen except through a single vision; they cannot see what others see.

After primary school came the high school of Our Lady of the Rosary where the Religion class continued until the third year. In the fourth year there was a subject called “Apologetics”; for the first time I came across the word “Theosophy”. This class consisted in demonstrating that Truth was only to be found in the Roman Catholic Church! Outside of this Church there was no salvation! Studies relating to everything else — churches, philosophy, and so on, were for showing that they were wrong.

I listened, and it was my turn to study some of those philosophies, and there was talk about “Theosophy”. What was Theosophy for the boys in the fourth year of high school? It was the door to hell! Theosophy was dangerous. “Please don’t get close to those books; that Society was founded by two ill-behaved, crazy, old ladies” — Dr Annie Besant and Madame H. P. Blavatsky (HPB). This was not true, because Besant was not connected with the TS until long after its foundation.

I had to come upon the TS in some way. Nothing happens by chance, and

therefore the causes presented themselves. The first one was that when my parents got married, they rented a house next to that of my wife’s parents, and my arrival to the TS had a lot to do with this.

While I was still going to school, the mother of a friend of mine, who belonged to the TS, invited me many times to attend a TS youth study group. Since earlier I had formed a dogmatic position against the TS — a prejudice, a fear, we might say, of getting too close to it — I thanked her many times, because she did not invite me only once, but I never went to the Society.

Time passed. In my wife’s family there was a senior lady who belonged to the TS. She had a conservative Catholic family — ultraconservative. This lady was the black sheep of her family; she was “the Theosophist”. Sometimes I would speak to my wife about these matters, but we had never paid much attention to it. But when we became newlyweds this lady started to pay us frequent visits to talk with us about the TS and to invite us; again we did not pay much attention to it. You can see how a wrong and malicious presentation causes a person with broad ideas in religious issues feeling repelled by something he cannot accept.

Time went by, and I can tell you that my wife, Cecilita, also from a dogmatic Catholic family, had great freedom of thought, differing from me, who had a narrow way of thinking. Her mother was the most extraordinary, good, and generous woman that I have known, and she was godmother at my baptism, but she died before Cecilita and I were even dating.

## Sixty Years of Theosophy — I

Cecilita studied in a school founded by a German educationist, Mrs Alice Block, who ran an extraordinary school, where there were Jewish girls, and Cecilita saw that these girls were exactly the same as the Christian ones. The only difference was that when it came time to attend the Religion class, they took a rest break. She found this interesting and realized that there is no difference between a Christian and a Jewish girl, and this led her to develop a broad mind, which was a good influence for her breadth of thought.

Cecilita and I began dating and sometimes we would put on the table the subject of religion. Undoubtedly we had differences from time to time, although not major ones, because generally, although we would talk, for example, about what can happen after death, it was not a cause for conflict for us.

But something came up that was really fundamental. How does a person come upon the TS? There are many paths toward it. It could be that someone speaks of the TS and it attracts their attention; or it could be curiosity. For others it may be a pamphlet found casually. In my case it was different. My father-in-law was a supremely disciplined person. He was an artist, pianist, singing professor and would follow a strict schedule. He would eat dinner at 6 pm; at 7 he was already in bed. He would get up at 3 am, do gymnastics, read, study until 7 am, and then he would sit at the piano. That was fundamental.

During our first year of marriage Cecilita and I lived in my mother's home, and the second year in my father-in-law's residence. So every day I would enjoy a 7 am concert; it was marvelous! He always

started with his favorite composer — Beethoven. He would always play a Beethoven sonata in an extraordinary way, and would follow with other composers. In a nutshell, to be able to participate in all of this was for me something very beautiful. He was a diabetic, having to take remedies for his pains and discomforts, and he died due to advanced diabetes.

His huge house was closed, where he had two pianos. One was for the students and the other was a very attractive grand piano that he would not allow anyone else to play; it was only for his own interpretations. Then the furniture had to be distributed so the house could be rented and Cecilita ended up with the grand piano, among other things. She would practice on the piano, but she was just an amateur, not an expert. She could read and play simple sheet music, but never like her father.

But there started to take place a phenomenon, and I had never before, nor have I ever since experienced anything like this. At 3 am Cecilita would hear her father telling her: "Wake up, we have to hold the piano lesson." I could not hear anything — it was for her an internal voice — but I could sense at 3 am, as if I had set an alarm clock, an electric jolt. So we would both get up, go to the studio, and she would start to play; and he would even tell her some things, would correct her, and she suddenly would say, "Well, it's just that those scribbles on the sheet music . . .", and he would reply, "Not at all! Those are compass numbers", and he would correct her. Well, we would laugh and go on like that until 5 am.

## Sixty Years of Theosophy — I

We never told this story to anybody else. It was a matter between Cecilita and me! But one day she sat at the piano and started playing a Beethoven sonata in an extraordinary manner; it was her father playing, not her! She continued playing until she realized it and got frightened. Then she stopped, closed the piano cover and said: “Dad, I can’t let you possess me with your mind for this!” She was very scared and did not want to get up anymore at dawn. But, what happened? How could we remain with such anxiety?

Then she called her TS friend and told her what was happening, and the friend said: “See, I don’t know how to resolve this, I don’t know what’s happening, but I do know who can help you. He is in charge of the TS in Colombia, Walter Ballesteros.” “Can we make an appointment?” “Yes, of course!” The friend called Don Walter and he immediately received us. He was an extremely cordial person, service-oriented, kind to all, always ready to serve, help, resolve problems. He was always kind and would never refuse such a request.

We went back to Don Walter’s home and he received us in his study. When he heard what was happening, he told us: “See, what’s happening is that, due to the drugs that he was taking, Cecilia’s father is not aware that he is dead. He needs to realize his state so that he can go on his way. When people die they need to stop having anything to do with the physical world and should move on. Life goes on, it continues.”

This made a great impact on us. What we had been told about Heaven and Hell

was not what we thought. We had the idea that when people died they would go with their wings and hands as if praying, to a Sky where they would live eternally happy beyond the clouds. But according to Theosophy, if a dear one dies not having a real knowledge of life after death, he or she continues being in the same state of confusion they had earlier. We thanked Don Walter, and that night we were prepared for the arrival of Cecilita’s father at 3 am.

Then, when the time came, instead of getting up, Cecilita said: “Dad, see, you have already died, there is nothing left for you to do here, and you need to move on.” As she said this, she became absolutely stiff, rigid, as if she was a corpse. Then I got terribly frightened. I had heard that to find out if a person was still breathing putting a mirror to their nose is a good test; I placed the mirror, and she was breathing. So I said to her father: “Luis, please, you are hurting Cecilita; leave her alone and go on your way, and don’t interject yourself in her life.” When I said this, Cecilita woke up.

We went back to Don Walter, and he said: “I’m sorry not to have explained or foreseen that this could have happened. We need to keep helping him. He needs to go on his way, disengage from the physical world he has left, and pay attention to his new life on the more subtle plane where he finds himself now; things must go on.”

But all this had already awakened in us a deep anxiety to know, to learn. We could no longer be like little sheep driven by a shepherd who takes them wherever he wants and says: “Don’t think, leave

## Sixty Years of Theosophy — I

thinking to me; you have to do what I say.” This is what happened with the religion courses, and we then thought that we had to understand and to know this situation. One cannot live in ignorance, waiting for fantasies to come later.

We asked Don Walter if there was a place where we could study, a gathering place, and he said: “Yes, we have groups that are called ‘Lodges’. The Lodge is a place for study, where members of the TS get together periodically, choose a theme, an issue, a book, a talk, a pamphlet, to study and exchange opinions.” Then we asked him if there was going to be a Lodge meeting soon, and he said: “Yes, precisely tomorrow there is one in such-and-such a place . . .” and we went there. They were discussing very strange things, which neither Cecilita nor I could understand, and we were more confused than we were previously.

So we went back to Don Walter and asked him: “Do you direct some Lodge?” and he said: “Yes, I’m in charge on Tuesday evenings.” It was Lodge Maitreya. How wonderful! What a difference! It was amazing; Don Walter with infinite clarity would present the most difficult and complicated issues. He endlessly showed us marvelous things to study. Then we started going there.

Naturally, we would attend as observers; what could we contribute to a Lodge being ignorant of the subjects that they were explaining? We were just observers like the beginners in a Pythagorean school who would have to listen first in order to be able to speak later, which is very wise. Don Walter would follow the same method. Of

course, he allowed questions from us, and many times, inclusively he would try to extract something from us through those questions. We would, then, progress in our studies little by little.

Those reunions became a cause of anxiety for us. We would count the days and hours to arrive at the Lodge that Don Walter Ballesteros was in charge of. How wonderful, then, to begin to know so many beautiful things that otherwise we would not have been able to accomplish. We would never, without having found the TS, have found them. We asked him where we should begin to study at home. He recommended some book, and our interest was such that Cecilita and I would not eat at the same time, but by taking turns. One of us would eat while the other one would read, and then we would change places.

For example, we started to talk about human nature. They started saying that human beings have not only a physical body and a spiritual nature, but have several bodies. One body is called “astral”, with emotions, and another one “mental”. We would say: “Well, how is this? How many bodies do we have? This is like an onion that we go on peeling to see how many bodies we have.”

That is how we started and continued the study with Don Walter. Fortunately for Cecilita and me, sharing ideas was marvelous. She and I would understand each other extremely well, all our lives. It was a life of absolute peace, harmony, and appreciation. Since we were like-minded, we could also share our studies joyfully.

(To be continued)

## *Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom*

Go not to the temple to put flowers upon the feet of God,  
First fill your own house with the Fragrance of love and kindness.

Go not to the temple to light candles before the altar of God,  
First remove the darkness of sin, pride, and ego, from your heart . . .

Go not to the temple to bow down your head in prayer,  
First learn to bow in humility before your fellowmen.  
And apologize to those you have wronged.

Go not to the temple to pray on bent knees,  
First bend down to lift someone who is down-trodden.  
And strengthen the young ones,  
Not crush them.

Go not to the temple to ask for forgiveness for your sins,  
First forgive from your heart those who have hurt you!

Rabindranath Tagore

# Imagining Theosophy for the Future

CATALINA ISAZA CANTOR

WHEN I first saw the theme, “Imagining Theosophy for the Future”, two things came to mind: the power of the word “imagine” and the meaning of “Theosophy”. Imagining is the act of mentally creating or reproducing using the power of the mind; imagination is one of the most advanced human faculties. So what we are doing here is making a collective effort to create mentally, using the power of thought, an image or picture of the future of Theosophy. This leads me to the second point, the meaning of Theosophy. It actually means divine wisdom (*brahmavidya*). Therefore, it has an immutable nature, it does not change, but the ways of getting closer to it, of spreading it, can and should change.

We will talk about how we imagine the future of the Theosophical Society (TS) or the theosophical movement as a vehicle for the diffusion of this ageless wisdom. The TS is made up of members around the world; so it is a living organism that needs review and renewal. It is one of the vehicles through which divine wisdom spreads (clearly not the only one). As an external manifestation, it goes through cycles. Making an analogy with the hu-

man body, the vehicle of our spiritual being, can help us to understand this better. According to scientists, the human body completely replaces itself with a new set of cells every seven to ten years. The body is renewing itself, adapting, but the spirit is the same throughout our entire existence. The same can be said of Theosophy and the TS. So, I will share three points that are useful to keep the flame of the theosophical movement alive:

## **1. Remember the principle of freedom of thought**

This is one of the most beautiful characteristics of the TS. Since its foundation, the Masters warned us about avoiding two things: selfishness, which prevents Universal Brotherhood, and dogmatism, which is the opposite of an open mind. But, what is an open mind and its relation to freedom of thought? An open mind is the kind of mind that examines any postulate, goes deep in research and inquiry, as J. Krishnamurti would say. Only through a really open, discriminating mind can true freedom of thought be maintained. And we, as students of Theosophy cannot forget that. Annie Besant says that any institution that

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has been in existence for many years is in danger of crystallizing and that this can happen when dogma prevails over free thought. She adds:

We must everywhere, in our influence upon the world and our influence over our young members, remember that the life of the Society depends on its remaining a society in which thought is entirely free, and frank discussion is encouraged. . . . We must encourage the expression of new thought, the open expression of any new idea.

(“The Future of the Theosophical Society”, public lecture delivered at the Adyar International Convention of December 1930)

For that reason, spaces like these are extremely useful. Keeping freedom of thought alive also goes hand in hand with the goals of the TS. An open mind allows us to go in depth in examining the different religions, sciences, and philosophies. Being aware, thanks to a careful examination, leads us to carry out unity in a practical way in the midst of diversity. This makes us more inclusive and considerate of the other’s vision: Universal Brotherhood.

I want to refer to the Teresópolis Declaration<sup>1</sup> and highlight that it points to that freedom of thought within a conscientious and fraternal spirit, something of vital importance for the future of the TS. Let us take as an example some extracts from the Declaration:

- ◆ To deepen the connection between theosophical ideals and the 21st century TS.
- ◆ To build bridges between theosophical

ideas and the philosophical and scientific assertions of our time [I would add arts].

- ◆ To seek possibilities of collaboration with organizations with similar proposals.
- ◆ To help widen the horizons of the theosophical perspective, by studying with respect traditions that were little addressed in our history.

When there is a fraternal atmosphere, it becomes easy to accept that our point of view on something is not necessarily conclusive. Therefore there is a relationship between fraternity and freedom of thought. Theosophy must be presented as a challenge to investigation and intelligent criticism. Individuals with a broad mind and a brotherly heart have the possibility of drastically changing themselves and therefore inspiring their environment.

It is claimed that the TS was formed to help and give an evolutionary impulse to humanity that could result in a real change. This brings me to my second point, something that has to do with the possibility of going beyond the mere theosophical movement and generating a greater impact that causes more individuals to be raised within theosophical ideals.

### **2. The need for a theosophical education**

One of the main ideas that Annie Besant had about education is the fact that the formation of a good citizen must begin during school days, and training must continue in college, because it is during childhood and youth that character is built. Maria Montessori as well had particular ideas about the importance of a



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proper education for children. Both of them look at children from a holistic point of view that takes reincarnation into consideration, and shows us that the child already has his character and a CONSCIOUSNESS ready to function and is born with a certain background. So the first years are very important and the child has to receive the appropriate stimulation during that time.

I currently work at the Adyar Theosophical Academy (ATA), a centre of transformative education founded by the TS, and a sister institution of The Golden Link School in the Philippines. Its goal is to impart a theosophical education:

ATA's primary concern will be the development of right character, and integration of core values such as empathy, sensitivity, and an attitude of stewardship for the environment and society, becoming an active instrument for doing what is right. Emphasis will be given to the development of life skills such as self-confidence, effective relationships, effective conflict resolution, communication skills, critical thinking skills (<adyartheo-academy.in/educational-philosophy>).

This kind of education is a way of keeping the flame of Theosophy alive. Regardless of whether the TS grows or not in terms of members, the fundamental thing is that those who receive this kind of education are capable of being that change themselves, that impulse that the theosophical movement is called upon to make: to be able to live in the light of these ideals and principles and inspire those around them.

We usually talk about attacking social problems and that the TS should be a pioneer in it. One way to attack the root of the problem is with a theosophical education. Some pointers to what a theosophical education can be are as follows:

- ◆ An education without competition or comparison but with cooperation. This means an education leading to the creation of a fraternity that is practiced in daily life.
- ◆ An education without fear, violence, or punishment: “Children should above all be taught self-reliance, love for all human beings, altruism, mutual charity, and more than anything else, to think and reason for themselves.” (H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, Section 13, “Theosophy and Education”). Let us remember that a child's faults, for the most part, can be changed if elders cultivate the corresponding virtues and show them respect and trust.
- ◆ An education for the ETERNAL, not for the ephemeral, in which the true nature of the being and the greater purpose of evolution are understood, and which is not a simple search for survival or material success. Children are individuals who are born among us after countless previous births on Earth, with experiences gathered through many lives forged in them as faculties and powers, with characters that are the embodied memory of their past, with a receptivity limited and conditioned by that past determining its response to external impressions. Their entire future at birth is largely determined by the influences that are exerted on them during their early years. Children already have their

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character and a CONSCIOUSNESS ready to function as long as they receive the appropriate stimulus. (Montessori)

Therefore, I imagine a future for Theosophy in which this type of education is the rule and not the exception. I imagine similar initiatives in every place of the world where there is a Theosophical Lodge and a true interest in personal transformation. Those who are interested are encouraged to visit ATA's website and to really consider the possibility of doing volunteer work in this institution. They are also encouraged to take the seed of a theosophical centre of transformative education to their homeland. It is said that the best way to teach is by example. Since everyone can be a teacher of everyone on this path, we must begin by applying the principles of Theosophy in our own lives. This leads me to the third point:

### 3. The practical application of theosophical teachings in our daily life

There is a false notion among people that Theosophy is mostly a kind of old-fashioned intellectual study. Actually, there is nothing as practical, actual, and intricate in daily life itself as Theosophy. Theosophy is the science of self-transformation and this is something that we, as members, have to be able to

transmit and show to the new generations.

I imagine, then, a theosophical movement in which each student of Theosophy becomes a centre of transformation and light, an agent of change and altruistic service. The quality of collective work depends upon the quality of effort and personal work. We are a living organism.

### Conclusion

1. The Masters said: As long as there is even a small group of real Theosophists, the institution is safe and so are the teachings. It is our task also to be living examples of that transformational power, in order to inspire and to be real channels of transformation.

2. When the Theosophical movement began, it was at the forefront. So it is our challenge to make Theosophy as relevant as possible to our youth and future generations.

3. It should be our main objective to make Theosophy accessible to all people, finding new ways of expression in order to connect and synchronize with contemporary times.

I imagine a Theosophical Movement as vibrant and inspiring as possible. There is an immense ocean of wisdom that cannot be the privilege of just a few. May the Ocean of Theosophy permeate as many souls as possible. ✧

### Endnote

1. Between 20 and 26 January 2020, during the 39th Summer School in Brazil, a group of young adults gathered together in Teresópolis (Brazil) with the objective to debate the past, present and future of the youth movement and the Theosophical Society. From that gathering was born "The Teresópolis Declaration", containing seven propositions from the youth to the Theosophical Society of the 21st century.

# Emerson on “The Over-Soul” and *The Secret Doctrine*

CARY GARDNER

RALPH Waldo Emerson opens his essay on “The Over-Soul” by pointing to what we might call the “golden moments” of a human life. These golden moments give credibility to the fact that there are higher states of consciousness available to the individual. And the source of these golden moments can be attributed to the over-brooding nature of what we might call “soul”. His writings could be characterized as a collection of golden moments. And to appreciate them sufficiently we must explore, just briefly, the manner in which they are delivered.

The spiritual literature of humankind, which is the birthright and inheritance of every human being born on this Earth, is inspired literature and is accompanied appropriately by a certain poetic beauty. If one thinks of the slokas of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the verses of the *Dhammapada*, the *Stanzas of Dzyan*, the axioms of the *Tao Te Ching*, the logia of the *Gospel of Thomas* or the melodious passages of *The Voice of the Silence*, you cannot help but hear a distinct musical quality to the

writing. If we were to read Plato in the original Greek, we are told, we would discover that his writings sound more like Shakespeare or Shelley than systematic philosophers like Hobbs or Hegel.

Truly inspired writing, such as we find in sacred texts, has a cadence, a rhythm and a melody that is unmistakable. This musical quality has a hidden, one might say an occult, power to lift and elevate the receptive mind, the open heart. This capacity is one of the keys to appreciating Emerson’s brilliance. His intent was to inspire. His thoughts and writings are more like flashes of insight or collections of mystic moments and less a geometrical proof or a rational explanation. He is a poetic rather than a systematic philosopher. And that is why it is important, not only to read Emerson, but to *listen* to him as well. Read the following passage out loud and feel the drum roll!

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of

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Mr Cary Gardner started studying Theosophy in 1974. Since then he has been participating and speaking at several ULT and TS Lodges, and guiding theosophical study sessions from his California home.

## Emerson on “The Over-Soul” and *The Secret Doctrine*

events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers, and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort, and advancing on Chaos and the Dark.

Emerson is a man of contemplation in the classical sense. He ruminated and wrestled with the great issues of human life. He brought depth and breadth to the eternal questions. For some writers it is said that the unit of thought is the page, for others the paragraph. For Emerson it is the sentence. And this accounts for why he is so widely quoted. He set his radar to the frequency of a Higher Life. His wife would recount how on many an occasion she would witness her husband rushing out of bed early in the morning. She could not help but ask, “What’s the hurry?” “I must catch this thought my dear, I’m off to catch a thought.”

Long morning walks were part of his daily routine. And he believed Nature was his muse. We all know how a long walk has a meditative quality about it. The body and senses are engaged, giving the mind a chance to work independently, with minimum interruption. This discipline was built into the fabric of his days.

He was often criticized for the discon-

nected nature of his prose, yet his aim was not to convince or persuade, but instead to light a fire under the mind of his listeners and to encourage them to pursue their own explorations. The universal themes of these meditations like “The Over-soul”, (our topic), Self-Reliance, Compensation (or Karma), Cycles, Nature, Experience, and so on reveal the expansiveness of his thought. He is, to use his own words, “Man Thinking”, and his ambition in life was to encourage this activity in others. And he did so, in the later phases of his life, by offering lectures throughout the land during America’s adolescence. He was considered by many as one of the finest orators of his generation.

When we read Emerson we find his spirit cheerful, amiable, optimistic, and introspective. The great naturalist John Muir met him when he was a young man and said of him: “He is the most sincere man I ever met, as sincere as the Redwoods.” Emerson was elegant, but not academic. His intention was to make one feel the ideas as much as understand them. This musical approach to his prose helps to create an atmosphere solicitous of intuition. His work tends to move from insight to insight much like a symphony glides from movement to movement.

His talks were very deep and rich in language, and for many could be hard to understand. There is a wonderful story about a simple uneducated washerwoman who attended every lecture Emerson gave in Concord. A local reporter attending one of these lectures, who had noticed this

woman’s frequent attendance, could not help but ask her if she understood what Emerson was talking about. She replied, “Not a word, but I love to go and see him stand up there and look as though he thought everyone of us was as good as he is.”

From where does Emerson’s love and faith in humanity come from? He had plenty of evidence to believe the opposite. He lived at a time of great social unrest filled with severe examples of man’s inhumanity to man. His generation struggled with the institution of slavery, the civil war, robber barons, and witch hunts. He experienced profound personal loss with the early death of his first wife, Ellen, who died two years after their marriage at the age of 20. His first son from his second wife, Waldo, died at the age of 5 from scarlet fever. So where does this abiding sense of optimism come from in the midst of such misery?

The Supreme Critic on the errors of the past and the present, and the only prophet of that which must be, is that great Nature in which we rest, as the Earth lies in the soft arms of the atmosphere; that Unity, that Over-soul, within which every man’s particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart, of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission; that overpowering reality which confutes our tricks and talents, and constrains everyone to pass for what he is, and to speak from his character, and not from his tongue, and which evermore tends to pass into our

thought and hand, and become wisdom, and virtue, and power, and beauty.

Emerson’s idea of the Over-soul, suggests an over-brooding omnipresent spiritual essence that defies explanation and confounds all our ordinary states of consciousness. Being omnipresent and transcendent it is the Voidness of the seeming Full. Being imminent and within it is the Fullness of the seeming Void to borrow the words of *The Voice of the Silence*. The concept of the soul and the concept of the Over-soul, blend in and out of each other in Emerson’s essay. And well it should if one would be the mirror and reflection of the other.

Emerson makes it clear that the soul is not an organ but the user of organs. He tells us that it is not the container of knowledge but rather knowledge itself; it is the “wisdom of the wise” as Krishna says in the *Gītā*. He says that the soul is the source of perception itself. This is precisely where our training in theosophical philosophy comes to our aid. What we discover straightaway in the First Fundamental Principle of *The Secret Doctrine* (*SD*) is the idea of the Absolute, the Causeless Cause pointing to a notion of radical Unity from which the very idea of Oneness arises.

Mysteriously and metaphysically this Absolute is experienced by conscious beings in manifestation as the ONE LAW (the second proposition of the *SD*, signifying a unitary relationship between Spirit and Matter. This Law that pervades all of Nature and the “I am I”

Emerson on “The Over-Soul” and *The Secret Doctrine*

consciousness that wells up within every human being are both pointers to what Emerson calls the Over-soul. He is loath to define it, and prefers to point to it much like a child excitedly pointing to a butterfly alighting upon a flower. In the Third Fundamental Principle of the *SD* the relationship between the Over-soul and the idea of “individual souls” is brought to light. In the same work, HPB states that the *SD* teaches:

The fundamental identity of all souls with the Universal Over-Soul . . . and the obligatory pilgrimage for every soul — a spark of the former — through the Cycle of Incarnation (or “Necessity”) in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law,

during the whole term. In other words, no purely spiritual Buddhi (divine Soul) can have an independent (conscious) existence before the spark which issued from the pure Essence of the Universal Sixth principle — or the OVER-SOUL — has (a) passed through every elemental form of the phenomenal world of that Manvantara, and (b) acquired individuality, first by natural impulse, and then by self-induced and self-devised efforts (checked by its Karma), thus ascending through all the degrees of intelligence, from the lowest to the highest Manas, from mineral and plant, up to the holiest archangel (Dhyani-Buddha).

*(To be continued)*

**\*Do not worry about what doesn't come,  
With what you know to be light as the breeze.  
May you reach the high thought of the  
Heavenly spheres.  
You will see in you the light of seven candles lit.  
If you look inside your heart,  
You will be one with all and with the magical universe.  
Today, just today, live the opportunity  
that was Given thee,  
To be Love, from the early centuries.**

Joma Sipe  
*Soul of Light: Works of Illumination*  
“*Inspired Messages*”  
Message 3, p. 121

\*This message corresponds to the image on the cover of this issue.

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