

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.

Inaugural Address to the Inter-American Theosophical Federation's Magna School of Theosophy

TIM BOYD

WITH all the uncertainty and changes that we are facing at the moment, it is good to ground ourselves in things that have deep meaning. One of those things we should never forget is the fact that *every* life has a purpose. Regardless of what others may view as our station in life, each one of us comes to this world with something unique and specific that we can add to the greater pattern in which *all* of us participate.

Although we each have a purpose, that purpose remains unknown and unfulfilled until one becomes aware. In her introduction to *The Secret Doctrine*, H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) identifies three Fundamental Propositions. In the third Proposition she describes the condition of being unaware. For many lifetimes each of us has been in the position of drifting, moving through life much like a leaf caught in the wind, without control, seemingly at random.

The term HPB uses to describe this condition is that we are at the mercy of “natural impulse”, which is to say that we are pushed, moved, impelled by Nature

and the conditions that it imposes upon us. But in that same Fundamental Proposition she also describes the condition of awakening. There is a dawning of awareness that occurs in us for a reason. It occurs because of the accumulated effect of so many repeated cycles of the shocks and blows of life. At a certain point we say: “Enough is enough.”

There was a great woman who many years ago was very active in the civil rights movement in the United States. Her name was Fanny Lou Hamer. She was a black woman who all of her life had accepted the status quo of segregation and racial discrimination. But at a certain point in her life she became exceedingly active in this movement — at great risk to her own safety. On one occasion she was asked why, what had moved her to become so involved? Her answer was that she became “sick and tired of being sick and tired”.

This is a condition with which anyone who embraces a spiritual path can identify. HPB describes this point where we awaken. But with awakening there are

Inaugural Address to the IATF's Magna School of Theosophy

certain consequences. HPB's description of the awakening soul's condition is that we then move on a path that is no longer impelled by Nature, but by "self-induced and self-devised efforts". This is another way of saying that we recognize that we can choose. The importance of this awareness cannot be overstated.

So what is it that we can choose? We do not choose the families or country that we are born into, the climate, culture, and so on. But what we do choose is whether we respond, or react, to these circumstances. We choose the nature and quality of the thoughts and emotions that we will harbor in our hearts and magnify in our thinking and actions. This is an area where we reign supreme. We have control over how we respond. But we have been under the influence of misguided habits of thinking for a very long time. So there comes a period when we need to apply our awareness to our own re-education, a self-training. This is the importance of the whole idea of study.

But we also must focus on the foundational principles related to this Ageless Wisdom tradition. The specifics are many, but these principles are few. In her Fundamental Propositions HPB lists three. What we find is that while the specifics build knowledge, these principles build a life capable of impacting the world. There is a reason why Theosophy has been reintroduced to the world at this particular time. From the very beginning the focus of the TS has been on self-transformation as an agency to affect the world, not merely individual

transformation. These days I often find myself saying that knowledge is a valuable thing, but for the problems we currently face, it is not enough. I come back again and again to the statement made by Albert Einstein, that no problem can be solved on the same level on which it was created. Knowledge of any sort, whether it be scientific, philosophical, religious, or even knowledge of a theosophical type, is not sufficient.

In the early days of the TS there was the famous letter from the Mahachohan, or head of the trans-Himalayan School of Adepts, in which many things about the TS's purpose are made clear. An important idea in that letter is that this theosophical movement came into being in order to react upon the moral code, the ethics of this world. It was believed and intended that Theosophy could impact the values that guide humanity. Whether we are speaking about an individual or humanity as a whole, we all behave according to what we see as true and what we think is valuable. These are the guides for our behavior and relationships.

It makes no difference where we are living in the world today, there are certain common things that we share. Recently one of those has been brought home to us very strongly. Our current pandemic has made it quite clear that we are all connected in this world together. There are a number of global crises that are looming. You all know the list as well as I do: the changing climate, rising oceans, deserts that are spreading, wars that are being fought, and the economic inequal-

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ities all around the world; it is global.

None of this is the result of blind actions of Karma. These are all human-generated crises that have been incubating over a long period of time. The reason for the emphasis by the Mahachohan on the importance of impacting the morality and values of the world is to address these sorts of crises. There is an expression that “we do not know who discovered water, but we do know that it was not discovered by a fish”. Similarly, we keep swimming in a sea of unexamined values which we accept and magnify without giving it thought.

Here are a couple of examples of the misguided values that have brought us to this situation. The way our current system of values operates, a tree is more valuable dead than alive. Its commercial value as timber, paper, mulch, and so on exceeds the value we place on its capacity to cleanse the atmosphere, or create ecosystems that harbor other life forms. The same thing is true of a whale that swims in the ocean. The products that can be produced from it when it is killed and “harvested”, outweigh its value when it was alive.

These are short-sighted values that seemingly provide short-term lifestyle benefits, but they all have an effect. Over time, forests and the fish in the ocean disappear. All of this has an impact. These values, to which we have given our unthinking allegiance, have brought us to an impasse. At this time it is clear that unless we embrace some different system of values the state of

the world will become much more dire.

In the last years of her life HPB became rather frustrated with the Theosophical Society and with Theosophists in general. She was very well known for being outspoken in her commentary. One of the things that she said was that the TS and the work it was founded to accomplish had been a stupendous success, but it has also been a “dead failure”. It had been extremely successful in presenting the ideas, the concepts, and rooting those concepts in popular thought. But in terms of its inner purpose, which is to cultivate a nucleus of an expressed Brotherhood, that is where she said we were not successful.

The great thinker and humanitarian, Dr Albert Schweitzer, was once asked if he thought that example was the best way of teaching. His response was: “Example is not the best way, it is the *only* way of teaching.” Any of us who have children are aware that they have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed in imitating them!

Similarly, the TS has, as its real foundational principle, the Object to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of humanity. The focus is on unity, Oneness, interdependence, interconnection, all of these words that describe a state of non-separateness. The world is still waiting for an example, an expression of this core value, this core principle of not just the Ageless Wisdom, but of the nature of reality itself — we are One. Simply by virtue of being born into the world at this time, we have all received an

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improper training in the expression of this principle.

All of us who have found Theosophy valuable and have seriously embraced this path, have taken it upon ourselves to uncondition our minds. Each of us has made an effort to express it across the spectrum of our relationships: in our families, the TS, our communities. This is a demanding moment that we are living in. One of the deep demands is that we intensify our awareness and actual experience of this quality of Unity, Brotherhood. In our private as well as our public life, it falls to us to model these behaviors and this expression of consciousness.

A qualitatively different system of values needs to find birth in today's society.

As individuals who have found the theosophical work worthwhile, it falls to us to *be* this model, to be the ones who will bring this brotherhood into being. Will any of us live to see a complete change? I doubt it.

In that same letter, the Mahachohan makes the statement that no messenger of truth, no prophet, has ever achieved in his lifetime a complete triumph, not even the Buddha. But we *must* do what we can to uplift this moment.

We are not in this world by accident. For whatever reason, we must do the groundwork for the next wave, for the next generation. In the teachings of the Ageless Wisdom, we find this one word of advice repeated again and again — TRY! Whether we succeed or fail, we must try. ✧

Q: How can one practice altruism and philanthropy, when one devotes one's life to the cultivation of the inner spiritual being and the attainment of total indifference to the physical world?

A: . . . no spiritual progress at all is possible except by and through the bulk of Humanity. It is only when the whole of Humanity has attained happiness that the individual can hope to become permanently happy — for the individual is an inseparable part of the Whole.

Hence there is no contradiction whatever between the altruistic maxims of Theosophy and its injunction to kill out all desire for material things, to strive after spiritual perfection. For spiritual perfection and spiritual knowledge can only be reached on the spiritual plane; in other words, only in that state in which all sense of separateness, all selfishness, all feeling of personal interest and desire, has been merged in the wider consciousness of the unity of [Hu]mankind.

H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings,
“Theosophical Queries”, TPH, vol. XI, pp. 103, 105

Talk at Adyar Commemoration Day

(17 November 1958)

N. SRI RAM

IT is now fifty-one years since the President-Founder, Col. H. S. Olcott (HSO), passed away from here, and some have said it is well that there should be a day in which not only the members of the Theosophical Society (TS) all over the world think of Adyar, but also on which we especially remember the President-Founder and his work. . . . There are the well-known words of Dr Annie Besant: "HPB [H. P. Blavatsky] gave us Theosophy, and HSO the TS; which is the greater gift?" Of course we need not answer that question. Both HPB and HSO are spoken of in *The Mahatma Letters* as . . . "the suffering founders".

HPB had a very difficult life; she suffered in various ways from the troubles of the physical body, as well as from the criticism, judgments, and condemnation of the people around her. Col. Olcott also had his troubles, but despite them, he carried on bravely, as his *Old Diary Leaves* points out. On more than one occasion he wanted to resign his post and retire because of the difficulties that he had. Nevertheless, at the wish of those to whom he looked for guidance, he continued his task till he laid down

his body here on 17 February 1907. . . .

Adyar is connected with Col. Olcott in a way which perhaps brings him closer to us than he is to many members abroad. This Headquarters Building as we know it today, we owe to him. It was very different when the estate was bought. He supervised every detail of the work that was carried on here on the old Headquarters estate, which was only about twenty-six acres. We also owe him the Olcott School, which is still being carried on, and there are various schools in Ceylon [now Sri Lanka], which long ago passed under other management. . . . The great Masters of the Wisdom recognized his invaluable services, his qualities. They have given most striking testimony in *The Mahatma Letters* to his value in the Work.

February 17th has been adopted by common consent by members all over the world as the day on which Adyar should be particularly remembered in practically all the Sections. . . . So they turn their thoughts to Adyar on this day, and I feel that we who are here should turn our thoughts to them, we should think of the work in various Sections and countries, work which is carried on under very

N. Sri Ram ((15 Dec. 1889 – 8 Apr. 1973) was the 5th international President of the Theosophical Society based in Adyar, Chennai, India, from 1953 to '73. He was much loved as a teacher, lecturer, and writer.

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different conditions from those which obtain here. . . .

I have mentioned HPB and Col. Olcott, and there was Dr Besant, who developed the original headquarters estate into what it is today, extending right to the sea. A place where she lived and worked for so many years cannot but be a spiritual centre. Then I should not forget to mention C. W. Leadbeater Having known both Dr Besant and him at close quarters for many years, I can well believe how they had inner guidance all the time, in one way or another.

We must realize that one great person can never be really like another, we cannot expect any of them to fit into the pattern of any other. . . . Adyar is particularly blessed with the magnetism and influence of the great leaders of the past to whom we owe much, and I might add to those whom I have mentioned, Krishnaji, Mr J. Krishnamurti, who in the past bore most glowing testimony to the beauty of Adyar from an outward standpoint; his words about Adyar still exist on record. . . .

I hope that someday Adyar will be a centre of studies, of thought along different lines, all illustrating the many-sided beauty of the One Wisdom. It is Dr Besant who converted Adyar from being a mere administrative headquarters of the Society into a place to which students could come from many different countries, stay here for a year or two, immersing themselves into the wisdom of Theosophy, and then taking back to their own countries, Lodges, and Sections, something of the inspir-

ation, outlook, and peace which they had gained here. . . . But I do hope in the days to come, when travel is more convenient and easier than it is at present, we will have students here from many different countries, and the studies will be carried on throughout the year. . . .

So on this Adyar day, let us try to think of our brothers and sisters who are abroad. Every Section and Lodge has its own problems; every member tries to know something of Theosophy and tries to live that Theosophy in his own way, in his own surroundings. But we should remember that we are spiritually and invisibly linked with all of them, because our faces are turned towards the same Light. We are also inspired by the same hope, each has caught something of that Spirit which is One, yet at the same time can be translated into so many different ways.

I myself have very often compared the Theosophical Society to a Banyan tree, having its trunk at Adyar, but spreading its branches far and wide over every country; then each Lodge, each group of Theosophists is a stem which supports that tree, formed by the symbol of the way in which the Wisdom spreads, because the roots come from above, not from below.

While we are here we should have a large vision, embracing the whole of humanity, which thinks not only of the local problems. Only when we have a heart embracing all, however different they may be from country to country, only when we live such a life, will we be able to really carry out the purpose for which the Adyar centre has been constituted. ✧

The Nature of Acceptance

RICHARD SELL

IMAGINE you are standing on one side of a river and you want to reach a spot on the other side. You dive in and start swimming but you have forgotten to take the river's current into account. You step up your efforts but no matter how hard you try you cannot quite overcome the currents. When you finally touch the bank on the other side you are quite some distance away from where you intended to be.

We may not like to admit it, but our life follows a similar trajectory.¹ People and events act upon our life, diverting us from what we think is our chosen path. The world's marketing machine of self-help gurus tells us that simple grit, coupled with positive thinking will overcome all. But as the ancient philosophers argued, we should instead make peace with the fact that life is dynamic and changing and we cannot control everything. Knowing what we can overcome and what just must be weathered is the art of *viveka* (discrimination).

Why is this so? As human beings, we seem hardwired to want to control the environment around us. This stems from a fear of the unknown, of change that will bring the unknown closer to us. Change is one of the few constants and we readily

accept the phrase "this too will pass", without actually believing it. We somehow think things will remain the same.

In *The Secret Doctrine* we hear about the "Law of Periodicity", the ebb and flow in all departments of Nature; so too in the human department. The temporary appearance and disappearance of happiness and distress over time are like the coming and going of winter and summer seasons. They arise from sense perception; and our task is to keep ourselves equanimous through the disturbances of mind and emotions.

Acceptance has a significant part to play in how we perceive life and its impact on the outer person and Inner Self. Instead of fighting against the currents in our life, we can begin to live in harmony with them, taking the opportunities for growth from them as intended by life. It is not so much what happens to us that matters, as our attitude towards the happening — we can in fact be content under circumstances which would make many other people miserable.

But this is not so easy at first. Our feelings take over and our thoughts do not stop, driving down the same old grooves and patterns that they have driven down over countless lives.

Mr Richard Sell has been a member of the New Zealand Section of the TS since he was 16, President of Auckland's HPB Lodge for 6 years, and chairs the Governance Board of the Section. This article is based on a speech he gave at the Section's Summer Convention in January 2020.

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To change, we have to make a conscious effort and apply our will power to ourselves, bringing acceptance into the equation. This does not mean turning into a passive doormat and accepting everything that comes our way.

In our spiritual quest we walk the narrow path between wise tolerance of others, acceptance of people and situations that we may not wish for, but we also hold fast to our principles concerning the right conduct of our life. I heard some sound advice many years ago that goes like this: “Give way in the small things but hold fast when matters of ethical principles are involved.” In Madame H. P. Blavatsky’s (HPB) “Golden Stairs”, we hear three lines that go like this: “. . . a courageous endurance of personal injustice, a brave declaration of principles, a valiant defence of those who are unjustly attacked . . . ” Let us explore these statements a little: “a courageous endurance of personal injustice” — what does this really mean?

On one level it will mean gritting our teeth to get through the unpleasant experience, but on a deeper level she might be talking about accepting our personal karma without getting riled up and resentful about it. By accepting karma that is due, which is better faced now than put off into the future, we can reap the benefit of the intended lesson now, rather than fearfully trying to avoid the circumstances and learning nothing.

It is, after all, an opportunity to learn more about our current personality, our push buttons, our levels of patience and tolerance. Importantly, it is a chance to

put into action our theosophical principles. It is an opportunity for achieving spiritual growth. One might say it is like the butterfly that has to push against the shell of the chrysalis to get blood pumping into the wings, strengthening them as it does so. These trials are like our strengthening, pushing against the shell of our current spiritual limitations. The soul may well have prearranged such trials before our incarnation.

HPB 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.” When so-called bad things happen to us, especially those that we feel are a personal injustice, we can reflect on this and hope to endure the experience, learn from it, rise above it, and grow.

To help us succeed in this task is where “a brave declaration of principles” comes in. Will we barter our principles away at the first sign of trouble or will we stand by our principles knowing it may very well end badly for us? What are these principles HPB speaks of? In her *Key to Theosophy*, the enquirer asks, “Have you any ethical system that you carry out in the Society?” and the Theosophist answers:

The ethics are there, ready and clear enough for whomsoever would follow them. They are the essence and cream of the world’s ethics, gathered from the teachings of all the world’s great reformers. Therefore, you will find represented therein

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Confucius and Zoroaster, Lao-tze, and the *Bhagavadgītā*, the precepts of Gautama Buddha and Jesus of Nazareth, of Hillel and his school, as of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and their schools.

When we adhere to living life according to the principles and ethics that we aspire towards, we remain true to ourselves. Are we prepared to declare them and live by them even when faced with hostility and rejection? We also know the good opinion of the crowd, that fickle barometer, is rarely worth having. Master Serapis in a letter to Colonel Olcott wrote: “Brother mine, he who cares for the opinion of the multitude will never soar above the crowd.”

This brings us to the third line: “a valiant defence of those who are unjustly attacked”. In *The Voice of the Silence* we read: “Let not the fierce Sun dry one tear of pain before thyself hast wiped it from the sufferer’s eye. But let each burning human tear drop on thy heart and there remain, nor ever brush it off, until the pain that caused it is removed.”

So in daily life for example, perhaps we see bullying in the workplace and speak up. By putting our head above the parapet, we risk getting it lopped off. If we do suffer for holding fast to our convictions, then we fall back on our first line: “a courageous endurance of personal injustice”.

This line, “a valiant defence of those who are unjustly attacked”, is a call to action (being Karma Yoga), a recognition that each person is a brother or sister. We are fellow pilgrims on this planet and

linked as one. New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, famously said after the Christchurch mosque massacre in 2019, “They are us”, which I think describes well the theosophical principle of the Oneness of all Life.

One of the biggest errors we make is seeing others as separate to ourselves. We focus on the differences, often not liking them, and this breeds a certain level of contempt, and therefore intolerance. Intolerance is the act of not accepting people as they are or things as they happen. We try and shape them to our own views instead of letting people find their own way. We each have our own lessons to learn and we learn in different ways — some faster, some slower. Ours is not to interfere with the development of others, unless asked.

Voltaire asked, “What is tolerance?” He replied: “It is a necessary consequence of humanity. We are all fallible, let us then pardon each other’s follies. This is the first principle of natural right.” Some quotes about intolerance may help:

In the practice of tolerance, one’s enemy is the best teacher. — Dalai Lama

Tolerance isn’t about not having beliefs. It’s about how your beliefs lead you to treat people who disagree with you. — Timothy Keller

Tolerance becomes a crime when applied to evil. — Thomas Mann

Less well known is the *paradox of tolerance*, expressed by philosopher Karl Popper:

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Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them.

Intolerance is often based on fears. Our attitude towards acceptance is not only just based on things that are — or have been. What of the future? One of the biggest threats we face is our mind's ability to make up all sorts of stories which play on these fears. For example, we have a small disagreement with our boss and we think we will be fired and start fretting how we will pay the rent. These fears can take hold of us, taking us out of living in the now, and forcing us to live in some made-up world where the future is bleak, leading to worry, anxiety, and so on. I am sure we all do it to an extent. The best advice I have learned to deal with this comes from the Master Koot Hoomi:

Indulge not in apprehensions of what evil might happen if things should not go as your worldly wisdom thinks they ought; doubt not, for this complexion of doubt unnerves and pushes back one's progress. To have cheerful confidence and hope is quite another thing from giving way to the fool's blind optimism: the wise man never fights misfortune in advance.

We cannot escape suffering however, and it is something we all experience, probably at many points in our life. Our attitude to dealing with suffering helps

shape our ability to voluntarily move beyond it and bring acceptance into our life. Suffering is resistance to what *is*, and is created only by oneself. Suffering deepens us and starts to erode the sense of self-importance.

Some say that the soul grows through suffering. This is not exactly so. It is by making mistakes and in the way we meet difficulties that we learn. Suffering invariably comes as a result of the mistakes; yet the growth does not take place during the suffering, but afterwards. A person may be better after an operation, but the improvement does not take place while the operation is being performed.²

As we hear in *Light on the Path*, it is in the silence which follows the storm that the flower blooms. We must have gone through the turmoil of battle before we gain the reward, the real unfoldment of the soul. HPB said: "Woe to those who live without suffering. Stagnation and death are the future of all that vegetates without change. And how can there be any change for the better without proportionate suffering during the preceding stage?"

Moving beyond suffering and sense of personal injury leads to forgiveness. Forgiveness can be very hard at times but, ultimately, it is necessary for healing and moving forward. It helps to remind ourselves that those who do us an injury are really just messengers of our own karma, deliverers of experiences we need to go through in order to learn and grow. Nurture forgiveness,

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for it is very powerful, and the *Mahā-bhārata* states:

One should forgive, under any injury. It hath been said that the continuation of the species is due to man's being forgiving. Forgiveness is holiness; by forgiveness the universe is held together. Forgiveness is the might of the mighty; forgiveness is sacrifice; forgiveness is quiet of mind. Forgiveness and gentleness are the qualities of the Self-possessed. They represent eternal virtue.

One of the biggest barriers to true acceptance is “regret”, which can be very powerful in self-reflection. In this process we aim to understand where we can do things differently. For example, if someone is feeling regret that they have not used their time well, that they have been too caught up in their career, realizing they do not know their children well, or their marriage is on the rocks, then having regret in that moment can be a trigger to making positive change in their life patterns. Regret has then done its job and can be let go. But wallowing in regret without positive change is harmful.³

Our ability to let go and accept is always filtered through the lens of our own worldview. When misfortune comes

our way and hits us hard at times, how do we respond? Do we respond with negativity such as hate, revenge, and a strengthening of mistrust in others, or do we allow it to develop within us compassion, love, humility, and acceptance. Which road we travel on depends on how we view things — our worldview if you will. Wayne Dyer put it well:

With everything that has happened to you, you can either feel sorry for yourself or treat what has happened as a gift. Everything is either an opportunity to grow or an obstacle to keep you from growing. *You get to choose.*

By acceptance of things as they are, not as we would have them, we can begin to live lives that are in harmony with Nature and the universe. We will witness a change in our own fundamental nature. Unhappiness slips away and contentment pervades. The true nature of acceptance enriches both the Soul and the outer “personality” of the man or woman. We become that calm centre in the whirlpool of life. Understanding the nature of acceptance is of immeasurable aid to the seekers as they battle courageously on and eventually stand in awe, in the deep silence on the threshold, reaching out towards the light. ✧

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High Time to Change Our Minds

TIM WYATT

FOR 99.9 per cent of people for 99.9 per cent of the time 99.9 per cent of their perception is focused exclusively on the physical matrix of our planet. Although this is a slight exaggeration, it does mean that attention is almost solely locked on to the material causes and effects of pollution, resource depletion, species extinction, climate change and the numerous other critical crunch points currently facing a bewildered humanity.

Most people are entirely unaware of the fact that the Earth — just like ourselves and indeed everything else on it — also consists of subtler energy bodies which ultimately are the controlling agents of the physical plane. We are in blissful ignorance of this. But it is time we wised up.

So the task of cleansing and healing a wounded and abused planet is not just a physical task. It is a metaphysical one. It needs to first unfold in the non-material realms. And it needs to have a morality usually absent from an exclusively materially based view of the world. That means a change of attitude.

Materialism is a curse not just because it turns people into consumerist zombies who believe that all the Earth's bounty is up for grabs. It is even worse than that.

Materialism shrinks higher consciousness. It turns everyone into short-term profiteers fuelled by greed, acquisition, and ambition for more. It denies the existence of a soul or that life can exist in the non-physical realms. It encourages selfishness. And it creates perma-conflict. [“Perma” is an acronym which means an authentic and sustained happiness and well-being—Ed] Materialism is not our future.

Let us remind ourselves of the way that the Ageless Wisdom teachings — Theosophy and similar traditions — regard the constitution of matter. Remember that these ancient assertions involve a body of cosmic laws which govern the entire evolution of the universe. And us, too. They are not trendy, modern speculations, but timeless truths.

According to the esoteric interpretation, the physical spectrum consists not just of solids, liquids and gases (and maybe plasma) but four additional, even finer states known as etheric matter. Members of all kingdoms of Nature — mineral, plant, animal and human — all possess etheric bodies which direct the influences from the higher astral and mental planes. Humans' etheric bodies contain energetic meridians governing the seven

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chakras or wheels of energy connected to our vital organs. They dictate our health and well-being. The Earth has similar key nodes.

The astral plane is an exact mirror image of the physical world reflecting it in every detail. This is its prototyping department where the blueprints and plans from the mental world begin to form templates ultimately destined to materialise physically.

Unless and until there is a wider understanding and acceptance of life beyond the physical, there is only a minimal chance of our even identifying the pressing environmental issues let alone solving them. But this requires a sea change in our understanding of the world. Will there be time for such a mass revelation?

The important message for everyone to learn is: *Thoughts are things. Thoughts have enormous power. Thoughts shape the world.*

Thoughts produce the energies of desire which ferment in their own unique world — the astral.

Comparatively few people accept this notion at the moment. It goes against everything that science, politics, religions, and a possession-obsessed society have dictated and conditioned us to unquestioningly believe. Therefore, it is assumed that only physical measures can be deployed to deal with problems caused by a purely physical understanding of the world. Wrong. Think about it for a moment. All physical actions are preceded by mental activity (thoughts, dreams, plans or aspirations) which are then fuelled by the

desire and emotion to see these things actualised. So thought always precedes activity. As occultists always assert, *energy follows thought.*

Like us, planet Earth has an etheric body, an invisible matrix which animates, protects and communicates vital energies received from the wider cosmos. The Earth also has its astral realm extending from somewhere beneath its surface to near the moon. It possesses a mental body — or to be precise, two such bodies, a lower body controlling mundane and concrete thoughts and a higher one displaying a more elevated consciousness of truth, beauty and appreciation of grandeur.

The remedial work needs to begin on these inner planes of reality. And this work needs to begin with an assessment of not just how we poison the oceans, deforest entire countries or drive species to extinction, but why. What has given us the right to rape Mother Earth and trash the classrooms of this planetary place of learning? Is our arrogance due to our ignorance?

Before we can behave differently, we first need to think differently and desire differently. It is essential to remove selfishness and ingrained notions of personal gain as much as possible from this process. Our solutions must be based on the fact that this Earth is a single, unified, interconnected and interdependent living entity and we are just some of its components.

Humans are the only department of Nature capable of producing occasionally creative but often catastrophic effects on our world — and human beings are the

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only ones who can remedy this.

As well as understanding that we are more than lumps of flesh and bone, it is also vital that humans understand that these subtler bodies are the vehicles for us to reincarnate in different physical forms as part of our evolution. The way to counteract short-termism is to promote the truth that every human being is part of an eternal continuum and on an endless journey.

We will all be back here again on Earth

at some point in new bodies and since karma dictates that we shall reap what we have sown in the past, do we come back to a paradise or a wasteland?

Eco-hysteria is no longer enough. What is called for now is a more precise and sophisticated appreciation of how we and our world are made. And a different way of thinking and applying those thoughts. This may not just be desirable but is about our very survival. ✧

Naturally, every sound makes its impression upon astral and mental matter — not only those ordered successions of sounds which we call music. . . .

It is well for us ever to bear in mind that there is a hidden side to life — that each act and word and thought has its consequence in the unseen world which is always so near to us, and that usually these unseen results are of infinitely greater importance than those which are visible to all upon the physical plane.

The wise, knowing this, order their lives accordingly, and take account of the whole world in which they live, and not of the outer husk of it only. Thus they save themselves an infinity of trouble, and make their lives not only happier, but far more useful to their fellow-humans.

Annie Besant & C. W. Leadbeater
Thought-Forms

The Yoga Tradition

CECIL MESSER

AROUND 250 BCE, the Hindu religious practitioner and scholar Patanjali compiled the essential teachings for mental liberation and codified them for posterity as the *Yoga-Sutra*, one of the premier guides for enlightenment since writing appeared on this planet. A sutra (from the Sanskrit “thread”) is an aphorism or concise core spiritual teaching. The *Yoga-Sutra* is a coherent tapestry, a bridging material used by the aspirant to cross the chasm of delusion and despair to the far side where wisdom and joy reside.

The Sanskrit root of the word “yoga” means “to join” and is usually translated as either “union” or “yoking”, depending on the context. In the “Second Discourse of Lord Krishna” from the *Bhagavadgītā*, the ancient Hindu scripture known as the *Song of God*, “yoga” has the meaning of “the state of union with the Divine”. Patanjali utilizes the meaning of yoga, “to yoke”, not as a state of consciousness, but as that action necessary to unite consciousness with spirit, to marry pure awareness with the primordial natural condition of existence. This action is a profound form of meditation practice.

The famous core statement of the *Yoga-Sutra* is given here in Sanskrit to express

the inherent beauty of its sound as well as its rhetorical effect: *yoga citta-vṛtti nirodhah*. Sound it out or voice it as yo[^]-ga, chit[^]-ta, vrit[^]-ti, ni-ro[^]-dhah. This declarative Sanskrit statement forms the thread of wholeness that weaves its thesis into the rainbow-like fabric of yoga and is preeminently translated by the scholar Chip Hartranft as: “Yoga is to still the patterning of consciousness.”

Looking at the nature of consciousness, not through the eyes of the secularist or the religionist, but through those of a child or archetypal scientist, the essential purpose of consciousness is to know all things rightly. For Patanjali, the fundamental predicament of humanity — the basic cause of suffering — is the inability to see through the veils of delusion and self-centeredness.

Sutra 2.4 reiterates:

Not seeing things as they are is the field where the [secondary] causes of suffering [egoism, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life] germinate. Lacking this wisdom, one mistakes that which is impermanent impure, distressing, or empty of self for permanence, purity, happiness, and self.

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From this perspective, yoga is the process of deliberately bringing about a fundamental change in the operation of our conditioned consciousness, so that we may return to our natural home as the welcomed prodigal offspring.

Often referred to as classical yoga, Patanjali's yoga practice system consists of eight major parts, translated as "the eight limbs of yoga". Two metaphors are useful in viewing this meditation practice approach: the metaphor of a spider suggests the equal importance of each limb's acting in concert to facilitate progress along the path. The traditional metaphor of a plant is germane for its broad applicability to several features of yoga. The roots represent the connection with the benevolent mother source; the limbs are the yogic elements that enable growth through interaction with the inner and outer environment; and the flowering of the plant is the emancipation and realization that we may secretly long for. The eight limbs of this budding plant are: external discipline, internal discipline, bodily posture, breath regulation, sensory withdrawal, concentration, meditative absorption, and integration.

1. External disciplines include harmlessness, truthfulness, honesty, chasteness, and generosity. These virtues are oriented towards an operational relationship with the outer world. They are cultivated to mitigate negative patterns of consciousness — the noxious weeds crowding the meditation garden. These weeds emit poisons that linger in the recesses of our mind and cause the fruits of meditation to wither and die.

2. Internal disciplines deal with mental purity, contentment, austerity, self-study, and devotion. These virtues gently nurture our inner self by forming the leaves of receptivity, which process the stilling required for our journey.

3. Bodily posture refers to maintaining a stable yet relaxed posture that supports the meditation practice. Sitting upright with a straight back promotes alertness and facilitates the flow of the subtle energies in our inner channels. The popular hatha yoga practiced in the West relates to the two limbs involving bodily posture and breath regulation. Its practice is helpful in calming our thoughts and emotions as well as supporting our physical health.

4. Breath regulation refers to observing the movement patterns of the breath — inhalation and exhalation. In the words of Hartranft: ". . . the breath becomes spacious and subtle. As realization dawns, the distinction between breathing in and out falls away. Then the veil lifts from the mind's luminosity. And the mind is now fit for concentration."

5. Sensory withdrawal means to shepherd the six senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and mentation into a readiness to serve attentiveness. This practice is not intended to numb or render the senses inoperable. Hartranft points out that external distractions must be transcended for concentration and absorption to develop enough to see that one only observes one's consciousness of an object, not the object itself. We do not directly perceive a thing or phenomenon, only its neural representation in our mind.

6. Concentration focuses attention

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and initiates the inner mental process of meditation practice by directing consciousness towards a field of interest. The process of concentration should be free of conflict, almost effortless. During a practice session, notice how attention drifts away from the object and carefully watch its manner of returning. This seeing of the movement of attention is central to meditation practice.

7. Meditative absorption seamlessly continues the process of concentration. At this stage, distractions have disappeared. The only thoughts in operation are those within the field of the object itself. In meditative absorption, we are able to look deeply into the afflictive causes of suffering in order to attenuate them.

8. Integration moves beyond the processes of concentration and meditative absorption towards the goal of realizing the essence and nature of the object of meditation. In the state of integration, the influence of self-centeredness — the subjective nature of the mind — has disappeared. In this final stage, the light of consciousness itself can be seen in all its ineffable glory.

Rohit Mehta uses the phrase: “cloud of benediction” to refer to a state where in there is no thought, no thinker — only pure perception. Consciousness has returned to its original and unmodified condition of absolute freedom. Although the opening of the bud is a process in time, the full flowering is beyond time. ✧

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There is no need to seek holiness in poverty and solitude; there is holiness wherever we find ourselves placed in our daily life, since everywhere is the Eternal. . . . we see Divinity in the faces of our fellowmen, and hear its music in the voices of Nature. . . . the common activities of our human existence have become the ceremonial in which we worship the Reality which in them is manifest.

. . . when we have seen Reality, there is not a grain of dust which has not a sublime meaning, since it is for ever part of the Eternal. . . . we may behold illusion, but we know Reality. Such are the fruits of the Vision of the Eternal, such is the practice of Reality. To see Reality is to live; to become It is to have achieved. In that achievement alone is Peace and Liberation.

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The Lord's Prayer

SIMON O'ROURKE

CHRISTIAN ritual took nearly three centuries to develop. The earliest recorded use of the Lord's Prayer from Matthew, ch. 6, in ritual was by Tertullian about the late 2nd or early 3rd century. There may be an earlier oral tradition, however records are not available and Christians met in private homes.¹ While frequently repeated in ritual, few people today probably understand the meaning of the Lord's Prayer.

The following general similarities or conformities of the Pater Noster (Our Father) and the Chaldean Kaddish, from Jean-Marie Ragon, may help us to gain a better understanding.² In the examples below, the first line has the Chaldean Kaddish, the second the 1844 French translation, and in the third line I have, for comparison, added a scholarly translation from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 5th ed., 2018:

1. [Ch Kh] — Our father who is in the heavens;
[French] — Our father who is in the heavens;
[New Oxf] — Our Father in heaven;
2. [Ch Kh] — May the name of the Lord be exalted and sanctified;
[French] — May your name be sanctified;
[New Oxf] — Hallowed be your name;
3. [Ch Kh] — May he govern the house of Israel soon and in the times to come;
[French] — May your kingdom come;
[New Oxf] — Your kingdom come;
4. [Ch Kh] — May he govern, he who has made the heaven and the earth;
[French] — May your will be done in heaven and upon the earth;
[New Oxf] — Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven;
5. [Ch Kh] — May life descend from the height of the heavens over us;
[French] — Give us, today, our daily bread;
[New Oxf] — Give us this day our daily bread (or, our bread for tomorrow);
6. [Ch Kh] — May it please you to receive our prayers with mercy and the welcome supplications of all Israel;

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[French] — And pardon us our offenses, as we give pardon to those who have offended us;

[New Oxf] — And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors;

7. [Ch Kh] — My aid comes from the Eternal; maintain the peace among us and in all of Israel;

[French] — And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil;

[New Oxf] — And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one;

8. [Ch Kh] — May it be said; Amen!

[French] — So mote it be!

[New Oxf] — [No equivalent]

Dating Chaldean wisdom is too complicated a subject for this article. We find “Chaldeans” used in the Hebrew book of Daniel, as a name for a caste of wise people. Pythagoras studied with them for a time and their wisdom was very influential on the Neoplatonists. Ragon adds: “To complete the proof of the similarity or conformity between these orisons [prayers], let us compare the verse of the offering and the harvest [French, *moisson*]: *pax domini semper vobiscum*, “the peace of the Lord be always with you”. At the end of the Kaddish: “O thou, who establish peace in the celestial countries, maintain the peace among us!” Thus the Chaldeans, by Israelite intermediaries, have handed the *Dominical Orison* [meaning Lord's speech] down to us.” There is also modern support for this idea.³

My understanding is that the story of Jesus ascending the mountain for the Sermon on the Mount is an allegorical one. The symbology of the elements or *tattvas* (Sanskrit) of earth, water, and air represent the planes or successive states of consciousness in Nature, the physical plane, the astral plane, and the mental plane. His experience indicates an interior contemplative state touching the immortal part of soul consciousness on the mental plane.

Theosophical literature exploring evolution of the ancient mysteries, such as *Esoteric Christianity* by Annie Besant, suggests that the significant events in the life of Jesus conform to the idea of five initiations leading to adeptship, and the final depletion of personal karma, which explains why Jesus, in the allegory, then understood the seriousness of his karma to follow. This was further symbolised by the later humiliation, torture, and crucifixion, and that he also understood that the Law which stimulates wisdom and growth could not be avoided by either God or human. In Matthew's Gospel, while on the Mount, Jesus says (insertions and italics are mine):

5:17 - Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law [*karma*] or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. [*Pay all debts*] **18** - For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, *not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law [*karma*] until all is accomplished. **19** - Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the*

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least in the kingdom of heaven [*a serious karmic offence*], but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20** - For I tell you, unless your righteousness [*dharmā*] exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees [*uninitiated*], you will never [*self-consciously*] enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴

Therefore, rather than an external petition to “God” the Father, who is not limited to Heaven, as It is omnipresent (pan-, all, and everywhere), the Lord's Prayer represents a guide to the inner “God” through meditation, the Father that is the immortal Higher Self or soul, whose child is the personality.

“Give us this day our daily bread” seems petty to the solemnity of the experience. The Greek word for “daily”, *epiousios*, “Jerome translated . . . in two different ways: by morphological analysis as ‘supersubstantial’ (*supersubstantialem*) in Matthew 6:11, but retaining ‘daily’ (*quotidianum*) in Luke 11:3”.⁵ “Origen testifies (de orat. 27) that the word was not in use in ordinary speech, and accordingly seems to have been coined by the Evangelists themselves.”⁵

The Chaldean Kaddish states, “May life descend from the height of the heavens over us”, and supports “supersubstantial”, but I think it would be more accurate in its intention to say “may the Higher Self become master of the lower”. As Devotion is to turn our attention to, and become, the Divine within, so then in becoming the object of our devotion we “consume” or reflect its nature,

symbolised as spiritual bread. Turning wheat into bread has long been a symbol of spiritual transformation and the power of Will. Interestingly, the alternate New Oxford translation of “our bread for tomorrow” comes closer to this idea of a supersubstantial or spiritualised future.

There is a verse that then follows the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:14–15: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” In it, “trespasses” refers to “*paráptoma* (from *parapípto*, see there) — properly, fall away after being close-beside, that is, a *lapse* (deviation) from the truth; an error, slip up; wrongdoing that can be (relatively) unconscious, ‘non-deliberate’.”⁴

However, that part of the recited prayer in Matthew 6:12, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” used in ritual, which the archaic English and High ritual give as “trespasses”, actually comes from “*opheilema* (a neuter noun) that which is owed, a debt, the *result* of having a debt, focusing on the after-effect of the obligation (note the *-ma* suffix).”⁴ This is a far more serious meaning than the translation of trespasses from *paráptoma*. Matthew 6:12 therefore relates to karma, and more specifically the balancing of final effects, whereas Matthew 6:14 immediately following the Lord's Prayer is really saying that the greater the distance between yourself and your brother (all others in the gender-neutral sense), for

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even small slights, then just such a distance is there between your lower self, the personality, and the Higher Self within.

There is a negative sense given in the St Matthew Gospel that it is God who leads one to temptation and evil. Pope Francis favours the French and Spanish translations, “do not let us fall into temptation”, but this potentially changes Catholic Theology regarding the nature of evil.⁶ The Chaldean Kaddish phrase noted by Ragon, “My aid comes from the Eternal”, relates to other passages of the Chaldean Kaddish and refers especially to “strength” and, importantly,

the positive sense of divine strength and relief. As such, it has more in common with the Liberal Catholic First Ray Benediction, given at the end of the Eucharist, calling upon the Holy Ones to “show us the light we seek” and to “give us the strong aid of their compassion and their wisdom”. Perhaps this was the true intention, if not the expression of the ancient author of the Lord's Prayer. As an afterthought, in its current form the Lord's Prayer requires considerable interpretation, and I wonder if it would benefit from being reworded in ritual, or if the Benediction would be a better substitute. This is only one view for consideration.✧

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**We meditate on that most adored One,
who pervades the universe
(the physical, emotional and mental realms).
May His effulgence (divine light)
illumine our intelligence and enlighten us.**

- *Gayatri Mantra*

The Window of Our Opportunities

SVITLANA GAVRYLENKO

DEAR friends, every year at our annual Convention meeting — and this meeting of ours is especially solemn — there is an occasion to talk about our possibilities. The individual experience of each of us can show that it is extremely important to take care of the effective use of those opportunities that, thanks to the extraordinary generosity of Nature, are always present in abundance in our lives. I think this applies to every theosophist in a special way, because our mission is to change the world for the better.

Moreover, on the one hand, we need to learn with scientific accuracy the ability to see and use our capabilities, and on the other hand, this ability should be treated as a creative ability with individual unique features. Let us try to make the first approximation to this. This is where I want to start the conversation. Prominent American statesman and self-educated man Benjamin Franklin once said: “There are three types of people in the world: those who are immovable, those who are movable and those who move.” And we understand perfectly well what is meant. Some people do not see the need for change and do not want it.

They look like boulders in a river stream that surrounds them on all sides. I would advise leaving them alone. Water currents and time work on the side of transformation, and one day these people will simply be left behind.

Movable people, on the contrary, understand the need for change. And if you explain to them what to do, they will start acting. Work with these people; go where their energy is concentrated. Partner with them, articulate your dreams, and make plans.

Finally, there are the people who move: agents of change, gifted with the talent to see the contours of another future, and determined to put it into practice.

Such considerations are directly relevant to our practical work. When the teachers of mankind created this community of people called the Theosophical Society, they intended to make it a channel for their work. What kind of work do teachers do? They are working in the direction of great evolutionary laws, in the direction of God’s Plan on Earth. And they are looking for helpers, those who are able to see the promising direction of evolutionary development,

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to show people the way, to lead them.

But we may not consider ourselves such drivers. Can we be visible enough to point the way? We can treat ourselves as “little” people who do not yet have any levers of influence on society, on whom nothing depends.

Let us get acquainted with the opinion of the famous spiritual teacher of the twentieth century, Mikael Ivankhov:

Good and pure people: They have a tendency to appreciate people who are rich, realized, and powerful, who occupy a prominent position in society. And when they meet people who show high moral qualities — selflessness, generosity, restraint, kindness, they are valued much less and often do not even notice. However, it is thanks to these people who do not attract attention, that life is still possible on Earth. While others try to occupy the front ranks, even endangering the balance of the planet, these people in the shadows modestly continue their beneficial activities. The light, peace, and harmony that they radiate clean the atmosphere and make the air suitable for everyone to breathe. I am not saying this to turn you away from all the bright and talented people, because fortunately some of them also have great moral qualities. I just draw your attention to the presence of simple, kind, and clean people, whom you have not yet learned to notice.

So, we are also worth something in this world. After all, evolutionary change never comes to people through presidential orders or through laws passed by

parliament. Evolution has its own, often hidden for some time, invisible and unknown leaders. And to help people realize the purpose of their life and their place in the universe, and to create a model, core nucleus of the universal Brotherhood and make it visible to people is worth something in this world, lost in values and torn by contradictions and confrontations.

Let us try to understand the possibilities now. The world is full of opportunities. The generosity of Nature is manifested in the fact that it always has everything you need in abundance. If we use the physical term, we live in a field of possibilities. They surround us everywhere and at all times. But not all of them are noticeable; we do not pay attention to all of them. What does it depend on? Buddhism and Taoism teach that in one lifetime a person can become a Buddha, gain enlightenment. Do we see these opportunities around us? Do we know those who have achieved this goal? So opportunities exist, but they need to be noticed and realized.

Let us now analyze the levels of opportunities that we realize, with which we interact. If a person lives a conditioned life, acts mostly automatically, reacts to the surrounding events at a hint, she notices a limited range of possibilities. Her choice is mainly directed towards those opportunities that are aimed at personal ambitions, comfort, and well-being.

Suppose a person aspires to make a career. Where is her attention directed? To stand out among others in front of the

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boss, to demonstrate high professional abilities, to find defects of character and shortcomings in the work of the boss, whose place she wants to take. Every day she finds opportunities to realize her intention, even if such an intention is subconscious for her. This is the lowest selfish level of intentions that interact with pragmatic opportunities to achieve a conscious or subconscious goal.

Suppose now that some people are interested in philosophical issues of world order; they go to lectures, read books. So they like a certain theory that answers their questions, which offers a certain system of thinking and behaviour. In this case, they begin to enthusiastically practise the prescriptions of this system and gain the belief that other people will also find it very interesting and useful. And so they begin to look for any opportunity to tell about their wonderful discovery to friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even fellow travellers. This is a higher, cognitive level of interaction of intentions and capabilities.

It turns out that our desires, intentions, and aspirations seem to light up in the field of possibilities around us that correspond to them in content, by the affinity of vibrations, by the law of resonant correspondence. We tend to notice those of them through which our intentions — conscious or not — can be realized, and we do not pay attention to, do not react, and do not notice the rest of the opportunities around us. Among those we notice, we consciously or subconsciously choose some with whom we begin to interact.

Thus, although we tend to consider possibilities as an external factor, this factor can also be considered to be tinged with expressive subjective colors.

In the field of our capabilities there is an internal component, our internal reserves, which we can show for the implementation of the plan. These reserves will be included during the interaction with the selected external opportunity. Sometimes these internal possibilities are the most unexpected for us, which have been in a hidden, latent state for some time. No wonder it is said: Man, know yourself!

These numerous internal and external opportunities that we manifest, notice, and to which we respond, some of which we realize and most of which we do not, create our individual corridor of opportunities through which we gain life experience, develop, improve, evolve.

Having mastered one layer of opportunities, we eventually transfer our desires and intentions to a higher level, and then a new level of the field of possibilities opens before us. Gradually freeing ourselves from the shackles of our personality with its whims, prejudices, preferences, and selfish desires, rising from the darkness of selfishness to the light of self-awareness, we begin to notice much more opportunities at the higher level: to meet the needs of self-knowledge, creative self-realization, and truth.

By focusing on a specific task, plan, aspiration, we seem to attract opportunities in the form of events, meetings, information messages, which give us the keys to solving problems and achieving the desired result.

The Window of Our Opportunities

And here is what is important: our world is arranged in such a way that possibilities can be considered as natural phenomena, as particles of the manifestation of the living universe. After all, they are able to come and go, unite and separate, increase and decrease, appear suddenly and disappear just as suddenly. Some opportunities are given to us from birth in the form of abilities, inclinations of character, talents; and some opportunities we can call out for and wait for a very long time.

Careful and reasonable observation can confirm that Nature has a mechanism to bring opportunities to us and also to take them away. This is especially true when we rise to the level of service. Our high aspiration, a noble dream aimed at the common good, especially if it corresponds to the laws of evolution and the divine Plan, includes a whole host of helpers on the subtle plane of existence. Thus, by consciously choosing and realizing our opportunities for selfless service to the common good, we learn to cooperate with angelic, or pure, beings.

To shed more light on the mechanism of creation and emergence of opportunities, let us consider a quotation from the Mahatma Letters. This is the first letter from Koot Hoomi (KH) to A. O. Hume, in Amritsar, 1 November 1880 (*The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, chron. order., app. I, p. 470–1):

To “guide” you, we will not consent. However much we may be able to do, yet we can promise only to give you the full measure of your deserts. . . . The human brain is an exhaustless generator

of the most refined quality of cosmic force, out of the low, brute energy of Nature; and the complete adept has made himself a centre from which irradiate potentialities that beget correlations upon correlations through Eons to come.

Those who are close to the idea of discipleship, who have devoted themselves to selfless service to the common good, to the protection of Nature and the weak, and to the spiritual rebirth of humankind, never expect guidance from their Master, and at the same time have much evidence of how fabulous and magical opportunities arise and complex, confusing situations are resolved to steer events towards the most favourable outcome.

But they are not always inclined to focus on this and disseminate such information; moreover, they are also not inclined to attribute to themselves the positive results of the efforts. It is undeniable for the workers of the Light that accepting responsibility opens up new possibilities. And now we even guess from what source such opportunities may come if pure and high intentions of service are demonstrated.

Now let us get closer to our realities of today. On 12 August 2019, on the 188th birthday of Helena Blavatsky, the Theosophical Society in Ukraine received the status of National Section, the highest status in this world organization. As if nothing has changed, we continue to work as we used to, each in our own place. Yet, in fact, a lot has changed. We can see this event as the opening of a *new window of opportunities*, at a

The Window of Our Opportunities

higher level of service to people through cooperation with the creative manifestations of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty.

But this window of opportunity will serve us only if we realize and accept our new level of responsibility for all life manifestations, for the future of the Theosophical Society, for the spiritual

rebirth of humankind, for the fate of our planet. Let us be responsible and aware, careful, and not miss these wonderful opportunities. And we will be able to realize them only by uniting our efforts as one family, as brothers and sisters. It will give us the joy of life, the sense of happiness, unity, and heroic enthusiasm! ✧

IF you desire to be of service to others with advantage to them and without danger to yourself, see that these three principles guide you in your service: (1) That your greatest joy is to tread the path of service; (2) That you know yourself to be but the agent of some force greater than your own which sends the power of service through you; (3) That you see in others the same divine nature you yourself possess.

Do not be jealous of another's greater power of service, rather be glad that a greater power exists to help those whom your own weaker force may be unable to reach.

When you give, do not expect the recipient to keep the gift for himself alone. Rejoice when the gift which has given him happiness makes glad another also. . . .

Do not look for the fruits of your service, nor feel unhappy when no words of gratitude come from him you help. It is the soul you serve and not the body, and you may always see the gratitude of the soul, though the lips remain silent.

George S. Arundale
(1 Dec. 1878 – 12 Aug. 1945)
The Way of Service

Befriending the Coronavirus

JOSELITO BELMONTE CENDAÑA

MODERN-DAY spiritual teacher and best-selling author Eckhart Tolle nicely echoed a fundamental Ageless Wisdom teaching when he wrote: “Life will give you whatever experience is most helpful for the evolution of your consciousness.” Indeed, even unpleasant karma and suffering have such great educative value that our difficulties are really stepping stones in our spiritual journey. Nothing manifests from the Absolute — as the sourceless Source of all life (in as far as everything is alive and sacred) — that is not designed to ultimately benefit all of us, for we are nothing less than that one same transcendent Reality itself at the core of our being! It just takes time for some blessings to be recognized as such.

This timeless spiritual principle is one we might manage to embrace, but may find really difficult to act upon because and by force of our ego habit of resisting life’s flow when we feel things are not “going our way”. For example, it is unnatural for us humans to respond from a place of gratitude to disease and dis-ease, or to maintain a stoic calm in the face of misfortune and loss.

Hence, a global health crisis as grave as the current coronavirus pandemic —

together with all the lockdowns the world over it necessitates — is not exactly the kind of occurrence that we would easily appreciate as a blessing. After all, the SARS-CoV-2 virus — as the deadly pathogen that is causing the COVID-19 pandemic is officially called — has already infected over 41 million people, and the number of lives taken worldwide is over 1.1 million, and counting. As if this were taken worldwide is not enough, the pandemic is wreaking such great havoc on our global economy that economists are already certain it will not recover fully for many years to come.

The Blessings

But consider this: The mother of all blessings is the glorious reality that the timeless realm of Heaven, or the enlightened state of being, is not separate from our world of time, space, and form. But even in our unenlightened state, certain blessings are coming to light as this crisis unfolds.

For one, the coronavirus pandemic is teaching us humans many precious lessons — the follies of indifference to the pain and suffering of other sentient beings and of overconsumption, being among those lessons.

Mr Joselito Belmonte Cendaña is an editor of *The Philippine Theosophist*, Associate Editor of the *Theosophical Digest*, and Chief Editor of *Peace Ideas*. From *The Philippine Theosophist*, April–June 2020.

Befriending the Coronavirus

We are learning that human overconsumption is not wise because our insatiable desire for material things and consumer goods has a direct hand on why killer viruses are on the rise. The worst viral outbreaks of late — SARS, MERS, Ebola, and by all probability, the SARS-CoV-2 (or Wuhan coronavirus) — originated in bats and other wildlife whose fierce immune systems drive viruses to mutate and become deadlier in humans. As we increasingly intrude into their homes, destroying rain forests for logging, mining, animal farming, and so on, the more forest animals become refugees and come nearer our places, enabling their viruses to infect us.

And surely, over the past century, the number of new infectious diseases that emerge each year has nearly quadrupled, while the number of outbreaks per year has more than tripled. All this means the writing has long been on the wall for a viral pandemic of this magnitude to occur due to our overconsumption, but we simply ignored it.

We are also learning that human indifference to the pain and suffering of other sentient beings is not wise because animal agriculture — also the leading cause of climate change, species extinction, water pollution, habitat destruction, and ocean dead zones — is the biggest driver of deforestation. For example, roughly 70 per cent of the Amazon rainforest — “the lungs of the Earth” — has already been destroyed and converted to animal farmlands. And of course, it does not help that wild-animal trading in China

and other countries are also spawning outbreaks.

Another blessing brought about by the pandemic and lockdowns is that we humans are generally being forced to focus more on our inner, spiritual life while we stay at home. Incidentally, we are being shown how important it is to slow down and want less of things of this world, as our planet is actually mending in proportion to our shifting from unwise human “doing” (or “having”) to mindful human “being” involving deeper connection to our true self, to life, our loved ones and others, our world, our true purpose, to meaningful work, and so on.

Another blessing still is that the pandemic is bringing out the best in many among us humans — health workers, volunteers, donors, and others of us who help in whatever way we can — in terms of altruism and universal responsibility.

Indeed, life keeps giving us the experiences we need to help us evolve — perhaps even more so today in the midst of this global crisis as we are being made more aware of our deeper interconnectedness with each other and the natural world. Yes, as mystic saints would say, “Everything is a blessing! Everything is sacred! Everything is God!”

Of course, it hurts us terribly that many are suffering and dying from COVID-19. Even we might be counted soon among the infected, or even the dead, for all we know — which means our family and loved ones may follow too. But we must not forget also that only life is; birth and death are just its doors. Suffering is

Befriending the Coronavirus

karma's loving tool for teaching us to grow in wisdom and love from lifetime to lifetime. Disease and dis-ease might be causing us much pain, but humanity is healing in a deeper and more important way.

Being raised as a Christian, this all makes me think how helpful and timely the revival of Jesus's original teachings would be today. I found further confirmation of this thought from Keith Akers' book, *The Lost Religion of Jesus*, where Akers says that the great religious founder required the practices of simple, austere living, as well as utter non-violence and vegetarianism (not to mention meditation and loving service) in his disciples for their spiritual development and for the benefit of all beings.

Imagine how immense a benefit to our world it would be if all 2.6 billion Christians around the globe today could be re-educated about the Master from Galilee's true teachings, realize their wisdom, and act accordingly! At any rate, Nature is somehow helping make this materialize through the way she seems to be defending herself, as the world's remaining rainforests had dwindled down to just 15 per cent before the pandemic was unleashed.

Befriending the Virus

Inner guidance often comes during our deepest moments of meditation. But before we can settle into the depths of our inner silence, random — surely “non-guiding” — thoughts first keep arising while our monkey mind holds sway. So I was not quite sure what to make of it when (during one recent meditation sit)

the whisper, “Befriend the virus”, arose halfway between breathing “healing-our-world” intentions and descending into greater mental stillness. Then it all dawned upon me later.

Not that we should not try to contain the coronavirus, but perhaps we humans tend to treat it too much as “the enemy”, when the truth is that everything — perceived foe or otherwise — is really inside us and part of our True Self. As long as we feed the illusion of separation that ails us and is the root of all our social and ecological problems, we cannot hope for a lasting remedy for the worsening ills in our world. After all, bats and viruses have been around for tens of millions of years and Nature had flourished along the way — until, that is, we humans came along.

Karma is such that every action we perform generates energy that returns to us, and one purpose of this divine process is to help us realize and understand the unitive nature of all things. If we are honest with ourselves, we humans have not been treating Nature kindly at all, and it is only fair that we are suffering from our own unwise actions.

So to “befriend the virus” means to approach the problem of this pandemic from a place of love and compassion for all — understanding that the coronavirus is only doing its sacred work. As the Buddha once preached, everything is empty of inherent, independent existence; we are all one “interbeing”. Hence, if we look deeply into all this, we can recognize the coronavirus as our friend,

Befriending the Coronavirus

our teacher, our ally, reminding us that the healing of our world must start within ourselves, for the world we see around us is but a mirror reflection of our own state of consciousness.

Because no true separation exists between us and our world, no matter how our senses and dividing mind tell us otherwise, it is of paramount importance that we exert our best efforts to wake up to the living reality of our essential Oneness by direct experience, so we can embody divine love fully for the welfare of our world and all beings.

In the meantime we are asleep, and we just have to do what is necessary to help alleviate and prevent suffering in our locked-down world — keeping distance, wearing masks, washing our hands, disinfecting things, helping others, and so on — but in a way of accepting life as it

comes, just emptying the self, for it is from this place of nonresistance, nonduality, equanimity, and peace that we can best act wisely and compassionately, as well as possibly awaken to our True Self.

The more we let go of what we take as our separate self, not only do we suffer less but the more we see the Whole in every being, and know that each is sacred and worthy of our love. Clinging less to fleeting form for the eternal divinity in all that is and widening our circle of love to include all beings, we do Nature a favour and lessen her need to defend herself.

If we humans can do this, then perhaps, the experiences we need in our forthcoming years to evolve in consciousness will no longer include too severe a pandemic, if any at all. And many of our world's ills will heal as well, while we keep advancing in our journey of awakening. ✧

Man must understand his true relationship with the universe, which springs from the unity of the indwelling Spirit. When his relationship with it becomes a relationship of harmony, it will display the values of that unity; he will then become a cooperator with Nature, and his free will becomes a force that helps her on that onward course we call Evolution.

N. Sri Ram

Thoughts for Aspirants, 2nd Series

ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY-FIFTH INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Beyond the fact of personal existence, the most fundamental human understanding is of cycles in Nature. No one is unaware of day and night, seasonal change, or the ebb and flow of the tides. Similar cycles operate within our body and mind, linking us to grand patterns of unfoldment. For those intentionally engaged in the unfoldment of consciousness, the cycle of seeding, growth, and harvest of the fruits of awareness is supremely important — individually and as units within a greater humanity.

Tim Boyd

A DIFFERENT CONVENTION

This will be quite a different experience in comparison with previous Conventions, as we cannot meet physically. On the other hand, we will have more participants from all four corners of the globe, joining the sessions at suitable hours for them. Each day is dedicated to regions with timings of their time zones.

TECHNICAL PLATFORM

The convention will be run by Zoom Webinar. On registering at tsconvention.com/register, all will receive relevant information and necessary links.

TYPES OF SESSIONS

There will be public lectures, talks, symposiums, panels, interviews, youth forums, and meditation sessions. To make this more interactive, there will be Q&A sessions with the speaker after the talks.

The Indian Section has its annual convention in two sessions which are open for all registered participants.

Videos of some international centres will be shown.

Convention Information and Programme

CONVENTION PROGRAMME

Sunday, 27 December

CHENNAI TIME (GMT/UTC +5:30)

- 9.00 am OPENING OF THE CONVENTION
Prayers of the Religions
Lighting the Lamp
Invocation by the President
Greetings from the Sections
- 10.15 am Presidential Address
 Tim Boyd, *International President, TS Adyar*
- 1.30 pm LECTURE
 “The Flame of Awareness”
 Shikhar Agnihotri, *International Lecturer, India*
Q&A Session
VIDEO: Golden Link School
- 2.30 pm YOUTH SPEAK: TOMORROW’S VOICES
 “Patterns of Thought”, Benjamin Upton, *New Zealand*
 “Just say Yes”, Celeste Sasuman, *the Philippines*
 “The Spirit of Youth”, Brandon Goh, *Singapore*
- 4.30 pm INDIAN SECTION CONVENTION — I
Inaugural Address
 Tim Boyd, *international President, TS Adyar*
 “State of the Indian Section” Address
 Pradeep H. Gohil, *President, Indian Section*
- 8.00 pm YOUTH FORUM
- 9.00 pm MEDITATION
 Ven. Olande Ananda Thera, *Sri Lanka*

Monday, 28 December

CHICAGO TIME (GMT/UTC -6)

- 10.00 am Universal Prayer

LECTURE
 “Mastering the Cyclic Nature of Existence”
 Elena Dovalsantos, *International Lecturer, USA*
Q&A Session

VIDEO: Theosophical Centres in the Americas
- 3.00 pm PANEL IN SPANISH
Translations into English, Portuguese, and French

Convention Information and Programme

- “The Work of the TS — Post-Pandemic and into the Future”
Moderator: Esteban Langlois, *Argentina*
Erika Chavez, *Argentina*
Juliana Cesano, *USA*
Ulisses Riedel de Resende, *Brazil*
- 4.30 pm TOS IN THE AMERICAS
- 7.00 pm BESANT LECTURE**
Maria Leonor “Leni” Gerona Robredo
Vice-President of the Republic of the Philippines
Q&A Session
- 8.30 pm YOUTH FORUM
- 9.30 pm MEDITATION
John Cianciosi, *USA*

Tuesday, 29 December

PARIS TIME (GMT/UTC +1)

- 10.00 am Universal Prayer
SYMPOSIUM BY EUROPE/AFRICA
Moderator: Patrizia Calvi, *Italy*
“From Becoming Aware to Ever Becoming”
Jenny Baker, *President, English Section*
“Spirituality — A Holistic Approach”
Patrick Kafunga, *TS member, Zambia*
“Becoming Aware of the Suffering — and How to Deal with It”
Janne Vuononvirta, *General Secretary, Finland*
“Becoming Aware Is Discovering Love”
Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu, *Chairperson of the EFTS, France*
VIDEO: International Theosophical Centre, Naarden
- 11.00 am PANEL Q&A — Moderator: Patrizia Calvi, *Italy*
Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu, *Chairperson of the EFTS, France*
Sabine Van Osta, *Belgium*
Carlos Guerra, *Portugal*
Janne Vuononvirta, *Finland*
- 3.00 pm INTERVIEWS ON AWARENESS
Moderator: Isabel Nobre Santos, *Portugal*
Interviewees and Interviewers
Antonio Girardi, *Italy* — interviewed by Marie Harkness, *Ireland*
Narendra Shah, *Kenya* — interviewed by Sabine van Osta, *Belgium*
Angels Torra-Buron, *Spain* — interviewed by Carlos Guerra, *Portugal*
Krista Umbjarv, *France* — interviewed by Patrizia Calvi, *Italy*

Convention Information and Programme

- 4.30 pm TOS IN EUROPE AND AFRICA
- 6.00 pm THEOSOPHY-SCIENCE LECTURE**
“Scientific Research and Spiritual Search”
Ravi Ravindra
*Professor Emeritus at Dalhousie University,
Halifax, Canada*
Q&A Session
- 8.00 pm YOUTH FORUM
- 9.00 pm MEDITATION
Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu, *France*

Wednesday, 30 December

CHENNAI TIME (GMT/UTC +5:30)

- 9.00 am Universal Prayer
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS PANEL
Moderator: Renee Sell, *New Zealand*
- 10.00 am LECTURE
“The Power of Renewal”
Linda Oliveira, *National President, Australian Section*
Q&A Session
- 11.30 am TOS IN ASIA
- 3.00 pm INDIAN SECTION CONVENTION — II
“Awareness Transforms Life”
Chair: Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, *the Philippines*
“Importance of Awareness in Fulfilling TS Mission”
Sanjay Potey, *President, Marathi Federation*
“Need of Awareness to Relate to the Present Situation”
Chital Patel, *Gujarat Federation*
“How Awareness Transforms Life”
Sripriya H., *Madras Federation*
- 6.00 pm **PUBLIC LECTURE**
“The Golden Hour: A Turning of the Cycle”
Tim Boyd, *international President, TS Adyar*
Q&A Session
- 7.30 pm **CLOSING OF THE CONVENTION**
Tim Boyd, *international President, TS Adyar*

Theosophical Work around the World

IATF's Magna School of Theosophy

Magaly Gracia de Polanco, Presidential Representative for Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, has submitted the report below.

There is a power which unites members of the Theosophical Society (TS) when we come together for the same purpose: fraternal work for humanity. This was fulfilled from 23 to 25 October 2020, as facilitated by the Magna School of Theosophy (MST) for the Americas and the Caribbean, with an *online* workshop in Spanish on “Find Your Refuge Only in the Eternal”, a theme inspired by H. P. Blavatsky’s *The Voice of the Silence*.

We wanted to ease the feelings of isolation and loneliness that many of us have been experiencing throughout this pandemic. So we had an idea and came together to plan and work on it for all Spanish-speaking members and others interested in the work of the TS.

MST began its work with Rafael E. Martínez Leiva (Mexico), Ernesto García (Argentina), and myself, with the blessings of Isis Resende, President of the Inter-American Theosophical Federation (IATF).

Then we met with Margarita Martínez (Mexico), Enrique Reig (Mexico/Spain), and the General Secretary of the Mexican Section of the TS, Enrique Sánchez in order to coordinate ideas and make them a reality.

Mrs Resende opened the program of

the MST and ably translated TS international President Tim Boyd’s inaugural address [on p. 5 of this issue]. Other speakers included Esteban Langlois (Argentina) on “Constant Dissatisfaction and the Futile Quest for Happiness”; Fernando A. de Torrijos (Spain/USA) on “A Sprout of Harmony Amid Chaos”; Enrique Reig on “Emotional Control through Spiritual Refuge”; Isaac Jauli (Mexico/Spain) on “Entering the Refuge of Our Heart”; Martin Leiderman (Venezuela/USA) on “The Life of the Mystic According to *The Voice of the Silence*”; and Isis Resende (Brazil) on “The Science of Life”. Gaspar Torres (Cuba/USA) was in charge of the invocation at the opening.

We also had the lovely collaboration of María Rosa Martínez Fernot (Argentina), Eladio Polanco (Puerto Rico), and Francisco Cuevas Torres (Chile).

I closed the program by reading a fragment of HPB’s letter to the London Theosophical Lodge in 1887:

I cannot do any good for you if you do not place yourselves in the atmosphere of Theosophy and that of the Masters, or rather, if we do not yet succeed in feeling within ourselves our Inner Master . . . working for oneself, no one can achieve anything, but when a few come together we can achieve much.

Let us be united in love — it is the only thing that can help the world. ✧

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