



# THE THEOSOPHIST

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Cover: Statue of Gautama Buddha, whose birthday, enlightenment, and passing are celebrated as Buddha Purnima or Vaisakha Purnima, referring to the Full Moon of the Indian month of Vaisakha, which fell on 21 May this year.

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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.

# Self-Responsibility

TIM BOYD

MANY teachings in theosophical literature relate to our individual responsibility for unfoldment. This is expressed beautifully in the small book, *The Idyll of the White Lotus*, by Mabel Collins. It is a short story, rich in meaning, at the end of which the 'Three Truths' are described. One of those Truths relates to the principle of self-responsibility: 'Each person is his absolute lawgiver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself; the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment.' It is clearly stated, and places the burden of effort on each of us. It is intended to counteract the idea that in some way the various things and events we encounter in our lives are determined by some force, or power, or being outside of ourselves. That idea weakens us, even in our approach to Divinity.

When we speak about the principle of Oneness, the essential idea is that we are not disconnected or separated from the principle described as God, the Ultimate, the Divine, or whatever the words that our temperament allows us to say. The process of mentally looking towards something else to determine the course and direction of our lives is a mistaken idea. Each one of us has this responsibility. It becomes all the more important

when we reach a stage where we actually become self-aware. It is really only at that point that we are able to make genuine choices. Prior to that, we are merely reacting to the circumstances that surround us in life and in Nature. With the advent of awareness we can actually choose for the first time. This is the stage in which we all find ourselves.

One of the facts of our being is that we find within us tendencies towards greatness arising from the divine seed that is planted within every one of us. We have these tendencies, and when we see them exhibited in others around us, we respond. When we hear the words, teachings, and stories of the lives of the Great Ones who have lived among us, we respond wholeheartedly. In a similar way, we have all of the 'negative' tendencies within us as well. When we look at someone who is perhaps not living to their fullest, people often say: 'Except for the grace of God, there go I.' We need to recognize that each of us has tendencies and possibilities of greatness, but at the same time we have tendencies that could take us far away from that course.

When we plant a garden, we either want great food or beautiful flowers. No matter how careful we are, we always

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find the presence of plants that we do not want — weeds — which left unattended will grow and choke out the plants that we are looking to harvest. An important part of cultivating a garden involves continually pulling up those weeds. Some people will just break off the part of the weed above the ground and believe that the weed is gone. But the root remains beneath the surface. Certainly it will grow again, and it will come back even stronger. There are some types of weeds that you can pull up by the root, but if there is even the smallest fragment of that root left in the soil, then that plant will come back again. Within us there is a process of cultivation that is similar to the attention that we pay to a garden, except that this is the garden of our hearts and minds. It is the rare individual who, through their many lives of self-discipline and attention to these matters, is completely beyond the reach of the temptations that take us off the track.

There are seeds planted in the desert in an environment where conditions provide no possibility for them to grow. Some of these seeds will remain dormant until the exact combination of conditions appears. It may take years, but when the proper combination of sun, rain, and humidity appears, suddenly the land that was barren and lifeless becomes filled with flowers, because the conditions that allow the seeds to grow have been provided.

In previous times, the conditions that would promote all kinds of distractive

behaviour were regulated by the influence of the communities where we lived and the cultures that surrounded us. Every culture encourages and discourages certain values and behaviours. Throughout history, this has led to the flourishing of a particular type of mind in one place, and of something quite different in another. One of the conditions of life in our time is that now we are exposed to a range of influences that would have been impossible previously. In cities around the world people from unfamiliar cultures, along with their traditions, customs, and ideas are interacting, often in conflicting and confusing ways. Beyond the physical atmosphere, we all share the atmosphere of thought.

Powerful thoughts influence people wherever they find themselves. We find examples of this in the history of inventions such as the airplane. The Wright brothers in the United States get credit for that invention because theirs was the first plane to leave the ground and remain in the air. Within months following that event, in other parts of the world airplanes began taking flight. When I was in high school I remember reading about the theory that the human body was incapable of running a mile in less than four minutes. Some athletes had gotten close to four minutes, but the greatest athletes in the world could not break it. One day a man named Roger Bannister ran a mile-race in under four minutes. He broke the barrier that was deemed impossible for the human constitution. Within a very short time, sub-four-minute miles

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became the standard for elite runners.

A difficulty for us is that we tend to be unaware of our broader environment. There is an expression that says: 'Nobody knows who it is that first discovered water. The one thing we *do* know, is that it was not a fish.' We are continually bathed in an ocean of thought influences from moment to moment. The idea of self-responsibility involves first becoming aware, and then, responsible.

In our time we are exposed to influences that were impossible in previous times. The global phenomenon of the Internet is a powerful influence. Every year each section in the Theosophical Society (TS) sends a report of its activities to Adyar. A few years ago, in writing the report for the American Section, I commented on the influence of the Internet and how it had become a major focus of our efforts. I remember somebody saying to me: 'Well, you are from America, and in America everybody can afford computers. So, the Internet may be important for your country, maybe also for Europe, but this whole Internet idea is not something for the world.' The following year, in writing the report I noted that one billion more people are now using the Internet since the previous year, and they are mostly from countries deemed to be of the third world. So, this global environment of influences which are largely distractive, or even negative, are finding their way into the homes in little villages in Mexico, major cities in Brazil, India, and the US. Like it, or not, everybody is exposed.

The conditions for some of these seeds that distract us from purposeful living are being fed in many ways unnoticed, and perhaps even against our will. Part of self-responsibility is that we make choices about *what* we expose ourselves to. But everybody is not functioning on that level. So now we see horrific things happening around us.

In the US newspaper world there is a saying that 'if it bleeds, it leads'. That is, if something deals with blood and suffering, it goes on the front page, because it attracts attention. People will use their hard-earned money to buy the newspapers and read about it. They develop thoughts and images about these tragic events and become angry or fearful thinking about the minds of the people committing these crimes. Positive and uplifting events are less frequently reported. When some horrific act is committed in some country, some new level of atrocity that perhaps no one had previously considered, within a short time the same thing is repeated in other parts of the world. The exposure that is being given to a very low level of thought demands of us a certain responsibility in feeding our minds. The expression that 'you are what you eat' does not just apply to food, but also to our thoughts and the types of emotions that we allow ourselves to enhance. We are continually feeding ourselves at all levels, but not necessarily consciously.

By the year 2050 it is estimated that 80 percent of all the people on the planet will be living in cities. Clearly there are

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issues that we will have to face on a material and also a spiritual level related to this type of concentration. In the Mahatma letters there is the expression that every person is continually 'peopling (their) current in space' with the offspring of their thoughts. Every moment we are sending out influences into the shared ocean of thought. We might ask, what are the influences that are being emphasized in these growing urban centres?

Probably the most important of the Mahatma Letters is called the 'Maha-Chohan's letter'. A crucial statement in that letter is that the universal scheme in human life has become 'the struggle for life'. Everywhere people are struggling for the life that they feel they should be living. The quality of thought flowing out from so many is tinged with frustration, anger, even desperation at being so far removed from the most basic needs, as well as potent consumer desires. This is the thought atmosphere that is being concentrated in these places where the bulk of the world's population now lives.

This characteristic of contemporary living defines a work and provides an opportunity for those of us who are sufficiently aware. There is an influence that has to be counteracted. Self-responsibility, if approached properly, begins with choosing to put ourselves in touch with great thoughts. Theosophy promotes a certain culture of the mind that leads towards greatness in thinking. As that translates into actual behaviours that we exhibit in our lives, then it has a further reach.

The higher *always* overcomes the lower.

For many there is a prevalent idea that real change in the world is difficult or impossible. Even spiritual practitioners can find themselves feeling paralyzed asking, 'What can I do? The forces that are out there that oppose these upward changes are so vast, the ignorance that surrounds us is so profound, what can I do as one small person in one small group?' The Theosophical Society worldwide has around 26,500 members. On a planet with more than seven billion people, I have heard it said that this is a very small number. On the other hand, J. Krishnamurti, a man who by anyone's account, had established his awareness in a range of consciousness that was quite exalted, once commented that if there were *ten* people in the world who shared his same state of consciousness, the world would be transformed. Imagine what 26,500 could do!

The reason for the emphasis on application of these principles is that, of itself, knowledge is not sufficient. It is only as these principles become active within us that transformation on a personal level, and transformation of humanity, becomes possible. In a room that is dark, the act of dispelling darkness is not something accomplished through great effort or extremes of will, but by turning on a light. In the presence of light there is no effort involved in dispelling darkness. Our efforts must be directed towards removing the internal barriers to that light.

The illumination that is possible through an awareness that directs us

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towards proper choices for our own unfoldment is what lies behind the principle of self-responsibility. In our personal lives there are choices we are making every moment. We choose to cling to, and harbour thoughts of resentment towards others for things that have been done to us. At some time in their lives everyone has had something done to them, but not everyone holds on to it for a lifetime.

The fact that we have been harmed, disrespected, or unappreciated by others is not something that should distract and hold our minds attached. There is an expression about forgiveness: 'Unwillingness to forgive is like a poison that we take hoping to harm the other person.' It simply does not work. This is part of the awareness that can breed a deeper sense of self-responsibility within all of us.

### Questions and Answers

1. Q: Even when one has engaged in the process of releasing hurt feelings, and has forgiven the other person, what is the benefit if there is no change in the other person?

1. A: Maybe that is not the correct question. The process of forgiveness is not done for the other person. The idea is that each resentment or hurt feeling that we carry with us is like a stone that we put in our pocket. If we carry enough stones, it gets to the point where we cannot move. Genuine forgiveness is about ourselves. Regardless of what I may try to do to others, I cannot control their inner state of mind. There are great people who

have been imprisoned, even tortured for years in an attempt to force them to change or move away from their internal convictions. Many have died without changing their convictions regardless of the level of abuse.

We cannot force the behaviour or thinking of another; what we *can* do is to release ourselves from attachment to some incident that has caused us pain. Often we feel as if we have released a hurt feeling, but when we meet the other person, and again find ourselves mistreated, the same feeling arises. So we ask the question: 'Why should I go through the effort of forgiving when the other person is just going to mistreat me again?' But self-responsibility means that we take responsibility for the cultivation of our own internal environment. Just as the good gardener would do, we try to protect our garden from harmful influences. As we do that, the garden grows.

As our practice strengthens, we find that we meet and connect with others who are involved in the same process. One of the features of any important change in the world is that it has *only* come into being as the result of a *few* focused and committed individuals. The Theosophical Movement in 1875 was pretty much Blavatsky, Olcott and a few others. As we are able to connect ourselves with the deeper potentials of our being, the power generated from those levels far exceeds external forces. The work for us is to become sufficiently clear for these potentials to be able to express themselves through us. Carrying

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resentments, angers, hatreds, fears, and so on, interferes with that free flow.

(Inaudible questions from this point onwards)

2. A: Everything that we do feeds into the common atmosphere that we share. We want to limit our harmful effects and increase our positive effects, but at the same time we have to recognize that in the undeveloped condition in which most of us find ourselves, our thoughts are not very powerful. The petty resentments we hold on to leak out into the shared atmosphere and very slightly change the consistency of that medium. At the purely personal level our thoughts, frustrations, irritations, likes, and dislikes affect little. What *is* powerful is when 6 or 7 billion people behave in that way. Each small emotion-charged droplet comes together with the others creating a powerful flood that affects us all. This is where we must recognize our contribution and do what is necessary to change it for the better. We will not always be immediately successful. In fact, success will rarely be immediate, which is why we take on the principle of self-responsibility with a long-term view.

One of the beauties of theosophical teachings is that it is not focused merely on the brief span of a lifetime. The proposition is that this cycle of birth, living, and death has been repeated many times, and that over the course of those repetitions it has allowed us to develop certain capacities. So, if we begin in this moment, by the time our life is over, in all likelihood we will not be enlightened.

But we will have had significant spiritual experiences and developed qualities upon which we will be able to build in future lives. No act that we do is insignificant. There is no course that we set for ourselves that will not have definite results either now or in some future life, but it will have results now because just as the irritation goes out into the shared atmosphere, so does the positivity.

3. A: One of the conditions of the human family is that we are all functioning on different levels. It is very much like a school where you would find multiple levels of activity and understanding. A few people serve as the teachers to all of them. The interest of a university student taking a course in astrophysics would be very different from the child learning to read and write. At some point the child will rise to, or even exceed the state of the university student, but currently it is an uneven development that we find in the human family. It is unrealistic to expect that we younger students in life's school behave at the higher levels. Certain levels of understanding lie in a future that, for most of us, is distant from this moment. This was part of the urgency to reintroduce theosophical teachings to the world.

4. A: The questioner used the analogy of a bridge in speaking about 'the path'. It is the nature of being human that there is a bridge, a linking consciousness, between the spiritual and the material world. The problem for us is that to cross this bridge from our normal materially focused consciousness to our deeper



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spiritual potentials, there is a toll. You do not go across just because you want to picnic on the other side. Some people vaguely wish to be more centred or spiritual, but feel that the toll is too high; they are simply not willing to pay the price, or their need is not strong enough. The experiences of the material side still seem to be sufficient. Sooner or later there necessarily comes a time for everyone when the satisfactions of material living are not enough. When that moment comes, we *need* to make the journey. Keeping with the bridge analogy, it is at that point that we save our money — our energies; we do not dissipate them. We concentrate our energies and we exercise our will in order to pay the toll.

In the Bible, many of the deeper

teachings that Jesus gave were taught in parables. He said to his disciples that the things that he taught to the others, he gave in parables, but to those who were close to him, he spoke openly. One of the parables he gave was about a man who traded in jewels. At some point he came across a most precious jewel, ‘a pearl of great price’. Being someone who had trained his mind, he was aware of the value of what he had found. So his response was to take all of the many other jewels that he had accumulated and to sell them in order to purchase this one invaluable jewel — this divine seed that we find planted within us. When we become aware of it, and recognize its value, then we behave accordingly. Until then, there will be many other things of less value that will capture our attention. ✧

**Each of us has response-ability for our unique piece of Creation, but only from the deeper wisdom and compassion of our Greater Self can we truly care for the world entrusted to us.**

Rabbi Theodore Falcon

# Mountain and Summit as the Path and Its Goal

WILLIAM WILSON QUINN

‘In point of fact, there is nowhere in physical nature a mountain abyss so hopelessly impassable and obstructive to the traveller as that spiritual one, which keeps them back from me.’

Morya quoting KH<sup>1</sup>

The motion picture *Everest*, released in September 2015, is a large-scale adventure drama that has received deserved critical acclaim since its release. Featuring international film stars Jake Gyllenhaal and Keira Knightley, among others, the film is based on a true story and depicts real events of the Mount Everest disaster in May 1996. The story focuses on attempts of two separate expedition groups of climbers to survive a deadly blizzard. A number of them were high on the mountain near the summit when the blizzard hit unexpectedly, its gale-force winds driving snow and ice against the climbers like explosive debris. Eight climbers caught in the blizzard died on Mount Everest during that tragic event. Until that point in time, it was the single deadliest day on Mount Everest on record. But that lamentable single-day

record was subsequently broken by the deaths of sixteen climbers (Sherpa guides) resulting from the 2014 Mount Everest ice avalanche, and thereafter by the fatalities of twenty-two climbers on the mountain resulting from multiple avalanches caused by the massive April 2015 earthquake in Nepal.

Films and books relating such stories point to the fact that there is, and always has been, a fascination in the collective psyche of humankind that pertains to the difficulty and risks associated with the ascent of a mountain summit, and the rewards that accrue to the successful climber. This natural relationship between (i) mountain/summit and (ii) ascent also supports the ease with which the simile of arduous challenge in the ascent of a mountain summit compares to other human endeavours. Stated alternatively, this relationship can be made comparable to other human endeavours by virtue of its stark clarity and simple comprehensibility. Not the least of those human endeavours is treading the spiritual path over all or a portion of one’s lifetime, and the difficulty of reaching the peak —

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its summit — of spiritual truth. One can, in fact, make a persuasive argument that the difficulty and arduousness of a person achieving the summit of life's spiritual ascent actually exceed those of ascending to the summit of Everest, and requires an even greater degree of courage, discipline, and steadfastness.

### The Metaphor

For everyone, including the seasoned mountaineer, the climb to a mountain's summit is exhausting, difficult, and often dangerous, as witnessed just by the multiple deaths on Mount Everest since 1996. The laws of gravity explain why it is more exhausting than walking along a path on flat or gradual terrain. Sheer cliffs, powerful winds, and icy, rugged topography (and altitude, depending on the mountain in question) explain why it is similarly more difficult and dangerous. These indisputable facts are no doubt the genesis for repeated use of the mountain, and its summit, as apt metaphors for the challenge of a person's spiritual journey, particularly where the purpose and goal of that spiritual journey are understood by the traveller. Once the summit is finally achieved, the climber experiences a clear and panoramic vision of all around, and all below, together with a greater proximity to and unobstructed view of all the heavenly bodies beyond the Earth's curtilage. It is thus not hard to understand how this achievement of reaching the summit may be correlated either to the experience of having taken a regular initiation as a chela of an adept or, as

significantly, having become what in Sanskrit is referred to as a *jivanmukta* — one who while living has at last liberated himself or herself from the wheel of death and rebirth. But one does not achieve the summit without first climbing the mountain.

The use of both metaphor and simile in correlating the ascent of mountain and summit to one's spiritual journey by writers of theosophic and esoteric treatises follows a long tradition. This is closely related to the fact that the phenomena of mountain and summit — including their ascent — occur regularly, and with elaborate detail in some cases, in the world's great cosmogonic and cosmological myths, which are immemorial. Though these myths differ in specifics, the representations of mountain and summit in them tend to share certain traits in common, such as the summits of the mountains being the 'home of the gods' or, as often, the sacred intersection between heaven and earth. The experience of Moses ascending the jagged summit of Mount Sinai, for example, and there witnessing a momentous theophany, resulted in the revelation of the Ten Commandments as a moral and spiritual guide for the entirety of humankind. Motifs of mountain and summit appearing in many of the world's cosmogonic myths are, moreover, often inextricably related to the difficulties of the climb, of ascending those summits.

### Mountain and Summit in Mythology

All ancient or traditional mythology

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is sacred. This is especially true of those myths that can be categorized as cosmogonic and which describe the creation and placement of the universe, the firmament, and our world, with all its constituent localities. This is important to note because where mountains and summits appear prominently in such myths, they are imbued with the *sacred* which, as we shall see, corresponds perfectly to the use of mountain-summit metaphors in life's spiritual journey. Owing to the limitations of space, just two of many other possible examples from traditional mythology follow here, in order to illustrate this point.

In classical Hindu mythology, various differences occur in the story of creation depending upon whether one looks to the oral *sruti* tradition of Vedic ritual and doctrine or the oral *smṛti* tradition emphasizing the acts of gods and kings, both later transcribed and in large part comprising the Puranas. Nonetheless, after the world was formed, one aspect of it looms large in Indic myths, which is the placement and location of Mount Meru, commonly believed to be the abode of Brahma. In the myths Meru is a mountain in the far north — in relation to the Indian subcontinent — which is sacred not only to Hindus, but to Jains and Buddhists as well. H. P. Blavatsky refers to its mythological status as 'the abode of gods'.<sup>2</sup> Mount Meru, pursuant to its mythological reality, is considered to be the centre of all the physical *and* metaphysical universes, and so has a primordial spiritual dimension. In testi-

mony to this, Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist temples were constructed in past centuries as symbolic representations of Mount Meru.

According to the great Hindu epic *Mahabharata* — which we should also note contains within it the *Bhagavadgītā* — the five sons of King Pandu, known as the Pandavas, and their wife Draupadi, attempted to ascend to the summit of Mount Meru in order to attain heaven. But during the ascent Draupadi and four of the brothers fell to their deaths due to their sinful karma. Only the fifth brother, Yudhishtira, because of his spiritual purity, successfully climbed to the mountain's summit and so reached the sacred sanctuary of heaven. Such traditional myths encapsulate beautifully both the notions of mountain/summit as sacred space, and the risks and difficulty of attaining that space posed by attempting to ascend to this sacred summit.

This eastern example of Mount Meru corresponds in many ways to the western example of Mount Olympus, the dwelling place of Zeus, chief of the Greek gods. In Greek mythology Mount Olympus was home to the twelve Olympian gods who, including Zeus, ruled the ancient Greek world. Olympus' northern slope was, further, the birthplace of the nine Muses and home to several of them. Mount Olympus is the location in which many Greek myths are set, and from whose 'topmost peak', as described by Homer in the *Iliad*, Zeus commands the other gods. Unlike Mount Meru, Olympus has an actual geographical counterpart, which

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is Greece's highest mountain in Thessaly. But like Mount Meru, Olympus is imbued with the same consecrating power of height, of proximity to and participation in the sacred, and also shares the same spatial symbolism of transcendence that includes, among other things, the principle of the vertical axis. Unlike Mount Meru, the ascent of Olympus was prohibited to mortals who were not permitted there. However, any mortals who in defiance of that rule nonetheless succeeded in making the difficult ascent to the peaks of Olympus, such as Castor and Pollux, became — like those who climbed Mount Meru — spiritually consecrated and/or achieved the status of gods or demigods.

In summary, the world's great sacred cosmogonic myths that feature icons of mountain and summit as representations of the principles of *centre*, *transcendence*, and *vertical* or *spiritual hierarchy*, are the immemorial bases for use by later writers of the metaphor that equates ascent of these summits to the challenges of a person's spiritual journey in life. Just what these challenges are, and their degrees of difficulty — and of suffering — will now be our focus.

### **The Difficult Ascent to the Summit of Truth**

Before turning our full attention to the core of this discussion, the reader is asked to recall two significant features in the discourse of the spiritual journey, in order to provide more clarity in further examining the metaphor of climbing a

mountain summit for climbing to the summit of truth, of spiritual realization, in one's spiritual journey through this incarnation. The first of these features is the use of, and distinction between, the Inner Person and the Outer Person, which principle may alternately be referred to as one's Higher Self and Lower Self. Such terms have been used throughout time to express this concept in sacred scriptures and commentary, and found perhaps their best expression in the West by Thomas Aquinas, who noted '*in homine duo sunt*'<sup>3</sup> ('in man there are two'). Aquinas' term reflects equally not only a core Platonic doctrine but the Buddhist and Hindu doctrines of the two selves, mortal and immortal, that dwell together in one person. As those familiar with the corpus of esoteric teachings dealing with the human vehicles or 'sheaths' (Sanskrit *kośa-s*) comprising the 'lower quaternary' and the 'higher triad' should understand, the Outer and Inner Person bifurcation is a reduction of the multiple and complex reality of these two portions of a person. This reduction is a very useful tool of reference in discussing the broader issues of spiritual development where these vehicles or sheaths are not the specific topic of discussion. It should be noted here that HPB used exactly these terms — Inner and Outer Person — not infrequently in her writings for that reason.

The second feature the reader is asked to recall, or to note, is what in traditional Buddhist doctrine are referred to as the 'way of the Bodhisattva', and as *vimutti*

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(‘release’ from *samsāra*) and entrance into *nirvāna*. Commentators frequently ascribe these differing emphases or goals, respectively, to the Mahayana (including Vajrayana) and the Theravada schools or divisions of Buddhism, but this is by no means absolute. In the first of these, the Bodhisattva ideal, one whose Inner Person at last conquers the Outer and so achieves the right to enter *nirvana* expressly sacrifices that reward in order to remain incarnate and assist others until all sentient beings have achieved the same goal. In the second of these, sometimes referred to as the *pratyeka-buddha* ideal, one who achieves *vimutti* and is therefore released from the wheel of death and rebirth, enters *nirvāna* and no longer has any active presence in the corporeal world. Among all the world’s spiritual traditions, Buddhist scripture and doctrine afford the clearest distinction between these two choices for those reaching release from the wheel of death and rebirth.

Turning now to the central question at issue, we ask: How and to what extent does the metaphor of ascending the summit of an actual mountain correlate to the ascent of the summit of spiritual truth and the rigorous path that must be trodden to achieve this? How, we may also ask, does this metaphor relate specifically to the everyday lives of those on this spiritual journey? A good place to begin to find an answer to these questions is to reproduce a quote from Annie Besant, second President of the Theosophical Society, in which she employs this

metaphor in a unique way by identifying two separate ways to achieve the summit. She writes:

The man who has entered on the probationary path intends to accomplish within a very limited number of lives what the man of the world will accomplish in hundreds upon hundreds of lives. He is like the man who, wanting to reach the top of the mountain, refuses to follow the track that winds round and round. He says: ‘I am going straight up the mountainside; I am not going to waste my time on this winding, beaten track which will take me so long . . . . No matter what obstacles there may be, I will go; precipices there may be — I will cross them; walls of rocks there may be — I will climb them; . . . but up that mountainside I mean to travel.’ What will be the result? He will find a thousandfold more difficulties surround him on the path. If he gains in time he must pay in trouble for the difficulty of the achievement. The man who enters on the probationary path is the man who chooses the short way to the mountaintop, and calls down on himself the whole of his past karma, which is largely to be got rid of before he is fitted for initiation.<sup>4</sup>

In her version of the mountain summit and ascent metaphor, Besant draws an interesting and insightful distinction between two different approaches to the ascent of the summit. While one may be tempted here to draw a comparison or correlation between her two approaches to ascending the summit and our prior

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distinction between the ideal of the Bodhisattva and the ideal of the *pratyekabuddha*, the facts cannot support it. There are too many spiritually exalted Buddhist contemplatives in Theravada 'forest tradition' meditation centres and sanghas to allow such a correlation, and for this reason one should not infer that this is what Besant meant. Accordingly, in our version of this metaphor — which, when completed, may as easily be viewed as a parable — we will concentrate solely on those taking the path of the Bodhisattva, that is, those who wish to go 'straight up the mountainside', regardless of their religious affiliations.

Our focus on those who follow the way of the Bodhisattva highlights the imminent and greater, or perhaps 'compressed', rigours of those treading that shorter path to the summit. There exists an ancient and hierarchical structure comprised of those few who have similarly gone before on this shorter path of the Bodhisattva and achieved the summit of spiritual truth, and who then often become the teachers of those presently engaged in a direct climb to the summit. Because they elect to work thereafter for humanity, and so will need certain skills, after their initial initiations and acceptance to chelaship these climbers undergo considerable training in mastering the forces of Nature, among other things, during their journeys. In addition, as Besant suggests, these climbers, because of their voluntarily accelerated ascent to the summit of truth, must also undergo a correspondingly accelerated confront-

ation with their karma, the result of which often involves great suffering and hardship. Those who elect to climb straight up the mountain to the summit must forge their own paths, and the consequences of the many difficult decisions they make along this challenging way are theirs alone.

Those spiritual travellers — as metaphorical climbers — who make the choice to go straight up the mountain, to follow the Bodhisattva ideal, are faced with burdens not faced by others. First, the climb straight up is far more difficult and exhausting than a gradual ascent, and thus requires an extraordinary degree of dedication and determination unlike that required of others. Second, the risk of injury or death on this steep climb is far greater than that faced by those taking a gradual ascent. In fact, considerable compressed suffering in the form of metaphoric injuries, if not death, is practically inescapable on the climb up this steep path. The law of compensation (karma) dictates this rule, because in this metaphor only those who have achieved a sufficient degree of spiritual purity can be successful in reaching the summit. And such spiritual purity occurs through a resolution and balance of one's opposite karma — equating to the Inner Person's victory over the Outer Person following an agonizing struggle, i.e., the direct climb.

Tradition holds that there are no exceptions to this law. This is illustrated by the experience of Damodar Mavalankar of Bombay, who was one of

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HPB's and H. S. Olcott's most cherished colleagues, and about whom few had anything to say but praise for his loyalty and dedication to these founders and their mission. In early 1885 Damodar left India as an initiate for the Himalayan retreat of his teacher, Koot Hoomi Lal Singh. There was no word of Damodar's progress until a note from this adept transcribed on a letter was received by Olcott in June of 1886. The note reads:

The poor boy [Damodar] has had his *fall*. Before he could stand in the presence of the 'Masters' he had to undergo the severest trials that a neophyte ever passed through, to atone for the many questionable doings in which he had overzealously taken part, bringing disgrace upon the sacred science and its adepts. The mental and physical suffering was too much for his weak frame, which has been quite prostrated, but he will recover in course of time. This ought to be a warning to you all. You have believed 'not wisely but too well'. To unlock the gates of the mystery you must not only lead a life of the strictest probity, but learn to discriminate truth from falsehood. You have talked a great deal about karma but have hardly realised the true significance of that doctrine.<sup>5</sup>

From this we can learn how critical is the decision to begin a steep and direct ascent to the summit of truth, and why one should never fail to be fully aware of one's own character or to make uncritical assumptions about one's readiness to proceed. It is said, 'Ask and ye shall receive', but this asking — which may

of itself be easy and which invariably prompts some response — should always be preceded by a sober and honest evaluation of one's readiness to 'receive' and one's current circumstances. Figuratively speaking, failure to evaluate oneself honestly before 'asking' would be tantamount to setting out to climb the summit of Everest without any physical training or necessary equipment — a decision with a probable outcome of tragedy. But at the same time, one cannot allow excessive doubt or trepidation to preclude the decision to begin such an ascent. Unwavering courage is an absolute requirement for this ascent. And always and repeatedly the adepts communicating with principals of the theosophical movement of the late nineteenth century exhorted them to *try*. This exhortation was often found in their correspondence in all upper-case letters: TRY.

Success in completing the difficult spiritual climb and ascending the summit of truth is, in a figurative sense, to suffer the defeat, or 'death', of the Outer Person, which often fights with ferocity to avoid this outcome. Though the physical body may survive this death, the remainder of the Outer Person must be wholly reborn from one with personal cravings and attachments, with emotional and mental needs and proclivities, to one whose motivations are completely unselfish and pure, and subject to the directives of the Inner Person. There are fewer forms of 'death' that elicit such a degree of suffering. The difficult *baseline*



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criteria for achieving this outcome are:

Fasting, meditation, chastity of thought, word, and deed; silence for certain periods of time to enable Nature herself to speak to him who comes to her for information; government of the animal passions and impulses; [and] utter unselfishness of intention.<sup>6</sup>

Following these requirements, suffering the accelerated and heavy vicissitudes of karma visited upon the spiritual climber who decides to take the straight path up the mountain to the summit of truth is but another way to describe the process of this death of the Outer Person. This process typically occurs during the climb and must usually be completed before reaching the summit.

The spiritual climber, at the outset of his or her ascent of this seemingly indomitable mountain summit, should also be aware that there are no easy shortcuts to that summit. Extending the metaphor, one cannot ride an animal or a vehicle, or be carried in a palanquin, or take a helicopter. No amount of wealth or social or political influence can assist this climber in reaching the summit, nor can one take the place of another. Such a climber must use his or her own feet, and make the difficult climb himself or herself, alone. Along the way this climber will lose footing and at times slide painfully backwards, downhill. This climber will invariably suffer scrapes, bruises, broken bones, frozen extremities, and debilitating fatigue. But despite such setbacks and injuries, the climber must

nonetheless keep ascending if the goal is to be achieved. On the way the climber's feet must eventually be 'washed in the blood of the heart', flowing from a wound to the heart made by the piercing lance of sacrifice — sacrifice of the world of the Outer Person to that of the higher and nobler Inner Person.

Certain aspirants may at last have come to a point in their long spiritual journeys where it is time to decide to undertake such an all-out ascent to the summit. At this point they consider choosing to follow the way of the Bodhisattva, and to actively invest the great effort that this choice entails with *complete* dedication. This choice is the decision to try. At first they may struggle mightily with the weight of this decision, as the consequences involved are usually formidable. For those climbers who live in the general population, the effects of this decision on their lives can be radical and may, as a first step, involve entrance or relocation into a monastery, ashram, or other spiritual communities.

In addition, for its very survival the Outer Person works forcefully against a decision to ascend. Even with global disaster occurring at quicker intervals and spiritual darkness relentlessly pushing to envelop humanity, some aspirants may feel comfortable within the environments of their families and communities, and perhaps their employment. This places these aspirants at a disadvantage in facing the consequences of this personal decision. Standing on the very edge of this decision, some may even be

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ready without realizing it, but act instead to preserve their familiar spiritual paths, and so avoid certain uncomfortable results that follow a *total* commitment to ascend directly the summit of truth.

Such a decision is never easy. It first requires an unblinking gaze into the depths of our hearts to discover whether we have the courage and the stamina to proceed. Once made, this decision can result in alterations to the various relationships we have, including those with our communities at large. Upon making our decision, our motives are sometimes misunderstood and criticized, ironically, as selfish or aloof. It is said that 'he who cares for the opinion of the multitude will never soar above the crowd'.<sup>7</sup> In some cases this decision may mean a sacrifice of these relationships, and certainly a sacrifice of our comfort and ease and sense of security. It usually means a handing over of what we believe is certainty in our life's path to uncertainty, and of a clearly planned direction to the unknown. For those spiritual climbers already resident in a spiritual community, this decision, even though free of some difficulties faced by those who are not residents of spiritual communities, is no less difficult. In short, it requires a surrender to our Inner Person, which occurs through the simultaneous process of subduing the Outer Person, whose mundane wishes, habits, and attachments thereafter become unimportant.

The extraordinary difficulty of this decision to begin the direct ascent to

the summit of truth — and upon succeeding devote oneself to the enlightenment of the 'orphan humanity' — is not new. In fact, it is ancient and has given rise to maxims of truth about this spiritual journey like *multi vocati, electi pauci* (many are called, few are chosen) which finds expression in Christian scripture in Matthew, 22:14. And the fearsome danger in the direct climb to the summit is not new either, expressed by Besant as the climber calling 'down on himself the whole of his past karma' by undertaking the way of the Bodhisattva. This choice is immemorial, yet ever present.

Since the first ascent of Everest's summit by Edmund Hillary in 1953, over 250 climbers have died trying to ascend that summit, and as many or more have been injured. But the direct climb to the summit of spiritual truth takes far longer, and is often as dangerous. The main difference between those who successfully ascend the summit of Everest, and those who metaphorically ascend directly the summit of spiritual truth, is one of the greatest magnitude. Those who ascend to the summit of Everest have arguably achieved the world's most magnificent vista, and a clear demonstration of supreme discipline and will. But those who succeed in ascending directly to the summit of spiritual truth, for all the woeful sacrifice and suffering of that arduous climb, have achieved something extraordinary as a consequence of their choice to serve humanity. One may believe that arrival of these climbers at the summit

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signals their entry into a new world of wonder and magic, where they are immersed in a vast reservoir of unconditional *love* — a condition in which they and those with whom they labour remain as long as that service continues. ✧

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**That age will be rich indeed when those relics which we call Classics, and the still older and more than classic but even less known Scriptures of the nations, shall have still further accumulated, when the Vaticans shall be filled with Vedas and Zendavestas and Bibles, with Homers and Dantes and Shakespeares, and all the centuries to come shall have successively deposited their trophies in the forum of the world. By such a pile we may hope to scale heaven at last.**

Henry David Thoreau  
*Walden — Or, Life in the Woods*, ‘Reading’

# Perception and Interpretation of Reality

TRÂN-THI-KIM-DIÊU

## Introduction

In every epoch, human beings are forever eager to search, to reflect, and to understand their surroundings, their fellow humans and themselves. The environment, the networked relationships, and the self constitute the three vast objects for observation and study. When the latter two reach a certain level, comprehension is gained and can lead to better understanding of the observed. The surroundings can be the immediate social circle, nearby Nature, or at a vast distance, such as the universe. Observation leads to perception, and perception garners interpretations. In addition to the eagerness for a fuller understanding, humans do have another characteristic, the capacity to conceive infinity, and to question the nature of existence and of Reality. A mature mind cannot help questioning these concerns. Before trying to reflect on Reality, one must deal with the question: What is perception?

## Perception and Interpretation

Resulting from the contact of the sense

organs with objects, sensation and perception occur. The quality of the two depends at first upon the quality of the organs. If one does not have a sensitive skin, the touch would not give an accurate sensation; consequently perception is misrepresented. Likewise, if the eyes do not see correctly, the view is distorted. The same process takes place with smell, taste, and hearing. Interwoven with perception — in some inevitable complex way — interpretation hints at a certain significance of what is observed. *This significance is important, since it will define the type of action as well as its objective.*

In order to sharpen the sense organs and their sensations, it is recommended to lead a clean life. Likewise, to sharpen the perception, attention is advised. Concerning interpretation, several factors are involved. It is based mostly on perception depending upon all the psychological conditioning of the perceiver. In the well-known example of a rope perceived as a snake, obscurity or insufficient light may be the outward factor;

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the inward psychomental factor may be an unconscious and/or uncontrolled fear. Indeed, if the perceiver had not been conditioned by fear, he would perhaps have seen the rope or something else, but not a snake. One can observe that fear can only work in the absence of awareness. This explanation does not exclude the case of a perceiver who loves snakes! One should say that the inner factors, the result of psychomental conditioning, include the dual attraction-repulsion (*rāga-dvesha*), the state of unknowing or absence of consciousness of Reality (*avidya*), the sense of 'I am' or egoism (*asmitā*), and clinging to life and fear of death (*abhiniveśa*) — these are the five afflictions (*kleśa-s*) described by Patanjali in his Yoga-Sutras, as the five fundamental fetters for students of Yoga — and also for disciples of theosophy.

Another well-known example is the description of an elephant by several blind men, each using only the sense of touch. The pachyderm is described as a broom by the blind man who touches its tail, a pillar by the one who feels its leg, and a fan by the one who handles its ear. None of the blind men can perceive the whole elephant. The incomplete touching of the parts cannot render the whole. Putting a broom, a pillar, and a fan together does not make an elephant! This fable hints at the human situation — the incapacity of seeing the whole, and the desperate attempt to put wrongly perceived parts together to make a whole. Obviously, this can never work. H. P. Blavatsky rightly warned students

of Theosophy not to try to construct a rational picture of what she taught, probably because of their lack of the inner sense, or intuition. If they had tried, they probably would have gotten, at best, a poor patchwork that does not represent the reality of the whole and, at worst, a more confused mind.

In fact, in the process of perception, all the senses are implied although some of them are more engaged. But at the top of the process, the mind coordinates, measures, weighs, and comes to a conclusion, which is the result of the entire process of perceiving. Of course, special 'seats' or centres located in the brain play the physiological role of relay, but the actor is the mind. 'The mind is the slayer of the Real'; it distorts sensations, wrongly measuring and weighing the surroundings so that perception is not accurate and interpretation becomes distorted. Understanding the physiological *modus operandi* of these centres in the brain does not help in the least in improving perception.

The mind holds a key role in and during the whole process of perception / interpretation. A Chan (Zen) Buddhist Master came across a group of apprentice-monks involved in passionate discussion. He enquired about the matter and one of the young monks enthusiastically summarised the situation: he had observed that a streamer was moving in the wind, but his colleagues objected and pretended that the streamer was not moving, they said it was the wind that was moving. The Master said: 'Neither the streamer nor the

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wind is moving; your mind is moving.’

Thus the mind sees the movement, allows itself to be captured by the appearance, and in its trap of isolation it cannot observe that the movement is its own. Therefore, the question here is how to realize a perception that is independent of conditioning and free of fragmentation. Conditioning and fragmentation are both limitations. *Awareness is the action of breaking through these limitations so that the immediate consequence is the seeing of the object of observation as it is, that is, in its wholeness and its bareness, without any qualification, any attribute.* Applying this to relationship, individuals and events must be seen *as they are and not as they appear.* Applying this to outer space, one can ask *what is behind the universe, masked by its appearance?* Indeed, stars, constellations, galaxies, the shining bodies and the surrounding darkness, all form the appearance of the universe. What dwells behind the movement of the cosmos?

It was earlier said that interpretation is important because it defines the type of action as well as its aim. In the example of the rope/snake, if the perceiver is afraid of snakes, he will jump away to avoid the danger of the snake; if he is a snake lover, he might get nearer and seize the rope as a snake. In both cases, the illusionary snake has been created by the mind. Likewise, one’s misinterpretation of an individual and his misled action, may lead to further incorrect action. Misinterpretation of the universe leads to the misunderstanding of one’s

own place in it; and consequently misleads one’s perceived destiny (*dharma*). It happens like a sequence of ‘virtual images’ in a logical order, but the events, the people, and all involved are just virtual images, not real. So are the snake, the broom, the pillar, the fan, the movement of the streamer, the movement of the wind; they are all illusory, made up by the mind out of inaccuracy of the sense organs, vision distorted by conditioning and, above all, lack of awareness. All of them are unreal. But the rope, the elephant, the streamer, the wind, are things that exist, concrete, and undeniable. They are not illusory in their context, but their perceptions and interpretations are illusory, thus unreal. Now comes the question of reality.

### The Unreal, the Real — Reality

The question of Reality remains one of the essential concerns of the religious, of scientists, artists, and occultists — all of them forming the ‘crest wave of humanity’. The religious associate Reality with the Supreme, scientists would ponder on it as Reality, artists exalt it as Beauty, and occultists search for it as Truth. These different terms are equivalent despite slight technical nuances. Tentatively, one can say that *the Supreme expresses itself as Reality that is the embodiment of Beauty, and That, as such, is Truth.* Let us dwell for a while on this idea. Albert Einstein, in his essay, ‘My View of the World’, wrote that if there is a Reality, the expression of this reality is space. It is also reported that while

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looking at the simple and famous equation  $E=mc^2$ , he declared: 'It's so beautiful!'

Space is commented upon in *The Secret Doctrine* as eternal, immutable, that which 'ever was, is, and will be'. Several of the Upanishads define Space as the name and form of the Supreme. All the contents of Space are parts of It. Extensively explained and disputed by the commentators of the Brahma-Sutras, Space is taken for being the origin of all existing things. Behind Space dwells the Supreme, sometimes identified with the Self, which is Being. Be-ness, the state of the Self, is no different from Truth.

Truth (*satya*) is identified with the Law (*dharma*), or Cosmic Order (*ṛta*). The *Rg-veda* describes *ṛta* as the supreme order that underlines the whole universe, that order from which things and events proceed naturally. The Tao-te-Ching calls it the Great Tao from which heaven, earth, and all creatures originate and proceed. The meaning of the word 'Tao', or 'the Way', includes Truth, the Law, and Cosmic Order. So one can say that 'Reality is the expression of what is hidden, what is forever unknowable (the Supreme), and its state is, as such, Truth.' It (Reality) is undeniable yet unattainable; undeniable because it is 'real' (from the Latin root *res* meaning 'thing' — with real existence), and unattainable because it is undivided, meaning that the student-pilgrim cannot reach it but can only merge with it. This merging results in a fusion instilling the state of consciousness where

there is neither you, nor I — the state of non-duality.

The world — or manifestation — is a fact, undeniable. It is real at its level, the concrete, the physical. It is our perception of this world that could be distorted at least on three levels: our contact, our sensing, and our interpretation. Since perception is under the influence of conditioning, an ambitious individual may see this world as a ground for accomplishment, where he remains trapped in this interpretation. As long as he keeps the same view, he cannot reach its deeper significance. But the world is not Reality. Therefore, although it is real at its level, it remains unreal on the level of Truth, for on the level where things are just as they are, the world is unreal, because it is the playground of duality and not the undivided state of Be-ness.

We use the word 'level' to indicate the levels of existence and also the levels of consciousness which are intimately linked with understanding. Any genuine student has the eagerness to learn and understand. 'Understanding is the earnest movement of consciousness delving deeper and deeper into the levels of existence.' The world view changes during this journey. The student at some moment becomes a disciple whose life is dedicated to learning with discipline. His wishes and desires are also sublimated during the journey: the world which used to be the playground for accomplishment appears now under a different light; it is no longer viewed as a means for anything else but the field of experience

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in order to know and discover the more profound significance of the universe, of relationship, and of himself. Hence the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad* says:

From the unreal lead me to the Real,  
From darkness lead me to Light,  
From death lead me to Immortality.

The unreal is identified with all the ad-junctions over the bare state of Be-ness. The 'Real' stands for the state of factual and effective existence; at the ultimate level the Real is Reality. 'From the unreal lead me to the Real' testifies to the movement of consciousness learning to grow with discrimination and to get out of the maze of illusion. This movement is also clarifying, so that consciousness moves from the darkness of ignorance, of not knowing, not being conscious of Reality — to Light, which has a significance that goes beyond the allegoric value. In fact, this Light is the effective result of self-effulgence of the ultimate One-consciousness.

By its power of effulgence, consciousness spontaneously 'inflames itself' and lights up the space within it. This light is the light of awareness, of vigilance, of inward knowing. One can make the link with the *Dhammapada*, declaring: 'Negligence is death; vigilance is immortality.' Therefore, 'From death lead me to immortality' equates with 'Lead me out of negligence by teaching me awareness'. This inward knowing demands clarity of mind, simplicity of action, and guilelessness in behaviour.

One can ask whether knowledge is of

any help in perceiving Reality and Truth.

### **Self-knowledge, Wisdom and Meditation**

There are several types of knowledge. Some can be acquired objectively, some by experience through one's living, and some have the nature of wisdom. A human is qualified as 'knowledgeable' when he does possess a certain amount of knowledge. This is the case of academic disciplines where knowledge remains in the limits of the intellect. Experience confers another type which need not belong to a high intellectual order, yet it leads to the mastery of dealing with varieties of business, including that of living. While knowledge and experience result in skill, they do not lead to wisdom. A skilful individual is not necessarily wise. The knowledge that crowns all knowledge is Self-knowing. Wisdom at this stage can be viewed like the distillation of knowledge and the essence of experience: the quintessence of both free of what is no longer useful for inward growth.

From objective knowledge of the outer world, the human mind can turn its focus inward to know about the inner space, about itself. This knowledge is uniquely of the human kingdom because it is specific to the mind. In this inner space, consciousness, in a movement of introspection, can watch the flowing of thought, the act of thinking, reflecting. Self-knowledge is less the psychological knowledge of the personality than the discovery of a greater consciousness, a wider space from within. The thirteenth



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chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* associates the inner space with ‘the Field’, identifies the Self as ‘the Knower of the Field’, and defines real Wisdom as the quintessential knowledge of the Field and of the Knower of the Field.

In the process of knowing, three elements are involved: knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the knower. Knowledge results from the flowing of the knower’s consciousness to the object of knowledge, from the investigation about the nature of this object, and from the direct contact with its nature. The flowing of consciousness towards the object of knowledge, at times lets consciousness mingle with the nature of the object. The union of the three — knowledge, the knower, and the known — *by fusion*, enriches the knower with knowledge about the object known, a process of which the knower is not conscious. The whole process resembles a constant stream of consciousness going from the knower to the object and back so that the constituents of this stream is constantly and lively modified, vivified through the awareness of learning. When this process is well-regulated and reaches a sufficient level of energy (or intensity) it can be assimilated with concentration, the first step of meditation (*dhāraṇa*).

Meditation, food for the spiritual Soul, constitutes a way of living, contains techniques for mental self-discipline, leads to the discovery of the constant dynamics of life’s interactions (which is impermanence), facilitates the exploration into the unknown levels of con-

sciousness, and gives the opportunity of approaching Reality. For the practice of meditation, the object can be an idea or a concept, as advised by HPB in her Diagram of Meditation: ‘First conceive of UNITY by expansion in Space and infinite in Time.’ This example is chosen for a practical purpose because it deals with Space and Time, which will be further explored. Otherwise one can also make use of ‘All the qualifications without Love would never be sufficient’.

Space, as mentioned earlier, is considered to be the expression of Reality, undivided. In conceiving UNITY by expansion in Space, one can feel the widening of space within. Actually, the mind, this specific acquisition of the human realm, can testify to additional human abilities during meditation: the human consciousness has the capacity to conceive infinity. And *Space is infinity itself*, according to Mahatma Letter No. 86, quoting the *Books of Kiu-Te*. One can assume that in optimal conditions of meditation, when the stream of consciousness regulates itself in a harmonious energetic mode — so much so that the flowing link with the object of meditation (Space) does not interrupt at all (*dhyāna*) — the human mind reaches the universal mind. When this happens, the human mind can ‘share’ the qualities of the universal mind ‘for a short while’, in a kind of temporary fusion, where the knower (the meditator), the object (Space), and knowledge merge into one. This state is called *samādhi*, the culmination of the whole process of meditation (*samyama*).

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Quite interestingly, Chan (Zen) Buddhism declares that the fruit of *samādhi* is *prajñā*, wisdom. The culmination of the practice of meditation is wisdom. The same teaching also declares that this wisdom is a natural consequence of voidness (*śūnyatā*) and that boundless Space has the characteristic of Void. As when a bucket plunged into the ocean contains ocean water when it is taken out, the knower's consciousness that has merged into Space, which is *śūnyatā*, will take on the quality of Space when it comes out of meditation.

At this stage, one can say that Space has the quality of voidness and the duration of infinity. It is also apt now to assert that Space is one. Outer space is just the continuity of inner space. With the experience of knowing through fusion, consciousness realizes that around, inside, and beyond its limits, Space can be explored in a movement of expansion that is ever growing because it is infinity.

This infinity is not solely boundlessness, it includes time. In reality, time is not. It is merely a condition of Space. Time is just — to quote Plato — ‘the moving image of immutable eternity.’

### Beyond Reality

The inquiring mind follows with a question: ‘What is beyond Space?’ Or better: ‘What is behind, hidden by Space?’ Accepting the assumption that Space is the expression of Reality, another question, as inevitable and as challenging, dawns: ‘What is behind Reality?’ Logically, the eager intellect must end with the notion of the Supreme. The Absolute does not allow us to go further.

The great Mystery remains with the Supreme. Unknowable, unconceivable, ‘subtler than the subtlest’, It inspires adoration. One cannot but bow with joy in one's heart, with the bliss that simple joy alone cannot express. ✧

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The *Diamond Sutra*

# ‘A Union of Those Who Love in the Service of All That Suffers’

NANCY SECREST

I WAS talking with Joy Mills a few years ago, and she said that the focus of our existence as human beings is self-realization — learning who we are, who we really are. That is what we are supposed to be doing here. This, she said, is the central point of *The Mahatma Letters*.

As we progress along the path of self-realization, we eventually awaken, or become aware of, our *buddhic* nature. With this awakening or awareness, compassion based on a sense of responsibility for all beings becomes a driving force in our lives, and we act as a bodhisattva acts, for the good of all. ‘In Theosophy the term “bodhisattva” is used to denote an individual who has reached enlightenment and may pass beyond the “wheel of rebirth”, but elects to reincarnate for the good of all.’ (*Theosophical Encyclopedia*, p. 110, TPH, the Philippines, 2006). In other words, a bodhisattva sacrifices his or her reward of transition into nirvana to help other sentient beings until all reach enlightenment.

I do not presume to say that any of us are already bodhisattvas. But, are you

familiar with the term, ‘fake it until you make it’? What that means, and what I am saying is that all of us can work *as if* we are bodhisattvas. All of us can help each other and humanity at large right now. These words from Annie Besant say it all.

The spiritual man must lead a higher life than the life of altruism. He must lead the life of self-identification with all that lives and moves. There is no ‘other’ in this world; we are all one. Each is a separate form, but one Spirit moves and lives in all.

Annie Besant

*The Laws of the Higher Life*

(3 lectures delivered at Vārānasi, India)

The Theosophical Order of Service (TOS) was founded by Annie Besant in 1908 as a way to put the first object of the Theosophical Society (TS) into action, as a way to demonstrate and practise the oneness of all life. The giving of our time, talent, energy, money, advocacy, and moral support to those in need is based on compassion and on the acceptance of our responsibility towards those with

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**Mrs Nancy Secrest** is the international Secretary of the Theosophical Order of Service. Talk delivered at the international Convention, Adyar, on 3 January 2016.

## ‘A Union of Those Who Love in the Service of All That Suffers’

whom we are one. Our TOS motto, ‘a union of those who love in the service of all that suffers’, reminds us of our commitment to the Oneness of All Life. These are pretty elevated words about the TOS when on the surface it may seem as though we are simply doing ‘good works’ as are many other humanitarian service groups.

What makes the TOS different? Our current President, Tim Boyd, answered that question in an appeal letter he sent out on behalf of the TOS in America back in 2008, when he was its President. Tim said, ‘There are countless groups doing valuable service work in the world . . . What makes the TOS different? Being guided by the theosophical worldview sets our service approach apart. We are motivated by a sense that we are all participants in the One Life. Suffering and overcoming suffering are not isolated or regional. We all share in it.’

Even before the TOS was formed, the Theosophical Society was no stranger to altruistic action, to working for the benefit of others, and to leading the way towards improvements in people’s lives. In a talk given in 2011, Diana Dunningham=Chapotin, former International Secretary of the TOS, said this about the work in the early days of the Society.

We don’t need to spend much time recalling the attention to social responsibility of our early TS leaders and members because many of you are well aware of it. I refer not just to Annie Besant but to pioneers such as Col Olcott, William Quan Judge,

Isabel Cooper-Oakley and Countess Wachtmeister. What is interesting, though, is that in those days the collective action of the members and their leaders actually caused the public to associate the Society primarily with social reform. Early *The Theosophist* magazines contain scathing commentaries on all kinds of social, educational, political and religious abuses of the time. When Col Olcott appeared on theosophical platforms all over the world, he didn’t lecture principally on metaphysics; he dealt mostly with such subjects as religious freedom, education for girls, cremation and agricultural reform. These may seem innocuous to us now but at the time they were very controversial.

Another interesting fact is that long before Annie Besant became international President of the TS in 1907, whole Branches and Sections of the TS were already campaigning in all kinds of domains: women’s suffrage, Esperanto, ‘higher socialism’, health reform, vegetarianism, antivivisection, the kindergarten movement, the abolition of racism, worker education, industrial relations, environmental preservation, and so on. Many Lodge programmes in the 1890s included ground-breaking children’s education, debating clubs, concerts, scientific and psychological research, the collection and distribution of clothing for the destitute, children’s holiday homes, prison and hospital visiting and in one branch there was even a labour bureau! In Australia, in the late 1920s and early ’30s, under the dynamic leadership of George Arundale, Theosophists ran a monthly

## ‘A Union of Those Who Love in the Service of All That Suffers’

political magazine and a radio station.

There is something else interesting to point out about all this. For Mrs Besant and her fellow pioneers, TS life and social responsibility were part of an indivisible whole. In 1913, when Mrs Besant re-entered politics to fight for independence for India, she felt she was acting on instructions from the Masters. . . . In 1908, some also say that Mrs Besant created the TOS to give an independent organizational focus for community involvement, but, if this was the case, in practice little distinction was made between the work of the TS and the TOS.

Actually, not a lot has changed in that regard. Even our more recent TS International Presidents, Radha Burnier and N. Sri Ram, have boldly taken stands on controversial public issues in their ‘On the Watch-Tower’ columns in *The Theosophist*. Mrs Burnier’s ‘Watch-Tower’ columns can be found all under one cover in the 2009 publication, *The World Around Us*.

There have long been two views of theosophical work, ‘one narrow and one wide’, as Annie Besant called them in her January 1915 ‘Watch-Tower’ article in *The Theosophist*. In the first view the theosophist wants to teach Theosophy without applying it and thinks that this is the only proper work of the Society. The second view is held by those who want to *apply* Theosophy as well as teach it. Mrs Besant said, ‘The other view is that the Divine Wisdom . . . exists in the world for the world’s helping, and that nothing

is alien from it which is of service to Humanity.’ In her article, Mrs Besant goes on to talk about both views saying that both are important to the work of the Society and that each was and is needed at different times. Throughout her presidency Besant encouraged the wider view. She founded the TOS and other groups to focus this energy. She said, ‘Since elected to the Presidency, I have endeavoured to organize the many activities of those who agreed with me in theosophising public life, so that no activity should compromise the neutrality of the TS, while members should remain perfectly free to work in any of them.’ Of the two views she goes on to say, ‘They are complementary, not hostile. But let neither depreciate the other, nor minimize its value. Let each do its work, and recognize that the other has also its place and its work.’

The older I become the more I realize that balance is the key to spiritual growth. The theosophical triad of study, meditation and service exemplifies this. Study utilizes our ability to reason and think logically. Meditation helps us to tap into our higher selves, the divine within, and gives us respite from today’s hectic world. Service then is the fulcrum — the point of balance. Service is that part of the triad which allows us to demonstrate the divine in the world. Through selfless service we help to heal suffering humanity. We draw attention to the woes of the world, and lead by example in the effort to ease suffering and right wrongs. In the process, we help ourselves. We grow

**‘A Union of Those Who Love in the Service of All That Suffers’**

spiritually as we become more and more open to seeing the unity of life wherever we look. Service can manifest itself as simple acts of kindness performed by an individual or a group, or as larger and more organized efforts. It can be aimed

at family members, a neighbourhood, a community, a country, a gender or other class of people, or at animals and even the planet. So let each of us work *as if* we are bodhisattvas. All of us can help each other and humanity at large right now. ✧

**Where trouble is, where suffering is, where ignorance is, where quarrel is, where injustice is, where tyranny is, where oppression is, where cruelty is — *there* must We find the earnest members of our Society, those who study truths of Theosophy and practically apply them to lead the world from darkness into Light, from death to Immortality, from the *un*-real to the Real. Blessed indeed are such peace-bringers, and they shall see God.**

**‘A Message to the Members of the TS’  
An Elder Brother**

**OFFICIAL NOTICE  
CONVENTION 2016 – 17**

In accordance with Rule 46 of the Rules and Regulations of the Theosophical Society, the Executive Committee has determined that the 141th international Convention of the Theosophical Society will be held at the international Headquarters, Adyar, Chennai, India, from 31 December 2016 to 5 January 2017.

**Marja Artamaa**  
*International Secretary*

# Books of Interest

THE STORY OF KRISHNAMURTI: *A Critical Perspective of His Life and Teachings*, by Shuvendu Patnaik, Authorspress, New Delhi, pp. 878, Rs. 3,400, US \$ 90. (Discounted price: Rs. 2,100).

‘Krishnamurti. Here is one man who may be said to be a master of reality. He stands alone. He has renounced more than any man I can think of, except the Christ’, said Henry Miller, the famous American writer. Here is yet another book on the life and teachings of J. Krishnamurti, in sixteen chapters, with reader-friendly font. The first chapter covers his birth and childhood. The second is useful for readers who are not familiar with Theosophy.

‘K’ was a riddle to many in the 20th century, such as George Bernard Shaw, who wondered who this ‘Messiah’ was; and Dr Bhagavan Das, who could not accept K when Dr Annie Besant declared him to be the ‘World Teacher’.

‘To believe without knowing is weakness; *to believe because one knows is power*’, proclaimed Eliphaz Levi. A subtitle in the second chapter is ‘Core Belief in Theosophy’. It must be clarified that in the Theosophical Society no one is asked to believe in specific teachings, but rather to enquire deeply into the laws of Nature and the ultimate Truth, which is beyond all speculation. The third chap-

ter has short biographical sketches of Dr Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, who were K’s guardians during his formative years.

The opening of chapter 5 reads:

Nitya’s death was a big shock for K. It taught him the illusion of beliefs. One can never discover truth with a bag of beliefs, not even belief in Masters or God! Belief is always an enemy of the truth, and sorrow is the greatest teacher in life.

Throughout his life Krishnaji addressed the fundamental problems of humanity like death, sorrow, and loneliness by pointing out what is not love, truth, and so on, helping everyone to discover the truth by themselves, as he did. Krishnaji said, ‘But the moment I realized that wherever there is life, it is one — though there may be a multitude of expressions of the one life — I ceased to grieve.’ The One Life proclaimed by Theosophy is the core of K’s teachings. In the same chapter the author has remarked:

He [K] readily agreed to perform a Hindu ritual in his capacity as a Brahmin, to inaugurate a small Hindu temple Annie Besant had constructed inside the TS compound. These actions were quite contrary to K’s nature, but he took part in them just to please her.

Opinions like this can only be considered as those of the author!

## Books of Interest

In the Star Congress on 28 December 1925, Krishnaji said:

I come to those who want sympathy, who are longing to be released, who are longing to find happiness in all things. I come to reform, and not to tear down; not to destroy, but to build.

In these words we can hear the echo of the Christ in Mathew, 5:17, as follows: 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.' When K spoke to the world, for many he was Lord Maitreya, Christ, Krishna, and so on. But who was the real Krishnamurti? This book probes the question in chapter 14.

In unequivocal terms Krishnaji proclaimed at the Ommen Camp of 1927:

Until now you have been depending on the two Protectors of the Order [Mrs Besant and Leadbeater] for authority, on someone else to tell you the Truth, whereas the Truth lies within you. In your own hearts, in your own experience, you will find the Truth, and that is the only thing of value.

The author rightly says:

K's concern was not about showering spiritual wisdom or theories on any specially chosen group of his own. In that sense, he was not a teacher of any particular group or sect. His concern was to bring about a change in the entire world. What made him quite different from any other guru was his blanket refusal to accept a following or disciples; he refused to become a psychological crutch for anyone.

And he continues:

Many people often found it hard to understand him. That was because people were accustomed to spiritual entertainment, and he never dished out dogmas on a platter for people to swallow. He forced people to walk the mile with him and work it out for themselves and understand it.

The book includes photographs of K's parents, little K with his brother Nitya, and also K delivering lectures in his later years. The chapter 'Flame of Understanding' deals with aspects of life such as laziness, sleep, dreams, habit, the sexual urge, desire, jealousy, anger, fear, sorrow, and love, which humanity faces in daily living. Who can say that K was not practical?

In chapter 12, 'Spiritual Progress', the author says:

It is difficult to brand K as a spiritual teacher . . . There were no dogmas, nor did he talk about spiritual theories and the supernatural. He has never said: 'Follow me and I will lead you to salvation.' Neither could he be called a mystic.

Chapter 15, 'Memories', includes meaningful stories clothed in satire, told by K on various occasions. Subjects such as his concept of schools and education, and relationship with Nature, are dealt with at length, giving readers an overall view of 'The Seer Who Walked Alone'.

The author's deep understanding of Theosophy and Krishnamurti's teachings enables him to explore rare linkages, culminating in chapter 13, 'Where Theosophy Meets Krishnamurti'.

K. DINAKARAN



# A Talk to Prisoners

C. JINARĀJADĀSA

**B**ROTHERS, during the course of my travels, I visit many countries, and I am often asked to visit the prisons and address the prisoners. You have asked me to come and speak to you, and I do so gladly with the hope that I may bring you a little relief in the painful life, which you are forced to live.

The last prison that I visited was in San Pablo, Brazil, but I did not there address the inmates, as I cannot speak Portuguese. But I remember vividly the last prison where I spoke. It was two years ago in India. The Chief Minister of the State was a friend of mine and he went with me. All the inmates of the prison were assembled for me in the central hall, and they sang to me several songs before I spoke to them.

One song that they sang was a beautiful prayer, invoking blessings upon the world. It is not easy when you are compelled to reside in a jail, with no freedom to go out into the world, to invoke blessings on those who live outside the prison walls; but that was exactly what my brothers then before me, whom the law labels 'prisoners', did. This was the song:

O merciful God, bless all —  
Bless man, woman, bird, beast, and insect,  
and all.  
May there be no pain, no famine in the  
world!  
May there be no war!  
May no one wish ill to any other,  
May all consider others' interests without  
difference!  
May each worship God according to his  
own faith!

But more remarkable still was the second song; it was about the justice of God! When one is in prison, with the deprivation of everything that is happy and beautiful in life, the most natural feeling is one of resentment and anger. One sees nothing in the life within the prison that can give rise to any sentiment of gratitude. I will read to you first this song about the justice of God, and then explain to you why the prisoners in the jail in far-off India sang it.

## THE JUSTICE OF GOD (Song sung in Bhavnagar Jail)

O just Creator, Your justice is perfect.  
It is very dear to all men: Your justice  
is perfect.

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Reprint from *The Theosophist*, October 1929. Talk delivered in the jail, San José, Costa Rica.

## A Talk to Prisoners

We suffer because of our bad Karmas,  
How can we blame You for that?  
Ours is the guilt: Your justice is perfect.  
Playing as we do the game of sin,  
We still hope for happiness!  
But the idea is futile: Your justice is  
perfect.  
One who treads the path of righteousness  
verily gets happiness;  
This can be demonstrated by thousands of  
instances:  
Your justice is perfect.  
When evil deeds become ripe for fruit,  
Their doers have to undergo sufferings,  
This is the unerring law: Your justice is  
perfect.  
Some say that God errs in giving justice,  
Verily they are thoughtless lunatics: Your  
justice is perfect.  
Each has to take the consequences of his  
actions,  
Each must reap what he sows,  
This is the universal law: Your justice is  
perfect.  
You are not affected by undue influence,  
You are not to be won over by bribes,  
O All-pervading God, You are guided by  
justice alone,  
Your justice is perfect.  
Shankar the poet says, pleaders are not  
necessary in Your court,  
This is indeed a great relief: Your justice  
is perfect.

Is it not strange that a body of men,  
deprived of all that is happiness in life  
and forced to live behind prison walls,  
should sing that God's justice is perfect,  
even if that justice means to live in a  
prison? They sang this song because

in India we have some beliefs in our  
religion that may seem strange to you.

One belief is that each one of us has  
lived before on earth, not once but many  
times. Before we appeared as children in  
these our present bodies, we have lived  
in other bodies, in other parts of the  
world. We lived to be men and women,  
we worked at various occupations, and  
we died when God called us to leave  
those bodies. We do not now remember  
anything of this past of ours.

But in that past we thought good  
thoughts or bad thoughts, and we did  
good actions or bad actions. Now, there  
is a law of life which we all know; it is  
that if we put into the ground a grain of  
maize, presently a maize plant will grow  
and give maize, and not wheat. What we  
sow, that we reap — that is nature's law.

This law is the Justice of God in the  
song, which I have read to you. We are  
born with a tendency to good thoughts  
and good actions as children, because in  
our past lives we thought good thoughts  
and admired good actions. We are born  
of rich or poor parents, because we gave  
happiness to others, or were cruel to  
them. Calamities happen to us or good  
fortune comes to us, because we sowed  
their seeds in the past.

God's justice is perfect and gives a  
good harvest of good grain to those who  
sowed good grain, and He sends a  
harvest of weeds to those who sowed  
weeds. God does not punish and He does  
not reward. He sends us the harvest of  
what we sow. This is the meaning of the  
phrase: God's justice is perfect.

## A Talk to Prisoners

‘God’s justice is perfect’ — so they sang in the prison, because Hindus believe that everything that happens in life is a result, a reaping of thoughts and deeds of long ago. Whether you can accept such a thought or not, one thing is very essential in your thinking, if you are to find even a little peace and happiness in your present painful situation. You must put aside every idea of any injustice done to you by others. God watches everything, and if He has permitted misery to come to you, it is because in some way you deserve it. You must believe that, even in your present life of unhappiness, you are being treated justly, because God does not permit injustice.

After removing from your mind all idea of injustice, the next thing is how to find a little peace of heart and mind while you are forced to live inside the prison. This depends on yourself.

It is not the place we are in, nor what surrounds us, that is the cause of misery or happiness. It is ourselves. Certainly just now, you have to live within a prison; you look forward to the time when you will be free. But will you be really free, when you leave the prison? That will depend on your heart and mind.

Think of hundreds of men and women, who live outside, who move about in trains and automobiles. If you could look into their hearts, you will find that they are in a kind of prison also. One man is always planning to be rich; he is in a prison and cannot free himself from his thoughts, which often result in cruelty to others. Another is thinking of someone whom he

hates and his thoughts of anger are like a prison, which shuts him in. Thousands outside this prison are miserable, because they live in prisons of their own making.

My brothers, when the time comes for you to leave this place and go back to the world, learn to be happy there, by learning a little how to be happy here. You can find a little happiness, even in this prison, if you will look in the right direction.

For instance, your prison regulations exact certain duties from you. Perform them willingly and not with a sense of injustice, even if they cause you misery, believing that God’s justice comes to you in those duties. You will then slowly find that a little peace comes into your heart. Give what help you can to a fellow-prisoner; help him in his task, if that is allowed. At least, as you look at him, give him your sympathy. Bless every one around you with your thought of goodwill, even if some of them cause you hardship. Like a lamp that radiates light, radiate goodwill, wherever you are within the prison. Think of those you love, who are far away; send them thoughts of blessing. Forgive those who have injured you, and make your heart a place of pity for those who in their ignorance do evil instead of good.

Then slowly you will find a new peace comes to your heart and mind; you will find more strength to bear your present lot. And when the time comes for you to resume your place in the life outside these walls, you will understand the justice of God more clearly, and so possess more strength to live according to His laws.

## A Talk to Prisoners

Your mind will be more clear to understand what is right, and you will have more strength to resist evil.

God's love surrounds you all the time; but you must listen to His whisper. Your ears are open to His voice, as you do each duty well, as you radiate goodwill and blessing.

I, who live outside this prison, come to you to tell you that you and I are all alike in this, that God's justice is the same for us all. I, and others like myself, live in prisons too. Our sorrows and griefs, our disappointments and our failures are our prisons, though we have broken no law of the country. We too are asking

for happiness, as you are. We too have to learn to do our duty willingly, to be centres of goodwill. Without the prison or within the prison, life is the same fundamentally for all men. We are happy or miserable according to what we think, and so according to what we do.

As one brother to another brother, I give my utmost goodwill to each one of you. And because we are all the children of one God, and partake of one life in common, I know that I shall be sending you a little peace as I learn to do my duty better. I shall remember that you are here, and send you always my goodwill to help you. ✧

**Curuppumullage Jinarajadasa, born in 1875, was the fourth international President of the Theosophical Society from 1945 to 1953. He died in June of the same year, a few months after relinquishing the Presidency. Some years before his death he wrote the following Epitaph:**

**He loved children, the sea,  
Beethoven, Wagner's *Ring*, the  
Hallelujah Chorus, and his  
Gospel was Ruskin**

**This epitaph sums up the nature of the ardent worker who became President because of his great aspiration to serve. Always humble, he impressed others by the many-sided activities, his dedication and undeviating service for the Society and the world. The benignity of his presence and the extraordinary range of his mind, made his life truly remarkable.**

## Theosophical Work around the World



C. Jinarājadāsa was the fourth international President of the Theosophical Society from 1945 to 1953. This month marks the 63rd anniversary of his passing.



Dr Deepa Padhi (third from left), head of the TOS Odisha Region, India, at the release of the book, *Yes, She Can*.

# Theosophical Work around the World

## **TOS — Empowering Women**

In December 2014 Mrs Nancy Secrest, International Secretary of the Theosophical Order of Service (TOS) spoke at the Adyar International Convention about the efforts of TOS groups around the world in disaster relief, theosophical education, women's empowerment, various medical aids, support and assistance to senior homes, orphanages, animal shelters and other projects. Following is an update about a few of the latest activities.

A few years ago, in response to the chronic violence towards women taking place in their region, Dr Deepa Padhi and the TOS Mahabharat group in Odisha, India, began a campaign to end violence against women. They solicited help from the Governor, raised billboards, put on street plays, had signature campaigns, and gave talks in schools and work places.

When the International TOS learned about this, they decided to invite TOS groups around the world to join the Mahabharat group and the International TOS in a two-year focus on women's empowerment. Several groups accepted the invitation and went to work. Along the way, the Mahabharat group issued a journal with articles on various aspects of women's empowerment. Now, all of their efforts have culminated in a book,

*Yes, She Can*, which is a compilation of all of the articles in the journal plus many more written by women and men who are respected in their fields. Proceeds from the sale of the book will be used to assist disadvantaged women. The link to the visual introduction of the authors of the book is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7pRNZjCtik>

## **Italy**

Mrs Isis Resende, a leading figure of the Brazilian Theosophical Society and currently President of the Inter-American Theosophical Federation of the TS, visited the general secretariat of the Italian TS in Vicenza. On that occasion she delivered a lecture organized by the Theosophical Group 'Aurora' of Vicenza on the topic: 'Jung and Teresa of Avila'. Mrs Resende explained how the Jungian method allows a deeply articulate interpretation of Teresa of Avila's thought. One of the aims of the Theosophical Society is to create and strengthen international contacts among its various members. Dialogue, cultural and human exchange, and shared research are all fundamental aspects of theosophical work, which is inspired by Universal Brotherhood without distinctions. ✧

**To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman.**

M. K. Gandhi

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