

Freedom of Thought

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

Freedom of the Society

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

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



THE THEOSOPHIST

VOL. 141 NO. 10 JULY 2020

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NOTE: Articles for publication in *The Theosophist* should be sent to: [<editorialoffice@gmail.com>](mailto:editorialoffice@gmail.com)

Cover: One of the murals painted in the Mulagandhakuti Vihara, built by Bodhisattva Anagarika Dharmapala in 1931, Sarnath, near Varanasi, India, depicting the life of the Buddha. Sarnath is where the Buddha gave his first sermon on the day of Asala Full Moon—Mural Artist: Kosetsu Nosu; Photographer: Prof. A. Chandrasekaran <http://www.flickr.com/photos/29848963@N03/>

This journal is the official organ of the President, founded by H. P. Blavatsky on 1 Oct. 1879. The Theosophical Society is responsible only for official notices appearing in this journal.

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.

The Teacher

TIM BOYD

I WOULD like to give some consideration to a central idea which is, for many, also a central experience in the theosophical life. In the process of our spiritual unfoldment the Teacher plays an unparalleled role. He/she is that person we encounter during the course of our spiritual growth, who seems to have the ability to spur our understanding and hasten our development.

Everyone has had a relationship with someone who has served in the role of a Teacher. It is a common experience in the university, at school, in our home, or in our spiritual life, to encounter someone in whose presence we find difficult things becoming clear, and who, when they speak we find ourselves elevated. In those moments when we are in their presence we feel as though we understand.

On a number of occasions I have had the opportunity to be around His Holiness the Dalai Lama. When he speaks, whether it is a small group or an audience of ten or twenty thousand people, there is a presence that he generates in which the sense of the possibility of compassion, which is his universal message, seems to be something very real. I have known people who have attended a talk by His Holiness, then left their job and gone out

to attempt great works of compassion, only to find that away from his presence, the profound understanding that they thought was theirs somehow slips away.

From time to time I used to be in the presence of quantum physicist and theosophist Amit Goswami. Quantum physics is a difficult field to grasp, even for quantum physicists themselves. But somehow I would find that when I was sitting around him, listening to him talk, his ideas all seemed so clear, only to walk away and wonder what it was I thought I had grasped at that moment. The process is very much like placing a bar of iron, a cold piece of metal, in front of a fire. Iron has the capacity to respond to heat, so the metal heats up when it is in that presence. When it is removed, it cools once again.

If we examine ourselves, we find that there are aspects of our makeup that are composed in various ways. So there are some aspects that respond very easily to high thought, to profound and pure emotion. In the presence of elevated thought and emotion they become quickened, just like the metal becomes quickened in the presence of fire. Because of the uneven nature of our development, we find that there are elements of our being that

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respond more readily and others that do not. It is much like standing in front of a fire and the metal on our belt and buttons becomes hot, but our clothing, hair, and skin do not.

So the advice we are given by the Great Teachers is that we need to repeatedly expose ourselves to elevated thought and emotion, so that we can become accustomed to vibrating at a higher frequency or responding regularly to an elevated energy. Later we can translate this into a presence to which we can then connect ourselves. They say things like, “Think on these things — What is it that is good? What is it that is true? What is the nature of beauty?”

How are these things expressed in a life? Think on these things: Bring our mental capacity into this higher level of vibration — force it to vibrate in that manner. Because it is out of our reach, initially it is a matter of effort. The poet says that our “reach should exceed our grasp, or what’s a Heaven for?” That toward which we reach, toward which we aspire, necessarily exceeds what we are capable of immediately grasping. That is the description of the practice. Repeatedly we call upon the mind to respond, the heart to be quiet, and to be acted upon. In that process, it becomes a custom.

For those of us who have been involved in athletics we are familiar with the process of training for building muscle. When the muscles are used strenuously, when they are pushed to their limits, some damage is done resulting in micro-tears to the muscle fibres. The

body responds to this damage by repairing, renewing, and adding to that muscle tissue. Because a demand is made upon it to perform at its highest levels, it responds by growing in size and strength.

The same advice is given with our mental and emotional natures. The process calls for utilizing them at the highest levels to which we are presently capable. Initially the process may be demanding and uncomfortable, but they respond by drawing in more matter of a similar type that can vibrate at this heightened level, and by expelling the matter that is unable to vibrate in that way. So we become more and more pure, awake, aware.

In the theosophical teachings we are very much aware of a hierarchy of Teachers. Most of us have some idea about the Mahatmas, or Masters of the Wisdom, and the hierarchy that exists among them. But They do not really function in this world. They are not the people that we walk, chat, and interact with in our normal way. What they tend to do, it seems, is that They work through their own close students, their “chelas”, through whom the Mahatma’s influence can be radiated. Sometimes we are in contact with those chelas, mostly unknowingly.

So we engage in a process of trying to become sensitive to the Mahatmas’ influence in the world and around us. We have become accustomed to some very dull sensations. The noises which surround us are the things that we hear most clearly. The sounds of the birds, the wind, the honking horns of cars and two-wheelers are what attract our attention.

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Yet always there are subtler sounds, but it takes a certain attunement for us to become aware of these. So we are encouraged to point our attention in certain directions, particularly during times of meditation. Various forms of advice and hints are given as to how we can hear and see at increasingly subtle levels.

The beautiful poem that closes J. Krishnamurti's little book, *At the Feet of the Master*, talks about hearing and seeing in this way: "Waiting the Word of the Master,/ Watching the Hidden Light;/ Listening to catch his orders/ In the very midst of the fight." Waiting is the process of suspending our outer and internal activities in order to wait on the word of the Master. Although we call it the "word", it is not assured that it will be "heard" as a verbal expression; we do not know when it will come or *how* it will come. "Watching the Hidden Light": How do we watch a light that is hidden? Just the process of trying to consider this requires that we move beyond our normal sense of seeing and hearing.

Listening to catch his orders in the very midst of the fight: in the midst of the round of daily activity, which in this poem the author equates to a fight, like warring kingdoms doing battle. Few of us have been in the battles of war. So for most it requires some imagination to envisage the surging movement, the constant need to judge, act, strike, move, and the continual din of warring adversaries in combat. But in the midst of it all, a quiet space in consciousness is retained, attuned to hear orders from on high. It is

a difficult process for us, who have trained ourselves so differently. Not just in this lifetime, but in many lifetimes, we habitually turn our attention outward, focusing on the fight, and not on the inner directions.

There is a Sufi story about a garbage collector who found himself in the middle of the perfume bazaar in Istanbul. Engulfed in an atmosphere of pure fragrances he suddenly collapsed, and no one could bring him back to consciousness. A wise man who was passing by found something that was rotting and filthy, and put it underneath the collapsed man's nose. When the man smelled it, he immediately awakened and the wise man was able to escort him out of the perfume bazaar. The story, of course, is about us and our attraction to lower levels of vibration. The tendency is so engrained that in the absence of the coarseness to which we have accustomed ourselves we become insensitive — in the story the man swoons into unconsciousness.

So we wait, watch, listen. The second part of that short poem says: "Seeing his slightest signal/ Across the heads of the throng;/ Hearing his faintest whisper/ Above Earth's loudest song." This is a training in which we engage that we generally think of as a meditative practice, but it has to carry across into the moment-to-moment, day-to-day life at our desk or home.

In meditation we often focus on the breath, and the breath leads us to an awareness of pulsations within the body. We start to become aware of subtle sounds

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that surround us: the sound of the breath coming in and out of the body, the sounds of the pulsing heart, internal electrical sounds. These are *always* present, yet we seldom hear them. These are the kinds of advice given on connecting and engaging with the Teacher.

There is a story about one of the great North-Indian Buddhist Masters, Asanga, who lived in the 4th century CE. He went into a meditation retreat in a cave for twelve years, with a formula he thought would not fail, to establish some sort of connection with the Buddha Maitreya. He meditated for three years and nothing happened. At that point he was ready to give up. He left his cave and as he was walking he saw a crow coming out of its nesting place in the side of a mountain. He noticed that where the crow was flying in and out, the stone around the nest had been worn away slightly by its feathers. So he thought to himself: If this bird can wear away a stone with just the repeated touch of his feathers, I can return to my meditation with confidence.

So he meditated for three more years and still had no experience of any connection with the Lord Maitreya, so he left the cave again. This time he sees water dripping, and where the water drips he notices the stone has been worn away by the softest of all elements in Nature, and he determines he would go back to meditate. A similar experience happened after nine years. So now twelve years had passed since the start of the retreat, but still no vision of the Master. At this point Asanga determines that his practice is

fruitless and hopeless and walks away for good.

On the side of the road he encounters a dog so badly injured that his flesh was starting to be eaten away by maggots. When Asanga sees the dog he wants to heal it, but also does not want to hurt the maggots feeding on the dog, seeing them as other living beings who also value their lives, so he tries to take them away one by one. He finds that trying to do it with a stick harms them. Then he tries to do it with his fingers and that also harms them.

Ultimately, one by one he lifts the maggots away with his tongue. But in that moment, what he had thought to be an injured dog suddenly appears as the Buddha Maitreya, and the response given to Asanga was: "All this time you sat and meditated, but there were still things blocking your vision. Your personal karmic obstructions prevented this connection. It was only in this moment of extreme compassion, when you were not thinking about your personal agenda of meeting Maitreya Buddha, in your extreme compassion to this animal, you are finally able to see and experience what had eluded you for twelve years."

Each one of us is at a different stage of unfoldment and is continuously in the presence of the highest consciousness, yet mostly unaware; but we try! There are certain efforts we engage in, not with the goal in mind of meeting and seeing these Masters, but with the goal in mind of doing a work that draws us closer to them. Determining that work and committing to it is how we spend a lifetime. If

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we approach it properly, there are breakthrough moments, just as occurred with Asanga.

Geoffrey Hodson wrote a beautiful small book, *Thus Have I Heard*. In it he includes a prayer, or really a meditation, quoted from another source. He calls it an unfailing method to connect ourselves with the Master in the heart. He does not focus our attention on meeting a physical individual, but to connect ourselves with the Master in the center of our being. The prayer begins: “Oh, gracious Lord, I enter your radiance and approach your presence bearing with me the service done in your name and for you.”

It is customary that when we go to visit someone special we bring a gift — we offer something. When we go to visit the Highest, we have to determine what is the highest gift that we can bring. In this meditation our gift is “the *service* that I have done in your name and for you”. And it goes on: “I seek to become a more efficient server.”

The point of our meeting, the point of the offering is that I may become a more efficient server — more efficient in magnifying what we have to give to the Highest. Then: “And I open my heart and mind to the power of your love, of your joy, and of your peace.”

In the opening of the prayer a direction is given for three specific internal actions that set the stage for our meeting the Master: that we identify and present a precious offering; that we clarify and state our intention to become more efficient in service to the Master; and we lay open

the depths of our being to the presence and influence of the Teacher. We remove the barriers that block us from what this Teacher has to give.

In Buddhism there is a teaching related to these opening lines of Hodson’s prayer. It addresses the question of: “How do we behave when we are in the presence of the Teacher? What are the qualities of our being that we bring to this special moment?” They present this teaching using the example of a vessel, a pot. And they say that there are three things that can be impediments to our connection with the Teacher.

The first example is a pot turned upside down. Even in the presence of one who has pure nectar to share, this pot cannot be filled. Pour and pour as they might, our hearts and minds are closed and no wisdom is retained. J. Krishnamurti, in *At the Feet of the Master*, says: “Unless there is perfect trust, there cannot be the perfect flow of love and power.”

The second example is the leaky pot. It receives water, but it retains nothing. Our habits of inattention and distraction regularly cultivated in our daily mundane activities, do not suddenly leave us when we are in the presence of something sublime.

The third example is a pot that is dirty inside. One may pour the purest nectar into such a vessel, but it gets mixed with the dirt. What is pure becomes impure in a consciousness steeped in wrong ideas, negative emotions, incorrect avenues of thought, the harmfulness that we direct toward others, the gossip that we carry

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with us. And, of course, we are the ones who suffer, because the teaching is wasted.

In this teaching the idea is not to be closed, to plug the leaks by being attentive. In Krishnamurti's example of "waiting" and "watching", we are attentive; we *attend* to that which is before us. In that state we have the capacity to actually receive and respond.

So: "Oh, gracious Lord, I enter thy radiance and approach thy presence, bearing with me the service done in your name and for you./ I seek to become a more efficient server." And I *open* myself, the vessel is open, intact, purified, and turned toward you, that you may fill it with "the power of your love, your joy, and your peace".

The meditation goes on to focus individually on joy, peace, and particularly love. "In thy presence thy love enfolds me." And then the prayer speaks about the quality of the love, and that, having received, I must necessarily be a

presence of love in the world. It ends: "Lead me, oh gracious Lord, through thy inimitable love, to union with you and the heart of eternity." And the final words of the meditation are: "In your love I rest forevermore."

Whenever we have some level of experience of the nature of the "Love, embracing all in Oneness" (as expressed in Annie Besant's Universal Prayer), the response is necessarily "to rest"; it brings rest; it stops the world. So we rest in that love. This is the focus of the meditation, that in the experience of this sublime rest, we come to realize a measure of the nature of the fragrance within the cave of the heart. And we repeat it, then we approach it again, but always when the experience dawns upon us, we rest.

This is just some advice shared by those whose experience gives it value. The work, as always, is ours, but the guidance, clues, and hints along the way are full of power. ✧

Nothing can happen to the pilgrims on the Path but that which is best for them. Once they deliberately put themselves into the hand of the Teacher, they see that everything happens at the proper time — the time at which the greatest advantage is reaped, alike for the pilgrims and for the world. . . . The storm-tossed bark on a raging sea is more peaceful than the life of the pilgrim to the shrine of Spirit. A peaceful life would mean stagnation and death in the case of one who has not acquired the right to peace by completely destroying the enemy — personality.

The Doctrine of the Heart
Compiled by Annie Besant
TPH Adyar, 1988 reprint, pp. 51-2

The Craft of Being Open-Minded

JAN NICOLAAS KIND

Generally speaking, openness refers to the willingness to hear and consider different ideas and to try new things. Open individuals usually accept others' values and beliefs; an open mind doesn't quickly reject oppositional opinions as wrong. People are sufficiently open-minded if they are receptive to strong arguments against their committed beliefs.

Jeremy E. Sherman, Social Science Researcher

THEOSOPHISTS, no matter what tradition or stream they may belong to, are supposed to be freethinkers. According to most dictionaries, a freethinker is a person who rejects accepted opinions, especially those concerning religious beliefs:

Freedom of thought is embedded into the DNA of Theosophy. As theosophists, we possibly pride ourselves on having open minds and the ability to think for ourselves. In some cases that is more aspirational than actual. We have as many closed-minded people as any other organization — and, according to some, even more.¹

I always felt I had to overcome some inner hurdles as I tried to grasp the *real* meaning of the serious conflicts that occurred in the early years among the “freethinking” pioneers of the Theosophical Society. I do not mean to write

a summary of what happened historically in those first three decades after 1875. Instead, I will just mention some names. Think of the “cases” involving T. Subba Row, A. O. Hume, William Q. Judge versus Henry S. Olcott and Annie Besant, C. W. Leadbeater, B. P. Wadia, and, surprisingly, also A. P. Sinnett.

In his posthumously published *The Early Days of Theosophy in Europe*, Sinnett writes rather disappointedly about his memories of those early days, bringing up what, in his mind, were many question marks. Sinnett must have thought that he had a unique status in the TS, due to his association with the Mahatma Letters, which led him to believe that he was in receipt of teachings from sources beyond HPB. The London Lodge, which he ran, truly was an elite club, where members wore opulent evening dresses to meetings.

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Having perhaps never matched his ability to practise the precious and inclusive teachings entrusted to him by the Masters to his intellectual understanding of them, Sinnett's class-consciousness as a refined and respected Englishman defined him and confined him. By contrast, think of Col Olcott, who left his comfortable life and status as a New York City lawyer to embrace wholeheartedly, with true brotherhood and self-sacrifice, the hardships of South Asia.

What was, or still is, the "real" meaning of those early quarrels, misunderstandings, and at times bitter, contentious confrontations? In an organization where the "forming" of a Nucleus of Universal Brotherhood is so clearly laid out in its first Object, one would not expect these clashes to happen, *but they certainly did*. Up until today people are still influenced by them. Are they just personality confrontations?

Perhaps the significance of conflicts, or if you wish, the lesson that is to be learnt, is that they should teach us to open up, to really listen, search for solutions, and improve our flexibility, thus stepping out of our comfort zone. In order to step away from that "safe corridor", the very first requirement would be to go for an unconditional open-mindedness — a feat easier said than done.

Considering how difficult true open-mindedness is to achieve, perhaps it would be beneficial to think of it as a craft of which we are apprentices. This invites us to participate in a step-by-step process of learning and unlearning, while ack-

nowledging the importance of the undertaking. All forms of craftsmanship demand a gradual attunement of head, heart, and hand. The craft of open-mindedness is no exception. Implicit in the idea of apprenticeship is the promising hint that there are journeyman masters and that we, too, can move in that direction.

The craft of being open-minded calls for *acceptance* and, most importantly, *tolerance*. Acceptance is obviously something that is connected with knowing how certain developments took place and led to existing realities, which, by the way, does not mean one has to stop being discriminative. Tolerance is possibly the most difficult one of the two, especially when there is a strong difference in points of view. Hearing an opinion, which directly opposes our own and learning to deal with that in a mature manner is a painful exercise, demanding perseverance and psychological discipline.

In Katherine Beechey's gem, *Daily Meditations*, the September/Tolerance chapter, 4th entry, has this delightful quotation from an Elder Brother:

Take care not to seek to impose your standard of life, your convictions, upon others. Help them to gain their own standards, to reach their own convictions, be these what they may, provided they stimulate to nobler living.

Our opinions, and we all have them, are stored in a rather superficial compartment of our thinking. The *things we think* are based on what we are fond of or detest, our preferences, tastes, quick judg-

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ments and even prejudices. If we are really eager to learn, it is necessary to go deeper, making a beginning in questioning our own beliefs, which we all too often simply take for granted. Convictions are time bound. They need to be double-checked regularly and, if needed, overhauled. In our search for Truth, which we can only undertake with an open mind, *all convictions are transitory*. If we allow ourselves to profoundly go through this process, we become aware.

J. Krishnamurti, when asked to explain what in his view awareness is, said the following:

Just simple awareness! Awareness of your judgments, your prejudices, your likes and dislikes. When you see something, that seeing is the outcome of your comparison, condemnation, judgment, evaluation, is it not? When you read something, you are judging, you are criticizing, you are condemning or approving. To be aware is to see, in the very moment, this whole process of judging, evaluating, the conclusions, the conformity, the acceptances, the denials.²

To be open-minded is really tough at times. Most of us are (*theosophically*) brought up with a set of views and values and, throughout our lives, tend to surround ourselves with people who share the same values and beliefs. Therefore, it can be difficult when we are faced with ideas that challenge our own and, though we may wish to be open-minded, we may struggle with the successful practice of it from time to time.

Though it can be daunting, it is rewarding at the same time. To be sincere with oneself, doing away with both *Mr or Mrs Know-it-all* — who live in each one of us — will allow truth to come our way. Not being tangled up in accumulative knowledge, which is so very tricky, doors will open to intuitive perception and non-conditioned observation. Bounteous will be the results.

While trying to take on those hurdles when reading or hearing about the personalities that clashed in the first years of the modern theosophical movement, I am inclined to think that these had to do much with what I would refer to as the *growing pains*. All involved were relatively young in 1875 when the TS was founded in New York. For example, H. P. Blavatsky was 44, Henry Olcott 43, William Judge just 24, A. P. Sinnett 35, while Annie Besant, in 1875 not involved with the TS yet, was 28.

Young women and men, full of what they felt they needed to share with the world, in the German language the word *begeistert*, much better than in English (impassioned)³, describes their state of mind. As it often goes with passionate initiatives, mistakes were bound to be made. To approach the Society's history and the various divisive events that took place, especially after HPB's passing in 1891, demand a fully opened mind, a mind that will not take any sides, but *just observes* and is freed from any conditioned thinking. If we indeed are willing to set out on such a journey, it will soon become apparent

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that a learning process is most certainly about to surface, one that will deepen our understanding and reduce our prejudices.

It is interesting to note that, as described above, Mr Sinnett for example, a key figure in what would ultimately result in the compiling of *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* by the end of his life, was simply not able to be open-minded when he looked back at the early years of the movement. His elitism caused him to be harsh, skeptical and even rather unfriendly towards his contemporaries. Others, Henry Olcott as well as Annie Besant, in the autumn of their lives, were much better able to *open up their minds*, looking at themselves critically, admitting their mistakes and even revising former opinions.

In connection with what became known as the infamous "Judge Case", Henry Olcott stunningly admits that he had done wrong. In Sven Eek's *Damodar and the Pioneers of the Theosophical Society*, there is a description of what happened. It is a long excerpt, but certainly worthy to examine it in full:

When in 1906 Colonel Olcott visited America for the last time, he wrote his old friend, MrsHolloway-Langford, asking her to see him. The latter had been out of touch with the Theosophical Society for twenty years, when she left her Theosophical colleagues in London in 1886 and returned to America. She had been a personal friend of Olcott's sister, Belle Mitchell, who had passed away. Belle had been an "oasis" in Olcott's domestic life, always loving him in spite of the fact

that she herself was a strict Presbyterian.

A sad and depressed Olcott met his old associate Laura Holloway, but his conversation, which was later published, reveals a new man who had in life's struggle at last achieved inner greatness.

Laura Holloway writes:

"I am sure he was wholly sincere in attributing his depression of spirits to his sorrow for this dear sister, but my sympathy for him was too genuine to admit of self-deception; I realized that loneliness and homesickness were prime factors in his case; as also were physical infirmities; and, as were memories of other faces now absent. Quite sure was I of this when he was speaking of Madame Blavatsky, whom he repeatedly characterized as his 'dear old colleague' who had gone on ahead of him.

"Of her he spoke as one of whom he was bereft — not only of her presence, but of her prestige. He sorely missed both and was growing to be more and more conscious that a great force had been taken out of his life, and the motive power removed from the work he was prosecuting without her; conscious, too, that his influence was departing, if not departed.

"My sense of loss — the magnitude of it', he said, 'I realize more and more, as I note the trend of events in the Theosophical Society since her death. I am President-Founder, but other and younger workers are in control of its affairs: This is right, and as it should be, but HPB's mighty mentality is not here to guide and make steadfast, and her personality is missed

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more and more. I, too, will soon be gone, and then all the older influences that surrounded the Society will be removed.’

“Suddenly it occurred to me to speak of that other able and faithful comrade who had worked with HPB and himself from the first inception of the Society, and I did not resist the impulse to say to him: ‘And have you no word now for that devoted co-worker of hers and yours, toward whom, after her death, you were hostile? He is indelibly associated in my mind with you both. Do you not mourn him at all, that dear old friend of the long ago?’

“‘You speak of Judge’, he slowly replied.

“‘Yes, of him.’

“‘Yes, yes,’ he interrupted, ‘I know how you feel about him and always have felt.’ Then, taking my hand in his, he gave my face a searching glance, before he answered, in a manner subdued and most impressive:

“‘We learn much and outgrow much, and I have lived much and learned more, particularly as regards Judge.’ . . .

“‘I know now, and it will comfort you to hear it; that I wronged Judge, not willfully or in malice; nevertheless, I have done this, and I regret it.’”⁴

Annie Besant in 1928 writes on Judge the following:

Judge [was] a much-loved friend and pupil of HPB’s, and the channel of life to the American Branch of the TS. A highly evolved man, with a profound realization

of the deeper truths of life, he built up the Society in America from small and discouraging beginnings. No difficulties daunted him, and no apparent failures quenched his fiery devotion. . . .

He was beside HPB through those early days, saw the exercise of her wonderful powers, and shared in the founding of the Theosophical Society. And throughout the remainder of her life on Earth, the friendship remained unbroken, and during the later years she regarded him as her one hope in America, declaring that, if the American members rejected him, she would break off all relations with them, and know them no more. . . .

Spiritual and intuitional, he was also extraordinarily capable as an organizer and a leader. Then came the revelation of what was hidden under the reserved demeanor . . . an unquenchable energy, a profound devotion, an indomitable will. And these were held together by a single aim — the spreading of the truths of Theosophy, the building of an organization which should scatter the seeds over the land.⁵

So, with an open mind, putting all possible hindrances to form a just view aside, we might even conclude that all that occurred in those early years, the clashing of personalities, the upheavals, no matter how painful some of them were, were incidents from which we can learn. Such charitable acceptance of facts will help us to tread further on our individual Paths. In full accordance with the open-mindedness, as Theosophists and Freethinkers, we are fortunate to

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have the Theosophical Society General Council's "Freedom of Thought" resolution. For the purpose of this article, hereunder a most relevant passage:

No teacher, or writer, from H. P. Blavatsky onwards, has any authority to impose his or her teachings or opinions on members. Every member has an equal right to follow any school of thought, but has no right to force the choice on any other. Neither a candidate for any office nor any voter can be rendered ineligible to stand or to vote, because of any opinion held, or because of membership in any school of thought.

One can conclude that in Theosophy, the so-called *theological* methodology, as is common in religions, is a non-starter. Theosophical *theologians* are not recognized. Open-mindedness and theology are not compatible.

Any known religion on our planet consists of a collection of *beliefs*. Each religion teaches or proclaims her own truths about the world — humanity and God (or gods). These beliefs make clear how the followers of a certain religion can find their salvation. There are scriptures and instructions on what to do and what not to do through theology, the believers are instructed *how to interpret* those. All is directed towards a common kind of truth, while obedience and, above all, unconditional surrender to the guidelines are unquestionable.

In particular, the three monotheistic religions — Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, have, via very unfortunate misinterpretations caused, and are still caus-

ing, pain and misery. This has been going on for at least 2,000 years.

In Theosophy, what HPB reintroduced to us in *The Secret Doctrine* — with the Stanzas as a basic starting point — forces us to be open-minded from the very start. All our previous known convictions will have to be tested and, if needed, put aside, if not forgotten. Our thinking has to be fully receptive for new conceptions, ideas and panoramas. This makes Theosophy, as a world view, unique. It is in this way that I am convinced that the Theosophical Movement has a future and a specific task, and that this attempt by the Masters to share with us their wisdom will not fail as long as we do not make the same mistakes as religions have done up to this day.

There cannot be any sort of conservatism or limit to our open-minded theosophical thinking. The various streams, now 145 years after the foundation, have all earned their place under the sun. The gratifying fact is that the various organizations all, *and this really means each one of them*, in their own manner, represent a facet of the theosophical diamond. In this respect I would reject terms such as "true Theosophy" or "pure Theosophy" as if there is untrue, or impure, or pseudo Theosophy. Theosophy simply IS, or IS NOT Theosophy. As seekers, and not as proclaimers, we can enter that impressive figurative theosophical library and choose which way to go.

There are groups of students who solely concentrate on the *core teachings* as brought forward by H. P. Blavatsky,

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William Judge, Robert Crosbie, and other *first-generation* theosophical authors. Students in the Adyar environment are, next to the voluminous literary output by Annie Besant, open to also *second or third generation authors*, like N. Sri Ram, I. K. Taimni, Joy Mills, and John Algeo, while there is also room for the *clairvoyant* approaches as postulated by C. W. Leadbeater or Geoffrey Hodson.

Students from both the Adyar and Point Loma traditions agree that the works of G. de Purucker have been very helpful in understanding the teachings that were transmitted by HPB. The *oeuvre* and significance of J. Krishnamurti remain a much-discussed topic even today. It is evident that K., during his lifetime *as well as* in the years after his death in 1986, as an educationist, author, philosopher, and speaker, has positively influenced millions of people around the world and inspired many within the Adyar tradition.

A well-known theosophist, who resided at Krotona, once told me that by digging into K's work, wherein often the emphasis is on *self-transformation* and *open-mindedness*, she was better able to go deeper into the traditional or core teachings as we know them through *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Mahatma Letters*. The Dutch theosophist Ali Ritsema in her article "Living in Truth — Where HPB and Krishnamurti meet", wrote:

We often get stuck in our preferred ap-

proach and don't quite get the value in other approaches. My intention was to highlight the close similarities between Theosophy and Krishnamurti in relationship to the search for and living in Truth. Both approaches, like many other approaches, can help us to come to an understanding from within, which is, after all, the aim of our studies.⁶

Theosophists from the three main-streams in the Movement, gather annually on the platform of International Theosophy Conferences (ITC), an initiative I have firmly supported. It is to be hoped that on that admirable platform, in order not to become some indolent study club, theosophists will continue to be ready to come out of their comfort zone, eager to explore new territories beyond their own. If this is done ITC will remain vibrant, but if there is a restriction placed on free thought, and only accepted or known topics are going to be investigated, the danger lurks that all is merely a repetition of what has been said before. Then the opportunity for learning will have come to a tragic standstill.

To be truly open-minded is a craft, and like with any other discipline, if we want to do it well, we need to prepare ourselves to patiently and consciously find our way. A mark of fulfilling it will certainly be when we come to realize that we all might come from different wells, but swim in the same river. ✧

Endnotes

1. Tim Wyatt, *A Freethinkers' Way to the Galaxy*. <theosophyforward.com/articles/theosophy/2230-a-freethinker-s-way-to-the-galaxy>.

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2. *The Collected Works of J. Krishnamurti*, vol. IX, Amsterdam, May 26, 1955.
3. *Begeistert* in German would be best translated into English as "impassioned", although it is hard to find the exact equivalent.
4. TPH Adyar, India, p. 657-8.
5. *The Theosophist*, October 1922, p. 351.
6. <theosophyforward.com/articles/theosophy/2223-living-in-truth-where-hpb-and-krishnamurti-meet>.

One night a man was crying, Allah! Allah!
His lips grew sweet with the praising, until a cynic said,
"So! I have heard you calling out,
but have you ever gotten any response?"
The man had no answer to that.
He quit praying and fell into a confused sleep.

He dreamed he saw Khidr, the guide of souls,
in a thick, green foliage.
"Why did you stop praising?"
"Because I've never heard anything back."
"This longing you express is the return message."

The grief you cry out from draws you toward union.
Your pure sadness that wants help is the secret cup.
Listen to the moan of a dog for its master.
That whining is the connection.
There are love dogs no one knows the names of.
Give your life to be one of them.

Jalal Al-Din Rumi
"Love Dogs"

Meditation and Religious Traditions

CECIL MESSER

AT the core of every monotheistic religion is the theme of *unity with the Divine*. The word “religion” comes from the Latin root *religare* — to bind again — signifying the bond between humans and God. It also comes from the Latin *religio* — reverence for the sacred. This common ground manifests itself in accordance with different cultures and traditions. In Islam, this union is represented by Allah, the name of the one true God. In Christianity, union with the ineffable — God is through the personage of Jesus, the Christ. In Judaism, this union is through Adonoy, the one God. To practice these religions, one must prepare oneself to receive the blessings of divine union and to recognize therefrom that we are all one family. So far, so good; these views are coherent and do not lead to the mischief of extremism.

What is meant by the word “God”? To the vast majority of followers of each of these religions, God is the Supreme Being, the creator of the universe. Many anthropomorphize a personal God (usu-

ally but not exclusively masculine) as a being separate from them — an outer form looking down on the world from above. This God is relative and has attributes. He resides in a heavenly mansion. He has feelings and expresses love as well as wrath. Some fabricate a God in their own image thus ironically creating a personal “golden calf”.

There is another view of God that is absolute and beyond description, yet is within our being. In the Qur’an, Allah is depicted as transcendent and immanent, too ineffable to be comprehended, yet divinely present in everything. This principle of unity is beautifully captured by Rumi, the Sufi poet and professor of Islamic law (adapted from *The Way of the Sufi* by Idries Shah):

He went to the door of the Beloved
and knocked.

A voice asked: “Who is there?”

He answered: “It is I.”

The voice said: “There is no room here
for me and thee.”

The door was closed.

Mr Cecil Messer, a retiree of the NASA Space Program Science and Engineering Team, presented spiritual teachings from many traditions for twelve years while residing at the Krotona Institute of Theosophy, Ojai, CA. He is currently a dharma practitioner, living in the mountains of North Carolina.

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After a year of solitude and want,
He returned to the door of the Beloved
and knocked.
A voice from within asked: "Who is there?"
The man said: "It is Thou."
The door was opened for him.

This same principle of unity is also succinctly portrayed by the apostle John in the New Testament. Christians take to heart these profound teachings:

The one who does not love
Does not know God,
For God is Love.
(1 John 4:8)
God is Love;
Whoever lives in Love
Lives in God,
And God in them.
(1 John 4:16)

Again, Jews also view God as a principle of unity as evidenced by their most ancient and traditionally important prayer, the Shema. From the Torah:

Hear O' Israel,
The Lord is our God.
The Lord is One.
(Deut. 6:4)

The predominant established spiritual practices of these traditions typically involve prayers directed towards their deity and usually take the form of worship, petition, or thanksgiving. Communication with him is either directly through prayer or through an intermediary such as an imam, a priest, or rabbi. It is said that "praying is like asking God

a question, and meditation is listening for the answer." Additional practices include reading, reflecting, and meditating on God's holy words. It is thought that God's *Word* was transmitted by him to inspired prophets — suitable vessels — who subsequently inscribed their visions for posterity.

These original autographs have long been lost; only replicas now exist. These artifacts have been copied and translated for ages by many different humans and are therefore subject to human inaccuracies and interpretations. No doubt God's *Word* is perfect and without error; but it does not follow that the writings purported to preserve them are free from error. Just because a book is very old does not mean it is necessarily true. Nor can the interpretations made by men whose understanding may be imperfect be wholly relied on. For these reasons we should be very careful in choosing secondhand concepts to lock onto.

One way to test our derivative views is to examine them side by side with the core principles of unity. Without enjoining the hermeneutic interpretations of the Bible, Qur'an, or Torah, there are other ways to recognize our limitations in discerning valid concepts. Modes of thought and behavior can be classified in two ways, those on the side of love and those on the side of hate. All creeds and associated actions not on the side of love are suspect. When we go astray from core concepts and begin to emphasize extremes of interpretation, radical behaviors such as violence, war, and genocide

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erupt. Let us, in all humility, set aside questionable doctrines and trust those that resonate with our deepest conscience and noblest feelings.

Ironically, it is common practice in many religious cultures to view spiritual matters from a secular perspective. This approach diverts primary attention from the inner core teachings to the outer phenomenal aspects of the stories depicted in their scriptures. Getting stuck in various conceptual features leads to division into competing denominations and sects. These actions inevitably degenerate into religiosity and the focus becomes sidetracked into a preoccupation with glamorous secondary topics such as: the “virgin birth”, the Ark of the Covenant, the Shroud of Turin, “judgment day”, and its concomitant “eternal damnation”.

Pertinent to our present inquiry are those religious practices that emphasize and follow the wisdom of the teachings of their religion and lead to a profound renewal of mind and heart; one is *born again*. The Islamic scholar Rumi said that those Muslims who follow only the outer form of Islamic prayer such as frequently kneeling and touching their forehead to the ground are like chickens pecking grain. But the chicken is smarter because at least it gets something in return. He said that the outer form of worship is of no value without inner understanding. Like the other monotheistic religions, Islam is noble at heart, inspiring a spiritual and ethical way of life. However, if its scriptures are interpreted in a super-

ficial manner and practiced without love, it may be perverted and become a source of evil.

Christian representative teachings are given in the “Sermon on the Mount” and in the New Testament parables. There the words of Christ advocate forgiveness and admonish judging others. They include meeting violence with nonviolence. He renounces the old law of “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” and proclaims the radical imperatives of “Resist not evil!” and “Love your enemies!” If being a Christian is defined as one who believes in Christ and therefore tries to follow his teachings, then how many nations or organizations or individuals are truly Christian? Perhaps many of us believe, but few act. Sadly, some self-christened Christians are like connoisseurs who are so fascinated by the gilded frame holding a Rembrandt masterpiece that they never see the beauty in the art.

According to Judaism, Moses received the Ten Commandments directly from the Lord on Mount Sinai. The Talmud teaches that the Lord himself used his finger to inscribe a set of laws on two lapis lazuli tablets amidst much thunder, lightning, smoke, and fire. Perhaps the purpose of this phenomena was to emphasize these spiritual imperatives in a covenant with his people. Moses subsequently transcribed these rules of conduct in the Torah’s Book of Exodus.

One of these injunctions, the Sixth Commandment, is commonly translated as: “Thou shall not kill.” An alternate acceptable translation is: “Thou shall not

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murder.” This is a more palatable version because it mitigates the unpleasantness of dealing with ethical issues such as: executing heretics for contrary views; dropping napalm on children in foreign lands for our security; killing animals for food; or eradicating species in the name of progress. Regardless of which interpretation one adheres to, surely the moral law written in our heart by the finger of the Divine enjoins us to do no harm to others.

Mainstream followers of the monotheistic religions — mosque Muslims, church Christians, and Orthodox Jews — express their faith in observable forms, rituals, and doctrines. These ways are in sharp contrast to those of their more interiorly oriented brothers and sisters — Sufis, Christian contemplatives, and Kabbalists. These adherents employ deeper spiritual practices to enhance the process of opening their consciousness to the Divine. Though perhaps outside of formal wedlock, all religious traditions seem to have each birthed an inner or esoteric contemplative component. It is this offspring that arguably provides the sustaining life force of each religion.

On the surface, popular forms of these religious traditions do not appear to emphasize a close connection to meditation practice. Nevertheless, all religious traditions are concerned with opening our hearts and minds to something extraordinary and sacred, a transcendent reality, beyond our personal selves.

Representative of inner forms of practice are the Christian contemplatives and their profound connection to medi-

tation. In preparing for the opening of mind and heart, most devoted practitioners probably agree with Father Thomas Merton, the highly revered Trappist monk, that: “You will never find interior solitude unless you make some conscious effort to deliver yourself from . . . [this] world.” To approach the spiritual Source, he advocates a kind of contemplation that is beyond the discursive meditation that focuses on abstract truths about the Divine.

He points to a more direct transcendental meditation that is like an awakening, an intuitive realization or experience of union with God. In his *New Seeds of Contemplation*, he contrasts those two types of meditation with the assertion: “Nothing could be more alien to contemplation than the *cogito ergo sum* of Descartes: ‘I think, therefore I am.’ This is the declaration of an alienated being, in exile from his own spiritual depths.”

Father Merton expresses his passionate view of meditation:

Contemplation is the highest expression of man’s intellectual and spiritual life . . . is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life . . . is gratitude for life . . . is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent, and infinitely abundant Source. [Contemplation is] awareness of the reality of that Source. In contemplation . . . we know beyond all knowing or *unknowing*.

The Christian monk Father Thomas Keating advocates a variety of Christian prayers for coming into the presence of

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God. From his *Classical Practice of Lectio Divina*, three practices are given: “*Lectio Divina*”, “Centering Prayer”, and “Contemplative Prayer”. The method of “*Lectio Divina*” in its classical monastic form is intended to lead one to this communion. He advocates visualizing four parts along the circumference of a circle joined to each other and to the center, forming an interrelated pattern. The center “. . . is the Spirit of God speaking to us through the text and in our hearts”. The elements of the process are:

1. Reading or listening to the Scripture passage (*Lectio*),
2. Reflecting on the words and being attentive to your heart’s response (*Meditatio*),
3. Responding spontaneously with prayer (*Oratio*),
4. Resting in God’s presence (*Contemplatio*).

According to Fr Keating, this monastic form of “*Lectio Divina*” is oriented towards contemplative prayer rather than to the more popular scholastic form characterized by discursive meditation. The scholastic form conceives the process as hierarchical, in stages, moving from one thought to the next. Spontaneity may become problematic if we get hung up in conceptual thinking, thus thwarting the movement to become fully engulfed in the divine presence.

“Centering Prayer” is a method of internal prayer intended to open our hearts and minds to God’s presence and action within. It prepares us to receive the Holy Spirit’s gift of “Contemplative Prayer”, which in turn enables us to directly experience his presence. Basil Pennington, a leading proponent of this method, delineates guidelines for its practice: sit comfortably with your eyes closed; relax and quiet yourself; feel love and faith towards God. Choose a sacred word; let that word be gently present as the symbol of your intention to be in the Lord’s presence and open to his divine action within you. Whenever you become aware of thoughts, feelings, or perceptions, simply return to your sacred word. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence for a few minutes.

The condition of being no longer engaged with thoughts is the state of *unknowing* referred to in the 14th century anonymous book *The Cloud of Unknowing*. As a categorical precondition, Fr Merton points to one of the paradoxes of the mystical life:

. . . that a man cannot enter into the deepest center of himself and pass through that center into God, unless he is able to pass entirely out of himself and empty himself, and give himself to other people in the purity of a selfless love. ✧

**One neither sorrows nor rejoices over worldly dharmas.
One is able to relinquish one’s own benefit,
while always acting diligently for the benefit of others.
Being deeply grateful for others’ kindnesses, one repays them doubly.**

Nagarjuna's *Treatise on the Ten Bodhisattva Grounds*, pp 260-61

Entangled Minds and the Viral Pandemic

TIM WYATT

COVID-19 has not only concentrated our minds like nothing else we can recall, it has fundamentally and permanently changed human consciousness. Its effects have been unprecedented and its aftermath will be equally pronounced — and profound. It will bring economic hardship to hundreds of millions. We have already run out of clichés to describe the devastation and dislocation this pandemic has caused to every strand of human existence. Apart from possibly Antarctica, not a single continent on Earth has remained untouched. It has brought revolutionary changes to the way we live, work, shop and interact. It has been a fascinating but macabre exercise in mass psychology.

Despite its power to destroy lives and livelihoods, this tiny crown-shaped virus has also evoked levels of cooperation and compassion which are increasingly rare in the modern world. Along with its grim death toll it has also yielded other positive traits as people show greater degrees of tolerance, self-reliance and, that most old-fashioned of virtues, altruism.

Many people have been forced to deal with the isolation they face. For others, the lock-down has meant more time for self-reflection.

The world has gone quiet. Many people have heard birdsong for the first time in decades. Blue skies were left unscarred by the vapour and smoke trails of jets and industries. Air pollution levels dropped dramatically in even the worst affected cities. Even the seismic noise of the planet quietened. No doubt Earth Mother breathed a sigh of relief that her boisterous and hyperactive children temporarily curbed their usually frenzied activities.

Covid-19 has done what wars and conflicts always do. Apart from bringing out the best and worst in people, it has also presented both opportunities and threats. Battles and crises are teachers and synthesizing agents as well as purgative and regenerative forces. They always leave their mark and continue to reverberate.

No one is unaware of the momentous outward effects of this crisis physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. But what are the deep esoteric causes of this

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modern death wave being unleashed right now? Clearly, there will be cyclic reasons for this. It is almost exactly a century since the Spanish Flu pandemic, which killed millions in the wake of World War I.

Even more crucially, like every other event, there will be inescapable karmic roots to this disease. This would appear to be a classic illustration of collective karma in action. The principal purpose of karma is to compensate and restore balance and harmony. It would be all too easy to crudely interpret this as a punishment visited on humanity for its apparent wickedness. Perhaps it is more of a warning. Or even a lesson. Even though it is impossible for us to dismantle and identify the precise karmic causes, we can and should learn from an event of such magnitude and significance. And that lesson is interconnectedness and interdependence.

Covid-19 has produced its own vast collective thought-form which will linger long after the virus itself has been eradicated. We are all affected by this thought-form and, not only that, we have all been the architects and builders of it, too. As much as we may regard ourselves as individuals, humanity has a collective mass mind. Each of us constantly contributes to this mental reservoir, but much of our input is unconscious.

The Ageless Wisdom tradition states very clearly that “thoughts are things”. What happens in our minds shapes the world. Although not as dense and tangible as a car or a table, their existence is real and these thoughts persist depending on the power we attach to them. Some

thought-forms continue for millennia.

The virus has shown us just how interconnected we are physically and the extent to which life on Earth is interlinked. But it is also important to explore the mental dimension to this.

In the contemporary Western world of aggressive individualism, we labour under the fatal illusion that we have hermetically sealed minds, each one compartmentalized and separated from each other. We are convinced that every mind has its own unique thoughts, that each possesses its own customized perspective on life and that each operates in splendid isolation. This is a total travesty of the truth, although it remains the prevailing view.

Human minds are inextricably entangled. Not only that, the consciousness of human minds intermingles intricately with that of the other kingdoms of Nature. The timeless truths enshrined in the Ageless Wisdom tradition insist that everything is conscious on its own level as well as intimately interconnected. Therefore, what we perceive as separation is an illusion.

There was global consciousness long before the internet because global consciousness is super-physical. It did not take a digital revolution to create it. So, what precisely causes this intimate and universal interconnectedness?

It consists of this spiritual substance known as the astral or *ākāśa*, the Sanskrit word for ether, or invisible transmission medium. The ether, along with its alter ego, the astral light, explains our interconnectedness, and parapsychological psychic (psi) phenomena such as telepathy

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and clairvoyance as well as out of the body experiences. Nothing is exempt from it because it is the template for everything that was, is, and ever will be. It is the transmission agent for every individual's karma in any one life as well as dreams, memories, and clairvoyance along with body, mind, and emotional fields. It explains why we have numinous feelings for those close to us even at a great distance.

Universal interconnectedness and ubiquitous consciousness are two of the key pillars of the Ageless Wisdom tradition. Few people — least of all scientists — understand this or indeed the nature of the human mind itself. Science confines mind exclusively to the electrochemical activity of the brain, but has insurmountable difficulties in defining what consciousness actually is. This is where the esoteric teachings prove so valuable, asserting that brain and mind are not synonymous.

The view of materialistic science is that form produces consciousness. Theosophy asserts the precise opposite — that consciousness is responsible for form. The esoteric teachings are in no doubt that the mind does not need a brain in order to function. It exists beyond the physical hardware. It is something we tap into rather than contain within us.

Not all scientists subscribe to the tunnel-visioned view that reality exists solely on the physical plane. Nor do they all believe in a purposeless, random universe caused by chance cosmic collisions and “natural selection”.

At the risk of ridicule and reputational degradation, a few brave individuals have attempted to find evidence for this wider, interconnected consciousness which unites us all. Human consciousness is not only intimately entwined with itself but the consciousness of other departments of Nature, seen and unseen.

This includes not only the animal, plant, and mineral kingdoms but the three associated elemental kingdoms of nature spirits, which build these kingdoms, as well as the *devic* realms. Perhaps we are entering a phase where recognition of and cooperation with these invisible empires will be possible once again.

My own thinking has been heavily influenced by *Entangled Minds*, the title of a seminal book by Dr Dean Radin, who is chief scientist at the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS). “Noetic”, taken from the Greek words *noesis/noetikos*, means direct knowing, inner wisdom, implicit understanding — in short, intuition.

IONS was founded in 1973 by among others the astronaut Edgar Mitchell. As Mitchell gazed out of the capsule window when travelling back to Earth on Apollo 14 after his moonwalk in 1971, he had a profound spiritual experience. As he stared out into the vast cosmos, he experienced the intimate interconnectedness of everything he saw — the stars, the moon, the vastness of the universe, and the Earth itself.

Immediately Mitchell realized he had to reconcile his scientific training with the wisdom of the ages and create a new framework to explain the unexplainable

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and transcend what he saw as an outdated materialist view of the world. He called this synthesis, of science and spirituality, noetic sciences.

IONS describes its mission as follows: “Our future demands that we explore our inner space with the same rigor and ingenuity as we explore our outer world.” One of its most interesting ongoing experiments is the Global Consciousness Project launched in 1998, although its origins date back further. It is an international, multidisciplinary collaboration of scientists and engineers. The project involves the use of random number generators placed in locations around the world. There are now around seventy of these devices known as “eggs” in operation. Based on “quantum tunnelling” these produce completely unpredictable sequences of zeroes and ones.

However, when big events affect millions of people it appears to have a direct effect on these number generators. IONS claims the odds of this happening by chance are a *trillion to one*. It believes these experiments suggest there is evidence for an emerging noosphere or unifying field of consciousness — exactly the same as that described in the Ageless Wisdom teachings.

A prototype project was running in 1997 when Princess Diana died in a car crash in Paris. The random number generators then in use showed marked patterns of coherence and nonrandomness before, during, and after the event. This led to the formation of the greater project. The project has amassed huge amounts

of data from hundreds of diverse events around the world from meditation festivals, sports events, terrorist outrages, eclipses, miscellaneous tragedies, and the death of celebrities. Many show evidence of them affecting a wider collective consciousness.

The devices were affected by both small local and huge international events. However, major world events such as the bombing of the Twin Towers in New York on 11 September 2001 produced major fluctuations.

According to Dr Radin: “The universe looks less like a big machine than a big thought.” Radin has spent decades studying psi and related phenomena including a form of precognition known as “presentiment”. This is “a vague sense or feeling of something about to occur but without any conscious awareness of a particular event.”

In 2004 Dr Radin conducted a series of tests in which participants were measured for electrical activity on their skin known as epidermal activity (EDA). The participants were shown a series of randomly selected photographs. Interestingly, these double-blind experiments revealed that EDA was higher *before* emotional photographs than calm ones, suggesting the participants were somehow aware of the images before even seeing them.

Cleve Backster (1924–2013), a one-time specialist in drug- and hypnotism-based interrogation techniques for the Central Intelligence Agency, developed a keen interest in the use of polygraph or

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lie detector machines. When he experimented with these devices on plants, he made the astonishing discovery that not only do plants feel pain, they also have extrasensory perception (ESP).

In the 1960s, when he attached electrodes from the instrument to plants' leaves, he discovered there was a change in "electrical resistance" when the plant was harmed — and more critically — when the plant was *threatened* with harm. When Backster merely imagined burning a leaf, the plant showed an immediate stress response. Many further experiments convinced him that plants demonstrated telepathic awareness and were able to perceive human thoughts, emotions, and intentions. He called this "primary perception"; and conducted similar successful polygraph trials on yoghurt bacteria, eggs, and human sperm.

His experiments with brine shrimp were especially revealing. He set up a series of experiments in which the shrimp were killed by immersion in hot water while three plants nearby were monitored by polygraph. To avoid the possibility of experimenters unconsciously affecting the results, Backster devised a system in which the shrimp were dumped at random times unknown to those in the lab. Control experiments were also conducted in which no shrimp were killed.

When the results were analysed, there was a "significant correlation" between the shrimps' deaths and the galvanic responses of the plants.

Predictably, Backster's groundbreaking, if not somewhat controversial, work

enraged sceptics in the scientific establishment who criticised his experiments for their lack of repeatability. They have never liked this "spooky action at a distance", as Albert Einstein described quantum physics.

The pioneering biologist Dr Rupert Sheldrake (born 1942) has actively disputed science's purely materialistic explanations of ourselves, the world, and the wider cosmos. He has provided clear evidence of animal to human communication at a distance. His work, too, is written off as pseudoscience by the sceptics but has attracted wider attention from the more open-minded.

In his ground-breaking 1981 book *A New Science of Life* he proposed the radical new theory of morphic resonance operating through morphogenetic, or morphic fields. This theory proposes that all self-organizing systems, from human societies to crystals, inherit a collective memory which shapes both their form and behaviour. All human beings both tap into this collective memory and contribute to it.

Individual memory depends on morphic resonance rather than physical memory. Sheldrake's view is that the brain is more like a TV receiver than a video recorder. He wrote: "memories stored in our brains" was "only a theory" and "despite decades of research, the phenomenon of memory remains mysterious".

Morphic fields organize the bodies of animals and plants and coordinate mental activities in their brains. Crucially, it means that minds are extended out of

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bodies in both space and time. This idea has huge implications both for memory and biological inheritance.

So far-reaching and anti-materialist was Sheldrake's book that the senior editor of *Nature* magazine, John Maddox, suggested it was fit to be burned. It was not. It was widely read. But he has been regularly savaged by individual mainstream scientists. However, this has not deterred him from trying to construct a non-materialistic explanation for everyday phenomena. And throughout a long career Sheldrake has tested his theories about morphic fields in a number of intriguing ways.

In a pioneering research project in 1999 he set out to prove that there is a telepathic link between people and their pets, especially dogs and cats. He suggested that morphic fields were the reason for this. He examined more than a thousand cases of cats and dogs anticipating their owners' return and demonstrated that the animals knew — even when normal time patterns were broken — often waiting by a door or window.

He filmed numerous tests in which a dog named Jaytee was continuously observed when her owner was away. During these tests the dog spent far more time at the window when her owner was returning home than when she was not.

In order to rule out the dog responding to car sounds or routines, Sheldrake performed twelve further tests in which her owner travelled home by taxi or unfamiliar vehicle at randomly selected times.

Gardeners and pet owners especially are aware of how their emotions and thoughts affect the plants and animals they nurture. Many wild and domesticated animals are highly sensitive to human vibrations. There are some people who instantly repel dogs and cats — usually those who do not like them. Others can form an instant bond with animals they have just encountered.

As someone who is fascinated by cats and who has shared much of his life with these wonderfully quirky and unpredictable creatures, I have some rudimentary knowledge of feline behaviour and psychology. My present companion is a four-year-old black cat called Electra, named after the Greek goddess of the sea clouds. Not only is she probably the most sensitive cat I have ever encountered, we share an almost telepathic rapport. Whenever she is sitting on my lap and an angry thought or negative emotion happens to flash through my mind, she instantly leaps off my knee and retreats to the other sofa.

She is very aware of the power of the mind. And we should be, too. ✧

A mind that listens with complete attention will never look for a result because it is constantly unfolding; like a river, it is always in movement. . . . there is no perpetuation of a self, of a "me", which is seeking to achieve an end.

J. Krishnamurti, *The Book of Life*

Corona: An Opportunity to Introspect

SHIKHAR AGNIHOTRI

SINCE the title of this article has become synonymous with a lot of negative emotions, I would like to start it with a totally different approach of *hope, gratitude, and trust in a divine plan*, by quoting the famous philosopher-poet Jalal Ad-Din Rumi:

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor. . . .

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Just like any other year, 2020 started on a high with many expectations. But soon after, everyone found themselves in a situation which no person would have imagined to be in. From December 2019 to May 2020, the world has changed a lot and is still changing. Covid-19, gradually, but steadily, took the whole world

in its grip and forced us humans to make certain lifestyle changes. Even while writing this article, the number of patients is increasing every second in most parts of the world.

Although in the past there may have been similar situations, none of those people are alive to share their experience firsthand, and, in that sense, this situation is unprecedented because the way things are going, it appears as if no one has been prepared to handle this kind of phenomenon, not even the so-called super powers of the world, or even the richest of the rich. This is because this situation has affected everyone without any distinction of caste, creed, religion, gender, nationality, or social status. In a way it can be called the great equalizer. Yes, there are some who are affected more than others, in the sense that their livelihood is affected tremendously, especially those brethren who live from hand to mouth.

On the one hand, there are stories of how the virus-infected patients are

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left alone and not cared for by their own family members (due to fear of getting infected themselves), showing us the real face of selfishness. This behaviour is justified by many as self-preservation, which has become the basis of our so-called loving relations, and not the selfless, sacrificing love.

On the other hand, the stories of doctors, health care workers who are working tirelessly among the patients, volunteers risking their own life, catering to the needs of those who have no resources, still gives the hope that humankind is not yet beyond redemption. It is times like these that bring out the real character of an individual and provide an opportunity to either accelerate or retard growth.

The current situation is still very uncertain but we can have a holistic view of the situation and make some observations of the pre- and post-Covid-19 eras. Out of this event a new normal is evolving because everything is just an event as per Nature's laws. "Good" or "bad" are only labels given by the human mind depending upon the profit or loss from the event.

A large population of the world, including the leaders of various countries, blame it on a particular country. Although impartial investigation is required, if we let ourselves be blinded by any emotional opinion, we will not be able to find a holistic solution, because any cause or effect cannot stand in isolation. There is always a chain of causes and effects, one leading to another. So, our approach should be to avoid blaming anyone and look at the situation objectively.

As we can see all around, due to this virus, the daily life activities have changed a lot for most people. People are becoming restless due to the fact that they are not able to go back to their normal life. It is understandable in those cases where a person has to go out to work to earn the daily bread. But those who by their karma are so placed that they do not have to worry about livelihood, even they are having pangs of anxiety and depression to such an extent that they need psychologists to treat them. Why? Is it because that during all this time they were taught that the purpose of life is to get ahead of others to be called successful?

Now they see how erroneous that idea was and are having difficulty assimilating it, even though they were ahead of others. But this virus has brought everyone to the same level, there is no longer the sense of competition and there is no one else but oneself to be with. There is no longer excitement or pride in possessing the world's most desired objects because the priorities have changed now. It is this fact that is making the psyche uncomfortable when a person has to come face-to-face with oneself, realizing that all that he worked for means nothing when it comes to life and death, and the concept of being exclusive or special has disappeared.

It is quite interesting to note that in Patanjali's *Yoga-Sutras* there is mention of *pratyāhāra* as one of the eight limbs of Yoga. It implies that a student withdraws the attention of all his senses from the outside world (understanding the impermanence of the physical world) and

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tries to go within, just like a tortoise withdraws all its limbs inside.

It seems that Nature has put everyone in the world in a similar situation where one must go within and ask the questions: “What is really needed to live happily?” “Is this the right way, where objects are loved and people are used?” “Is this the right way, where ambition and material wealth is given more importance than loving relationships?” “Is it the right way that in the name of (unnecessary) development we go on exploiting and destroying Nature?” And if we think it is the right way, then we should as well be ready for more such disasters in the future because there is the Law that is ever working and guiding the events of this world, and that is the law of cause and effect.

All these questions are to be asked and followed up to bring about a change in our approach towards Life as a whole, to lead to a more sustainable growth. We should also not be under the fallacy that nothing will happen to us because this virus has also demonstrated the interdependence and interconnectedness of all beings. This again proves there is one Life, one Consciousness, of which there are different expressions. The causes initiated by one part inevitably affect the whole.

However, here comes the challenge in the form of a very peculiar habit of the human mind. When there are good times, the mind totally relaxes and carelessly indulges in the kind of lifestyle which is injurious to oneself in the long term and also to the whole fibre of Life. But when suffering knocks on the door,

the mind changes its ways for a while, and when things become normal again, the mind goes back to its old ways, forgetting the consequences of past actions.

Therefore it takes “long term suffering” to leave its mark on our psyche, to change our habits once and for all. This is exactly the kind of situation that has been provided by Nature now: where the lockdown that initially seemed to be for a few days is going to stay for a while, and even when it is lifted gradually there is going to be a different world out there.

I assume by now that most of us must have received thousands of messages with respect to medical, psychological, economical, and spiritual changes that we should adopt. So, leaving the finer details to our wise readers, I wish to share the two basic changes in our psyche that are required:

1) Change of motive: We must move from selfishness to selflessness. Because it is greed/apathy/shortsightedness born out of selfishness that is the cause of imbalance in Nature, and she knows exactly how to bring it back to normalcy. The species that become a threat to the existence of others are wiped out from the face of the Earth. It has happened in the past, it is happening at present, and if humans do not mend their ways, it will happen again in the future.

If one is the head of a country/state/organization, one needs to make policies which are environment-friendly, develop a holistic view of management, and encourage the discoveries in science that make the whole environment more sustainable and generous for all, rather than being

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exploitative and profitable for a few.

As an individual, one can contribute to this enormous task by becoming more sensitive to everyone and everything round, by placing the larger good ahead of the individual good, and by replacing selfishness with all-encompassing Love.

In short, the motive of our actions has to be transformed because it is the motive that is the real cause which influences the effect. From “Of what use can this world be to me?” our approach must change to “Of what use can I be to this world?” This world includes everything: from oneself, family, community, country, and the planet. Maybe that is why Confucius said:

To put the world in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must first cultivate our personal life; we must first set our hearts right.

Setting our hearts right, or the transformation in the motive, is exactly the need of the hour. But this approach will not be possible unless one realizes that the basic fibre of every form is One. One Life is ensouling different forms that are acting based upon the laws governing matter and spirit. So, no matter how much chaos or struggle or uncertainty is visible all around, there is a method in that madness, and there is a reason and an indelible link in all events and the forms that are affected by those events. Nothing can touch a person that one has not earned. Nothing can be taken away that one has earned.

2) Understanding death instead of

fearing it: Another understanding that we can derive from this event is our approach to death. Never before has anyone been surrounded so intimately by death. It is not that people were not dying before, but the numbers were so much lower and out of sight that our mind was clever enough to reject the idea of death ever happening to oneself.

But with the present situation the reality of death is showing itself wherever we place our attention. Though a very alarming picture is depicted, it is, at the same time, a very opportune moment for all seekers of truth, to experience this whole process of death and the fear involved in it. Try to go deeper and check whether this fear has any foundation or is merely based on some deep-rooted superstitions in the subconscious, ignorance, or illusion of losing one's possessions.

Death is just another event in life. It is the approach towards life that is more important. Lord Buddha never tried to prevent the physical death of the boy Chhatta at the hands of the dacoits who were going to kill him on the way. Instead, he taught him three stanzas on the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, and made him take the five precepts. Singing those stanzas made his mind so full of joy that even while dying he was joyful.

The cycle of birth and death will go on and on, but wisdom lies in what is our state of consciousness while dying. Death will come when it has to come, but let us try not to die of fear before the arrival of physical death, but try meeting it as a friend. ✧

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

Ye that will tread the Middle Road, whose course
Bright Reason traces and soft Quiet smooths;
Ye who will take the high Nirvana-way
List the Four Noble Truths.

The First Truth is of *Sorrow*. Be not mocked!
Life which ye prize is long-drawn agony:
Only its pains abide; its pleasures are
As birds which light and fly. . . .

Sweet is fond Love, but funeral-flames must kiss
The breasts which pillow and the lips which cling;
Gallant is warlike Might, but vultures pick
The joints of chief and King. . . .

The Second Truth is *Sorrow's Cause*. What grief
Springs of itself and springs not of Desire?
Senses and things perceived mingle and light
Passion's quick spark of fire: . . .

So grow the strifes and lusts which make Earth's war,
So grieve poor cheated hearts and flow salt tears;
So wax the passions, envies, angers, hates;
So years chase blood-stained years with wild red feet. . . .

And drugged with poisonous drink the soul departs,
And fierce with thirst to drink Karma returns;
Sense-struck again the sodden self begins,
And new deceits it earns.

The Third is *Sorrow's Ceasing*. This is peace —
To conquer love of self and lust of life,
To tear deep-rooted passion from the breast,
To still the inward strife; . . .

Then Sorrow ends, for Life and Death have ceased;
How should lamps flicker when their oil is spent?
The old sad count is clear, the new is clean;
Thus hath a man content.

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

The Fourth Truth is *The Way*. It openeth wide,
Plain for all feet to tread, easy and near,
The *Noble Eightfold Path*; it goeth straight
To peace and refuge. Hear! . . .

So is the Eightfold Path which brings to peace;
By lower or by upper heights it goes.
The firm soul hastes, the feeble tarries. All
Will reach the sunlit snows.

The First good Level is *Right Doctrine*.
Walk In fear of Dharma, shunning all offence;
In heed of Karma, which doth make man's fate;
In lordship over sense.

The Second is *Right Purpose*. Have good-will
To all that lives, letting unkindness die
And greed and wrath; so that your lives be made
Like soft airs passing by.

The Third is *Right Discourse*. Govern the lips
As they were palace-doors, the King within;
Tranquil and fair and courteous be all words
Which from that presence win.

The Fourth is *Right Behavior*. Let each act
Assoil a fault or help a merit grow:
Like threads of silver seen through crystal beads
Let love through good deeds show.

Four higher roadways be. Only those feet
May tread them which have done with earthly things;
Right Purity, Right Thought, Right Loneliness,
Right Rapture. Spread no wings

For sunward flight, thou soul with unplumed vans!
Sweet is the lower air and safe, and known
The homely levels: only strong ones leave
The nest each makes his own. . . .

Enter the Path! There spring the healing streams
Quenching all thirst! there bloom th' immortal flowers
Carpeting all the way with joy! there throng
Swiftest and sweetest hours!

Sir Edwin Arnold
The Light of Asia

Question 6: Why? *

RAMI SHAPIRO

I ALMOST dropped the question “Why?” from the questions asked in this series of essays, and the only reason it is included is that it is asked of me over and over again. The reason I thought to drop it is not because it is not a legitimate question, but because it is a distracting one.

Asking “Who am I?” leads us to the realization that we are so much more than the smaller self can imagine, and as we come to see ourselves as the many faces of the singular Self, we are freed from the fear and anxiety the smaller self suffers, and the ignorance, arrogance, and violence that often comes from that fear and anxiety.

Asking “Where did I come from?” awakens us to the interdependence of all the living, in the singular process of the Life that is all life. And as we awaken to our shared origins we realize our shared responsibility for person and planet.

Asking “Where am I going?” shows us that we arise in and return to our truest Self, that there is nothing to fear regarding death, and because we are free to die fearlessly we are free to live coura-

geously in service to universal justice and compassion.

Asking “How shall I live?” offers us a compass that allows us to continually adjust our walk so that we are always moving toward justice and compassion. But what does asking “Why?” do for us? I am not sure it does anything at all. Or at least, nothing essential. In fact, asking “Why?” might distract us from all that we have learned thus far.

A rabbi once told me:

“Why?” is the greatest question a believer can ask, because when we ask “Why?” we have to step beyond ourselves and into God. God is the only answer to the question “Why?”. It is not the best answer or the wisest answer, but the only answer. If it is not about God, it is about nothing.

This very powerful statement resonates with me, but not the way the rabbi intended. For him God is other, transcendent. God is the Creator who stands outside creation to judge it and determine its fate. God is the Chooser who chose the Jews and set aside the Land of Israel

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as their eternal inheritance. For him God is the One to whom we must seek solace and guidance. But, not for me.

I was raised with this God. I was taught that God chose the Jews above all the other peoples, and gave us the opportunity to fulfill the 613 commandments our rabbis culled from the Torah. I was promised that if we Jews lived these commandments rains would fall in the proper season, the Earth would yield her bounty, and justice would replace cruelty.

And yet I was also taught that our people, seemingly through no fault of their own, were exiled from their Land, and doomed to wander the Earth hounded by Gentiles who saw them only as pawns to be used in the service to power, or pawns to be abused as a stand-in for power. And I was taught that God allowed six million of us — most of whom were pious people who kept the commandments — to die torturous deaths at the hands of the Nazis.

And I stopped believing. It was not simply the issue of evil (theodicy) that drove me to disbelief. It was alternative beliefs. I began meditating at age 16 and within less than a year I knew for certain that Reality was other than what my rabbis had taught. I knew beyond doubt that all life was an expression of the singular Life I called and continue to call God. By the time I was in college I was a student of Hillel, Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Mohammad, Rumi, Ramakrishna, and others.

By the time I entered rabbinical school

(how I got in I still cannot fathom) my spiritual life was defined by a multitude of practices, some Jewish, some not. I no longer believed in the tribal marketing of Chosen People and Promised Land. I no longer took refuge in Torah alone, and found wisdom in the Gospels, the Gitā, the Tao Te Ching, and other texts as well. And even as my knowledge of Judaism deepened, so did my knowledge of the other wisdom traditions: religious, literary, and scientific.

Nothing has changed. I am no less a religious hybrid today than I was forty years ago. In fact I am more so. While I continue to identify as Jew culturally, and while I still find the language of Judaism to be my religious mother tongue, I am multilingual and spiritually open. I am, as my teacher and rebbe Zalman Schachter-Shalomi once said about himself, a Jewish practitioner of universal truth. And that truth is the Perennial Wisdom.

I am sharing all this with you because I want to make it clear that I, no less than the Chief Rabbis of Israel, the Ayatollahs of Iran, the Pope in Rome, or the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, am a believer.

I believe that God is the source and substance of all reality. I believe that you and I and all beings, sentient and otherwise, are expressions of this non-dual reality. I believe that we arise in this reality and call that birth, and return to it and call that death. I believe that because we are all one interconnected and interdependent whole, the only rational way to live with one another is to live for the mutual

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well-being of one another. And I believe that things are the way they are because at the moment they are anything at all as they could not be anything but what they are. Which brings me back to the question: “Why?”

Many people find my understanding sad, fatalistic, and, even nihilistic. I disagree with all three assessments. When I realize that this moment is the moment it is because of the trillions upon trillions of moments that came before it stretching back some 13.8 billion years, I am overwhelmed with wonder. Do not mistake me for saying that the universe intended this moment for me, or intended me for this moment — that would be egoism on steroids. I am saying that in this moment and this place, I am an expression of 13.8 billion years of happening. I am not 62 years old, but 13.8 billion years old!

When I say that this moment cannot be other than what it is, I am not denying free will, choice, or randomness, but simply saying that all the free will, choice, and randomness that was, has produced this moment just as it is, and I had nothing to do with it. In this moment I am adding a bit of free will, choice, and randomness to the moment that will be next, and if I am not humbled by this, I’m less alive than a stone.

As for the charge of nihilism, I find it alluring but in the end, false. A nihilist is one who believes that life is intrinsically meaningless, and lacking in inherent moral values. I could make this assertion only if I believed that I am other than Life, came from somewhere else than Life, am going

somewhere other than Life, and therefore live in a manner that is in the world but not of the world. But I do not believe any of it.

I do believe that rocks are poor meaning-makers, and that horses are not that much better. I also believe that the laws of Nature are inherently amoral. And if I believed that human beings were not natural I would then say with the nihilists that life is meaningless and amoral. But life is us. Humanity is no less a part of Nature than rocks, but unlike rocks we humans make meaning and create morality. Humanity is the way life is meaningful and moral.

I am not saying that the Big Bang had humans in mind when it exploded, or that evolution is designed to produce meaning-making and moral beings, only that once it does, Nature is intrinsically meaningful and moral. True there is no one meaning or moral system inherent in the world, but that is not the point. The point is that we humans are the way Nature invents meaning, the same way we are the way Nature invents iPads. The only way we can speak of life as being meaningless is if we remove humans from Nature, and that is something I just cannot do.

Given all of this, then, how do I answer the question “Why?” Because.

In modern Hebrew we have a phrase, *Lama? Kakha*: “Why? Because”. Not “because I said so”, or “because God wills it”, or “because it is your karma or fate or destiny”, just *kakha*, “because”. *Kakha* can also be translated as “just so”: Things are just the way they are because they cannot be other than the way they are.

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This is what the Book of Job is trying to tell us. Job suffers because suffering is part of the divine play. You do not deserve it and you cannot escape it, you can only accept it and move on.

Such an answer does not leave much room for further conversation, and that is the point. Discussing “Why?” is an endless conversation that tends to get more and more removed from the world. Once you understand who you are, where you came from, where you are going, and how you should live, the question “Why?” is somewhat irrelevant.

To avoid getting trapped in “Why?” without ignoring those who continue to ask “Why?” I am ending this series of essays with a simple litany of “because” that comes from no one other than myself. I am not asking you to stop asking “Why?” but only that you put the question aside until you have answered/realized the answers to the other four questions. And when you do, I suspect you will find asking the fifth question totally unnecessary.

Because.

Because if this moment could be other than it is, it would be.

Because.

Because if you could be other than you are this moment, you would be.

Because.

Because given what is at this moment, what happens must happen.

Because.

Because you are not free to change what is, only what is next.

Because.

Because this is not the best of all possible worlds, it is the *only* possible world.

Lama? Kakha.

Post Script

The purpose of these six essays is to spark and deepen a conversation. The conversation does not have to end now that the essays are completed. Nothing I have said is meant to shut down discussion, or foreclose debate. While I have shared my understanding of the Perennial Wisdom, there are other interpretations one can seek out. And, more importantly, there is your own opinion, your own answers to these five existential questions. Your answers may change over time. What matters is not that we all settle on one set of answers, but that the conversation continues. For me, conversation — honest, thoughtful, rational, and passionate conversation — is the key to human maturation, and the survival not only of our species but the Earth that birthed us. Keep thinking. Keep questioning. Keep talking. ✧

Why does the eye see a thing more clearly in dreams than the imagination when awake?

Leonardo da Vinci

Theosophical Work around the World



In a span of weeks, ATA students have worked on an array of activities, ranging from self-portraits, conversations, sculpting and story-telling to no-fire cooking

Theosophical Work around the World



ATA's virtual classes are as colourful and inspired as the in-person sessions: screenshots of UKG students showcasing their "Hungry Caterpillar", the "Thirsty Crow" getting a makeover, an LKG student displaying his leaf-lacing activity and a round-up of creations from other classes

Theosophical Work around the World

ATA — Online Learning

The Adyar Theosophical Academy (ATA) celebrated its first birthday on 24 June 2020 on a virtual platform to remember a year spent in creativity surrounded by Nature, where children and teachers celebrated life, the arts, and the delight of being together. ATA's first year was cut short due to Coronavirus. But taking a cue from the children and their intuitive adapting capabilities, ATA took the plunge into online learning. The goal and vision remain: a learner-centric approach that integrates transformative learning.

Keeping in mind these challenging times and the difficulties it poses to children and their parents, ATA has prioritized socio-emotional support in their virtual interactions. The objective is to ensure that schooling continues in a way conducive to learning life skills from home. So schooling was restarted on June 11 on a virtual platform with a heartwarming reception, even from the youngest students, who quickly took to meeting and greeting their friends via their computers.

Rhymes, stories, and elaborate discussions on the characters are being translated into art activities engaging students on the story and widening their understanding of characters and themes. Simple experiments with home-based ingredients feed their curiosity. The kindergarteners cannot get enough of their teachers and their session is invariably extended. Their assignments are playful, such as crafting,

and the turnout has been an impressive array, such as paper planes and yachts. Stories are amplified by puppetry and props.

Grade children's interactions are almost as lively as a real classroom, holding an element of surprise and excitement, be it stories, songs, or fun brain-gym activities such as playing games to tap into both sides of their grey matter. In just a week's time, they learned to faithfully fill in their journals where they draw, write about what they did and how they felt. Numbers and sounds of letters are learnt through association of stories and objects. Children laugh while wrestling with tongue-twisters and learning consonant blends, filling them with a sense of positivity and well-being. Grade 2 concludes their session with a round of music appreciation, and through painting and drawing.

Grade 3 has embarked on an exploration of Africa. They are currently engaged in mapping the continent's food, culture and history through folk tales, songs, and its rich dance heritage. Students are also engaged in science peppered with stories, rhymes, intriguing questions, and crafting; stories sparking off animated discussions and activities that spin off help them ponder over themes of empathy and courage.

By cultivating journaling with support from stories, songs, games, and activities that engage their senses, ATA hopes to provide a space for children to emote and share in these trying times. ✧

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Edited by Mr Tim Boyd, 'Olcott Bungalow', The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai (TS),

Published by Mr S. Harihara Raghavan, 'Arundale House', TS, and Printed by Mr V. Gopalan, 'Chit Sabha', TS, at the Vasanta Press, TS, Besant Garden, Besant Avenue, Adyar, Chennai (Madras) 600 020, India, on behalf of the President, The Theosophical Society.

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