

Freedom of Thought

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

Freedom of the Society

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

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



THE THEOSOPHIST

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Cover: "The Most Sacred (Treasure of the Mountain)" oil painting (1933). Its symbolism points to a search for the spiritual "treasure" that is available to all who are willing to reach for it. See: <facebook.com/roerichmuseumnyc/photos/a.439610556239927/1346599282207712/?type=3&theater>

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THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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

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

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

The Soul's Best Friend

TIM BOYD

I HAVE a good friend I would like to tell you about. He is my best friend and I love him dearly. We have been together now for many years and I know and understand him completely. You see, when I first came to this place from my land, which is very far away, it was at the invitation of my friend. He wanted me to stay with him. He opened his home and himself to me, and put everything at my disposal. When he was young we used to spend long hours together conversing, playing, really getting to know one another. So many things I would help him with. Yet, I know there was much he did not understand.

The outlook and customs of my land were so different from his. But still, often he would take my advice and things would work out. He had many little friends from his own country and would always take me along when he was with them. In fact, we went everywhere together. We were inseparable. Often, when he was with his little friends, he no longer had time for me. He would dash about playing, completely oblivious of my presence, and

I would sit by and watch. His enthusiasm and energy were a joy to behold.

From time to time in his reckless play I could see my friend was in danger. At those times I would go to him and try to make him aware of the danger. Often he would calm down and listen, and avoid it. Sometimes he would be so immersed in his activity that my words would be too faint for him to hear. On one or two occasions he clearly heard me, yet decided not to listen.

At those times, try as I might, I could not help him. The result was always some painful experience for my friend. It hurt me to see him suffer, but what more could I do? He had a life and mind of his own. I could not make him listen to me. After these sorts of experiences, when we were again alone together, we would talk about it. When he had calmed down and some of the smarting had subsided, he would turn to me and ask my advice. Knowing that I was his truest friend and that my only desire was to help him; he would listen.

As my friend grew up, more and more of his time was spent among his own people. He was sent to schools to learn

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their ways. He was trained in the home. His friends who were receiving the same teachings would practice them on each other. Gradually his waking hours became consumed with this educational process. He no longer had time to spend with me. It got to be that the only time we would spend together would be just when he was going to sleep. Then briefly he would be able to relax and we would talk like before. I would sit by the bed and would still be talking to him long after he had gone to sleep. In the morning he would wake up, greet me, and then he was off again.

Soon there came a time when he no longer had any time for me. Everything he learned in his school and heard from his family and friends convinced him that the things I had said to him and the times we had spent together were wrong and misguided, and that I was not the type of friend he should be spending time with. He closed himself off from me and filled all of his time and thoughts with his other friends. I could no longer even talk to him at night. His every moment was filled with the plans and teachings he had come to accept.

From time to time one of his friends or teachers would say or do something that reminded him of me. On a couple of occasions people talked to him saying the exact things I had said, and telling him that he should listen to me. He thought that these few people were exceptional and he cherished them. At these times he would again make an effort to be with me, but it would not be long before he would

give it up. He had come too far. He no longer even knew how to hear me. He had become self-willed and was clamoring for experience of a kind I could not give. I had to let him go. Yet, I knew that our time and our many conversations together were not in vain. Someday, somewhere, something would happen and he would remember his old friend. Then he would want to be together again.

Years went by and he had many experiences. Often he would feel that he was putting the pieces of the puzzle together, that he was beginning to understand the things that were happening to him. Then something would happen and the puzzle would fall apart again. It was strange to him because it seemed as though the more things he did, the more experiences he had, the more confused he became.

He began seeking more intense, more exciting kinds of experiences, believing that their very intensity separated them from the norm, and could provide him with some answers. At first it seemed that they did, but gradually they became the norm, and again he was confused.

I felt so sorry for my friend. I wanted to run to him and set everything right, but I could not. He could not hear me. He had forgotten me. So, I watched from afar. More and more I could see a growing desire in my friend for a simpler time. Everything had become so complicated. He kept on doggedly trying to find some kind of answer, getting deeper and deeper in his involvement. All in vain.

At length there came a time when

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inwardly he gave up trying. With all of his efforts, his experiences, all of the many roads he had traveled, all leading nowhere, he gave up. He despaired of there being any answer, any rock on which he could stand. To my friend at that moment all was shifting sand. In that moment he let down the walls, dropped the barriers of self-will that had separated us for so long. I stepped

in, whispered in his ear that I was there and that he need no longer fear. He heard me. For the first time in years, he actually heard my voice. For many hours we sat together. Tears streaming from his eyes at being reunited with his old friend, and the remorse at realizing that one so true had been neglected for so long. That day he swore that never again would we be separated. ✧

The mysteries never were, never can be, put within the reach of the general public, not, at least, until that longed-for day when our religious philosophy becomes universal. At no time have more than a scarcely appreciable minority of men possessed Nature's secret, though multitudes have witnessed the practical evidences of the possibility of their possession. The adept is the rare efflorescence of a generation of enquirers; and to become one, he must obey the inward impulse of his soul irrespective of the prudential considerations of worldly science or sagacity.

Mahatma Koot Hoomi

The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett

Letter No. 2 (ML-2), Rec'd 19 Oct. 1880, Chron. ed., p. 6

Death and Immortality

RADHA BURNIER

The unreal has no being: The real never ceases to be.

The Bhagavadgītā, 2.16

THERE is no creature, no little worm or plant, no human being who does not want to live, unless the body has become too painful. Every creature, every person likes life, but is that all? I wonder, because to live is to be aware. How many of us would like to live if we could not be aware? If the body lies as if dead, we cannot sense life around us. If we cannot know something more than we already do, which is all awareness, if we cannot learn through experience, would we care to live?

Life means also to proceed in whatever way is possible to allow what is potential within our own consciousness and being to express itself, to grow and expand through expression of the seed of perfection which is within every individual. Is life, or the desire to live, merely an unconscious participation in a bitter struggle to live, to fight with each other as many creatures claim territory or supremacy and lose one's life or get hurt? Certainly not!

Perhaps this will to live, this deep unconscious instinct in everyone is an

intuition of our own immortality, that immortality of what is real within us, that perfection which is now in seed, but which will later bloom. So bodies are born and die, but the dweller in the body, who is aware and can expand into an extraordinary sense of happiness by experiencing and knowing more deeply, that dweller in the body is indestructible.

The outer mind, which is working through this material body and brain, thinks of immortality as belonging to what we know as ourselves, that is, this flesh, bones, encasement in which the dweller, for the time being, gains experience. We want this to be immortal, and so all kinds and means are investigated. How extraordinary that knowing what happens to the body, we want it to go on and on: toothless, hairless, afflicted by disease, with bent back, and moving with crutches. We know what can happen, but still this is what is attempted.

It is right to appreciate life, and it is wrong to extinguish it, for it is meant, as

Mrs Radha Burnier was international President of the Theosophical Society from 1980–2013.

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we said, to know more, to grow in happiness and knowledge, and in many other things. Because every creature has the right to live, no one has the right to kill, and that is what every religion teaches. The first of the Christian commandments is “Do not kill”.

Once someone asked a sage who lived in a small place called Tiruvannamalai in South India, Ramana, a wise man: “How am I to come to realization, to realize the self, truth?” Ramana replied: “You are already realized; you have only to know it. Give up the idea that you are not realized, that you are suffering, that you are unwise, all the things that you think about yourself in connection with your life which makes you ask that question.” Perhaps we can begin that way, that if we think of ourselves in a variety of ways as mortal creatures, we may live in the field of mortality and not be aware of anything else, but if we begin to have an intuitive perception of our own eternal being, then we would be different.

Recognizing that deep within us is that which is immortal, that the totality of life is present inside, the question arises, what we can do to fully become aware of it? A story is told about the Lord Buddha, who it is said was staying in a potter’s shed, where he found a young monk. The Lord Buddha gave him a discourse which was illuminating. He said: “The way to that which is undying and real is by not clinging to impermanent things.”

So think carefully over what is impermanent and what is unchanging, real. Contemplate this, and then turn towards

the eternal, the immortal, and the infinite. Meditate upon it, and as we meditate we will also find subtly arising within our consciousness formulations about the immortal and the infinite — they are not real. We may not even recognize that these are mental formulations.

So when we realize that, then we stop contemplating the impermanent, the eternal, and the immortal. There is no thinking, no craving for immortality, no attachment to the transient, the mind is not tethered to anything, then it may get assimilated to that which always *is*, and that is Nirvana. It is said that Nirvana, which has often been equated with immortality, cannot be reached. No one can say, “I will go to Nirvana”, and get there.

Nirvana literally means extinguishing all desires, cravings, lust, even for the highest of things. But we cannot extinguish it. Therefore the advice is given: “Stop feeding it with fuel.” Then Nirvana *is*, immortality *is*. If all our attachments to impermanent things, to unreal things, to the moods and fancies which arise in us, to the ideas which appear petty or grand, if all that ceases, then there is something else.

When we seek the things of the world, which come and go, and we are distracted trying to see whether this flower is better than that one, running here and there, this is distraction, it is stress. When we do that we are as if dead. Death then sweeps away that person, because, as we said, to live is to be aware, and to die is to be unaware.

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When we are plucking the flowers of worldliness we are all dead, because we are so absorbed in the self-centered activity that we are not sensitive or alert to the beauty of existence or its mystery. Therefore the Buddha said: "Mindfulness is the way to immortality." Mindfulness means being fully aware, alert, giving attention to everything that happens, both outside and inside, responsiveness. The absence of mindfulness, or attention, is death.

So this knowledge that the self is One is a sort of awareness which makes the consciousness blend with the boundless, universal consciousness which can never come to an end. Immortality is not something which pertains to the world of form. It is a state of consciousness which nothing can touch, which is unpolluted, invulnerable. To come to that state of consciousness it is necessary constantly to negate mindfully all attachment to impermanent things.

There is a tale about someone who is said to be immortal, who took the body of a crow — what significance it has you may try to guess — but this person was immortal, and he made a number of statements to show why nothing could afflict him inwardly or outwardly. He was in a state of perfect health morally, spiritually, and in every way. Death could not come near him, he said, because "I have no sense of possession or attachment." When we do, the mind then

gets clogged up with these images which are all of passing things. My mind does not say: "I've got this now and I will reach to that in the future."

We are told that in the minds and perceptions of all enlightened people, past, present, and future exist simultaneously. One may wonder how, but mystics have had experience of that, of a "now" in which everything *is*. Then, finally, this immortal, perhaps mythical being, says: "My mind neither praises nor condemns, it does not rejoice over pleasant things nor does it grieve over the unpleasant. It just *is*, it watches, it is fully aware of all that happens in the shadow world. Being aware is to be happy, to be aware of the vast universe, with its immense depths, the subtle realms of which we have no concept at all, is to be happy, and it is tranquil, free of illusion, and it is bliss. Immortality, or Nirvana, is supreme bliss.

If we proceed from the unreality, imagining that passing things are very real and important, we may cross the boundary to the real. If we proceed from the darkness of imagining that everything is separate, because this perishable body is separate, if we free ourselves of this illusion, we may find Light, and thereby we go from mortality to immortality in our inner being. So the body is born and it dies, but the consciousness, which is free, lives forever, it is immortal. ✧

The Gospel According to St John — I

RAGHAVAN N. IYER

Let us beware of creating a darkness at noonday for ourselves by gazing, so to say, direct at the sun . . . , as though we could hope to attain adequate vision and perception of Wisdom with mortal eyes. It will be the safer course to turn our gaze on an image of the object of our quest.

“The Athenian Stranger”

Arethusa, vol. 30, no. 1 (Winter 1997), pp. 75-102

EVERY year more than three hundred and fifty Catholic and Protestant sects observe Easter Sunday, celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God, who called himself the Son of Man. So too do the Russian and Greek Orthodox churches, but on a separate calendar. Such is the schism between East and West within Christendom regarding this day, which always falls on the ancient Sabbath, once consecrated to the Invisible Sun, the sole source of all life, light, and energy.

If we wish to understand the permanent possibility of spiritual resurrection taught by the Man of Sorrows, we must come to see both the man and his teaching from the pristine perspective of *brahma vach*, the timeless oral utterance behind and beyond all religions, philosophies, and sciences throughout the long history of mankind.

The Gospel According to St John is the only canonical gospel with a metaphysical instead of historical preamble. We are referred to that which was in the beginning. In the New English Bible, the recent revision of the authorized version produced for the court of King James, we are told: “Before all things were made was the Word.” In the immemorial, majestic, and poetic English of the King James version: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This is a *bija sutra*, a seminal maxim, marking the inception of the first of twenty-one chapters of the gospel, and conveying the sum and substance of the message of Jesus.

John, according to Josephus, was at one time an Essene and his account accords closely with the Qumran Manual of Discipline. The gospel attributed to

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John derives from the same oral tradition as the Synoptics, but it shows strong connections with the Pauline epistles as well as with the Jewish apocalyptic tradition. It is much more a mystical treatise than a biographical narrative.

The Godhead is *unthinkable* and *unspeakable*, extending boundlessly beyond the range and reach of thought. There is no supreme Father figure in the universe. In the beginning was the Word, the Verbum, the *śabdabrahman*, the eternal radiance that is like a veil upon the attributeless Absolute. If all things derive, as St John explains, from that One Source, then all beings and all the sons of men are forever included.

Metaphysically, every human being has more than one father, though on the physical plane each has only one. Over ten thousand years, everyone has had more ancestors than there are souls presently incarnated on Earth. Each one participates in the ancestry of all mankind. While always true, this is more evident in a nation with mixed ancestries. Therefore it is appropriate here that we think of him who preached before Jesus, Buddha, who taught that we ask not of a man's descent but of his conduct. "By their fruits they shall be known", say the gospels.

There is another meaning of the "Father" which is relevant to the opportunity open to every human being to take a decision to devote his or her entire life to the service of the human family. The ancient Jews held that from the illimitable *Ain-Soph* there came a reflec-

tion, which could never be more than a partial participation in that illimitable light which transcends manifestation. This reflection exists in the world as archetypal humanity — Adam Kadmon.

Every human being belongs to one single humanity, and that collectivity stands in relation to the *Ain-Soph* as any one human being to his or her own father. It is no wonder that Pythagoras — *Pitar Guru*, "father and teacher", as he was known among the ancient Hindus — came to Krotona to sound the keynote of a long cycle now being reaffirmed for an equally long period in the future. He taught his disciples to honour their father and their mother, and to take a sacred oath to the Holy Fathers of the human race, the "Ancestors of the Arhats".

We are told in the fourth Stanza of *Dzyan* that the Fathers are the Sons of Fire, descended from a primordial host of Logoi. They are self-existing rays streaming forth from a single, central, universal Mahatic fire which is within the cosmic egg, just as differentiated matter is outside and around it. There are seven sub-divisions within Mahat — the cosmic mind, as it was called by the Greeks — as well as seven dimensions of matter outside the egg, giving a total of fourteen planes, fourteen worlds.

Where we are told by John that Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many mansions", H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) states that this refers to the seven mansions of the central Logos, supremely revered in all religions as the Solar Creative Fire. Any human being who has a true wake-

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fulness and thereby a sincere spirit of obeisance to the divine demiurgic intelligence in the universe, of which he is a trustee even while encased within the lethargic carcass of matter, can show that he is a man to the extent to which he exhibits divine manliness through profound gratitude, a constant recognition and continual awareness of the One Source.

All the great Teachers of humanity point to a single source beyond themselves. Many are called but few are chosen by self-election. Spiritual Teachers always point upwards for each and every man and woman alive, not for just a few. They work not only in the visible realm for those immediately before them, but, as John reminds us, they come from above and work for all. They continually think of and love every being that lives and breathes, mirroring “the One that breathes breathless” in ceaseless contemplation, overbrooding the Golden Egg of the universe, the *hiranyagarbha*.

Such beautiful ideas enshrined in magnificent myths are provocative to the ratiocinative mind and suggestive to the latent divine discernment of *buddhic* intuition. The only way anyone can come closer to the Father in Heaven, let alone come closer to him on Earth who is as He is in Heaven, is by that light to which John refers in the first chapter of the Gospel. It is the light that lighteth every man who cometh into the world, which the darkness comprehendeth not. Human beings are involved in the darkness of illusion, of self-forgetfulness, and

forgetfulness of their divine ancestry.

The whole of humanity may be regarded as a garden of gods, but all men and women are fallen angels or gods tarnished by forgetfulness of their true eternal and universal mission. Every man or woman is born for a purpose. Every person has a divine destiny. Every individual has a unique contribution to make, to enrich the lives of others, but no one can say what this is for anyone else. Each one has to find it, first by arousing and kindling and then by sustaining and nourishing the little lamp within the heart. There alone may be lit the true Akashic fire upon the altar in the hidden temple of the God which lives and breathes within.

This is the sacred fire of true awareness which enables a man to come closer to the one universal divine consciousness which, in its very brooding upon manifestation, is the father-spirit. In the realm of matter it may be compared to the wind that bloweth where it listeth. Any human being could become a self-conscious and living instrument of that universal divine consciousness of which he, as much as every other man or woman, is an effulgent ray.

This view of man is totally different from that which has, alas, been preached in the name of Jesus. Origen spoke of the constant crucifixion of Jesus, declaring that there is not a day on Earth when he is not reviled. But equally there is not a time when others do not speak of him with awe. He came with a divine protection provided by a secret bond

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which he never revealed except by indirect intonation. Whenever the Logos becomes flesh, there is sacred testimony to the Great Sacrifice and the Great Renunciation — of all Avatars, all Divine Incarnations.

This Brotherhood of Blessed Teachers is ever behind every attempt to enlighten human minds, to summon the latent love in human hearts for all humanity, to fan the sparks of true compassion in human beings into the fires of Initiation. The mark of the Avatar is that in him the Paraclete, the Spirit of Eternal Truth, manifests so that even the blind may see, the deaf may hear, the lame may walk, the unregenerate may gain confidence in the possibility and the promise of Self-redemption.

In one of the most beautiful passages penned on this subject, the profound essay entitled “The Roots of Ritualism in Church and Masonry”, published in 1889, HPB declared:

Most of us believe in the survival of the Spiritual Ego, in Planetary Spirits and *Nirmanakayas*, those great Adepts of the past ages, who, renouncing their right to Nirvana, remain in our spheres of being, not as “spirits” but as complete spiritual human Beings. Save their corporeal, visible envelope, which they leave behind, they remain as they were, in order to help poor humanity, as far as can be done without sinning against Karmic Law. This is the “Great Renunciation”, indeed; an incessant, conscious self-sacrifice throughout eons and ages till that day when the eyes of blind mankind will open and, instead of the few, *all* will see the universal truth.

These Beings may well be regarded as God and Gods — if they would but allow the fire in our hearts, at the thought of that purest of all sacrifices, to be fanned into the flame of adoration, or the smallest altar in their honour. But they will not. Verily, “the secret heart is fair Devotion’s (only) temple”, and any other, in this case, would be no better than profane ostentation.

Let a man be without external show such as the Pharisees favoured, without inscriptions such as the Scribes specialized in, and without arrogant and ignorant self-destructive denial such as that of the Sadducees. Such a man, whether he be of any religion or none, of whatever race or nation or creed, once he recognizes the existence of a Fraternity of Divine Beings, a Brotherhood of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Christs, an Invisible Church (in St Augustine’s phrase) of living human beings ever ready to help any honest and sincere seeker, he will thereafter cherish the discovery with-in himself. He will guard it with great reticence and grateful reverence, scarcely speaking of his feeling to strangers or even to friends.

When he can do this and maintain it, and above all, as John says in the Gospel, be true to it and live by it, then he may make it for himself, as Jesus taught, the way, the truth, and the light. While he may not be self-manifested as the Logos came to be through Jesus — the Son of God become the Son of Man — he could still sustain and protect himself in times of trial. No man dare ask

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for more. No man could do with less.

Jesus knew that his own time of trial had come — the time for the consummation of his vision — on the Day of Passover. Philo Judaeus, who was an Aquarian in the Age of Pisces, gave an intellectual interpretation to what other men saw literally, pointing out that the spiritual passover had to do with passing over earthly passions. Jesus, when he knew the hour had come for the completion of his work and the glorification of his father to whom he ever clung, withdrew with the few into the Garden of Gethsemane.

He did not choose them, he said. They chose him. He withdrew with them and there they all used the time for true prayer to the God within. Jesus had taught, “Go into thy closet and pray to thy father who is in secret”, and that “The Kingdom of God is within you”. This was the mode of prayer which he revealed and exemplified to those who were ready for initiation into the Mysteries. Many tried but only few stayed with it.

Even among those few there was a Peter, who would thrice deny Jesus. There was the traitor, Judas, who had already left the last supper that evening, having been told, “That thou doest, do quickly”. Some among the faithful spent their time in purification. Were they, at that point, engaged in self-purification for their own benefit? What had Jesus taught them? Could one man separate himself from any other? He had told those who wanted to stone the adulteress, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone”.

He had told them not to judge anyone else, but to wait for true judgment. Because they had received a sublime privilege, about which other men subsequently argued for centuries and produced myriad heresies and sects, in their case the judgment involved their compassionate concern to do the sacred Work of the Father for the sake of all. The Garden of Gethsemane is always here. It is a place very different from the Wailing Wall where people gnash their teeth and weep for themselves or their tribal ancestors. The Garden of Gethsemane is wherever on Earth men and women want to cleanse themselves for the sake of being more humane in their relations with others.

Nor was the crucifixion only true of Jesus and those two thieves, one of whom wanted to have a miracle on his behalf while the other accepted the justice of the law of the day, receiving punishment for offenses that he acknowledged openly. Every man participates in that crucifixion. This much may be learnt from the great mystics and inspired poets across two thousand years. Christos is being daily, hourly, every moment crucified within the cross of every human being. There are too few on Earth who are living up to the highest possibility of god-like wisdom, love, and compassion, let alone who can say that in them the spirit of Truth, the Paraclete, manifests.

Who has the courage to chase the money-changers of petty thoughts and paltry desires from the Temple of the universal Spirit, not through hatred of the money-changers, but through a love

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in his heart for the Restoration of the Temple? Who has the courage to say openly what all men recognize inwardly when convenient, or when drunk, or when among friends whom they think they trust? Who is truly a man? How many men are there heroically suffering? Not only do we know that God is not mocked and that as we sow, so shall we reap, but we also realize that the Garden of Gethsemane is difficult to reach. Nonetheless, it may be sought by any and every person who wants to avoid the dire tragedy of self-annihilation.

Indeed, there are many such people all around who barely survive from day to day because of their own self-hatred, self-contempt and despair, and who tremble on the brink of moral death. We live in terribly tragic times, and therefore there is no one who cannot afford to take a little pause for the sake of making the burden of one's presence easier for one's spouse, children, or neighbours. Each needs a time of reexamination, a time for true repentance, a time for Christ-like resolve. The Garden of Gethsemane is present wherever there is genuineness, determination, and honesty.

Above all, it is where there is the joyous recognition that, quite apart from yesterday and tomorrow, right now a person can create so strong a current of thought that it radically affects the future. He could begin now, and acquire in time a self-sustaining momentum. But this cannot be done without overcoming the karmic gravity of all the self-destructive murders of human beings that he has participated

in on the plane of thought, on the plane of feeling, especially on the plane of words, and also, indirectly, on the plane of outward action.

If the Garden of Gethsemane did not exist, no persecuting Saul could ever become a Paul. Such is the great hope and the glad tiding. As Origen said, Saul had to be killed before Paul could be born. St Francis, who was a simple crusader, had to die before the Saint of Assisi could be born. Because all men have free will, no man can transform himself without honest and sincere effort. Hence, after setting out the nature of the Gods, the Fathers of the human race, HPB spoke of the conditions of probation of incarnated souls seeking resurrection:

. . . every true Theosophist holds that the divine HIGHER SELF of every mortal man is of the same essence as the essence of these Gods. Being, moreover, endowed with free will, hence having, more than they, responsibility, we regard the incarnated EGO as far superior to, if not more divine than, any spiritual INTELLIGENCE *still awaiting incarnation*. Philosophically, the reason for this is obvious, and every metaphysician of the Eastern school will understand it. The incarnated EGO has odds against it which do not exist in the case of a pure divine Essence unconnected with matter; the latter has no personal merit, whereas the former is on his way to final perfection through the trials of existence, of pain and suffering.

It is up to each one to decide whether to make this suffering constructive, these

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trials meaningful, these tribulations a golden opportunity for self-transformation and spiritual resurrection.

If this decision is not made voluntarily during life, it is thrust upon each ego at death. Every human being has to pass at the moment of death, according to the wisdom of the ancients, to a purgatorial condition in which there is a separation of the immortal individuality. It is like a light which is imprisoned during waking life, a life which is a form of sleep within the serpent coils of matter. This god within is clouded over by the fog of fear, superstition, and confusion, and all but the pure in heart obscure the inner light by their demonic

deceits and their ignorant denial of the true heart.

Every human being needs to cast out this shadow, just as he would throw away an old garment, says Krishna, or just as he would dump into a junkyard an utterly unredeemable vehicle. Any and every human being has to do the same on the psychological plane. Each is in the same position. He has to discard the remnants, but the period for this varies according to each person. This involves what is called “the mathematics of the soul”. Figures are given to those with ears to hear, and there is a great deal of detailed application to be made.

(To be continued)

Appearances do not bind, but attachments do. So, Naropa, cut off the attachments.

Longchen Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*

Hamsa: The Great Bird

KIRK GRADIN

Saith the Great Law: “In order to become the KNOWER OF ALL SELF, thou hast first of SELF to be the knower”. To reach the knowledge of that SELF, thou hast to give up Self to Non-Self, Being to Non-Being, and then thou canst repose between the wings of the GREAT BIRD. Aye, sweet is rest between the wings of that which is not born, nor dies, but is the AUM throughout eternal ages.

(The Voice of the Silence, I.19)

In 1952 ascent to the peak of Mount Everest had never been achieved despite repeated attempts by large elite teams of the best known climbers. Besides the vicious weather, treacherous ice falls, and fatal crevasses, the last 2,000 feet of elevation gain occurs in what mountaineers call the “death zone”, where there is insufficient oxygen for the human body to function for extended periods. In 1953 however, another British expedition was approved with over 400 people, including 362 porters, 30 sherpas, and 10,000 pounds of baggage. On 29 May, after three months on the mountain and one failed attempt to summit, Sir

Edmund Hillary and a Nepalese sherpa, Tenzing Norgay, made the first ever successful summit.

On the semi-final leg of their climb, they were assisted by George Lowe, a New Zealand mountaineer who claimed to have seen bar-headed geese (*Anser Indicus*) sailing over the summit. At the time, this was thought physiologically impossible for birds of any type and more than a mile higher than any other known bird had flown. Only in the last fifty years, with use of radio transmitters and satellites, researchers have verified the twice-yearly migrations of this remarkable species. Bar-headed geese have now been scientifically documented as ascending in unbroken flight from sea level to heights over 23,000 feet in just a single seven-hour nighttime period to arrive at nesting grounds amidst the pristine lakes of the Himalayan plateau.

The Sanskrit word *hamsa* can mean swan or goose. This suggests that modern science has now confirmed tales found in the Puranas and ancient Indian epics, where stories of such migratory patterns of the *hamsa* were repeatedly described.

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In one of the most iconic myths of the *Ramayana*, seven rishis took the form of swans in order to descend from Heaven to Lake Mansarovara to visit the locale where the Vedas were written. Lake Mansarovara sits at the foot of Mount Kailash in Tibet, believed to be the abode of Shiva by the Hindus. It is also known as Mount Meru, a sacred place of pilgrimage for Buddhists and Jains as well.

H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) taught that in certain Puranas the term “*rshi*” is a veiled reference to the seven Dhyanis, the primordial emanations of Mahat, the Cosmic Mind, unfolding as centers of karmic and cosmic law and eventually as beings of avataric descent, as well as human principles in microcosmic evolution. In this context the symbol of the swans in the *Ramayana* may be likened to that of the winged globe that crowns the caduceus, the perfected Adept or Bodhisattva who willingly and periodically descends through prototypical hierarchies in order to guide and instruct humanity, to re-establish *dharma*, and aid the forward spiritual progress of evolution.

In the West, it is flocks of Tundra swans which make a twice yearly 4,000 mile round trip from the east and west coasts of North America (including California) into remote regions of the Arctic for nesting, giving birth, and raising their young. Flying in V formation they are known to migrate at heights of over 20,000 feet. Besides being a symbol of the voluntary participation of wise beings in collective rebirth, reincarnation, and cyclic return, many aspects of

such trips display remarkable instinctual knowledge and a highly refined harmonic attunement to the rhythms and signals of Nature. By contrast, for six weeks out of each year while molting, swans along with all other water birds, are flightless. During the molting period, all its feathers are shed and regrown, another symbol of death and rebirth, yearly self-renewal, and self-regeneration.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, analogy and correspondence are said to be the surest guides to the occult teaching. This is because the principle of unity pervades Nature, because every physical particle and every living form “corresponds to and depends on its higher *noumenon*” — the higher Being or universal principle “to whose essence it belongs”.¹ *As above, so below*. The divine unity differentiates in seven primary stages from the formless into form, from the purely spiritual to the archetypal-akashic, to the psychomental to the astral-physical, “the whole of Nature evolving on parallel lines”.

This is why every microcosmic form, from the smallest infusoria, to the human constitution, to the solar system, is analogous to the whole kosmos. The whole is mirrored in every part. “The dewdrop and the star shine sisterly, Globing together in the common work.”² In addition, this polarity between the spiritual above and the material below is analogous to the polarity between air and water. Aquatic birds such as the swan, the ibis, the goose, and the pelican, because they inhabit both sky and water, bridge and transcend this same polarity. This is one reason why

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these magnificent creatures have figured so prominently in many mythological traditions and have been protected and revered as sacred living symbols of divine life, of Bodhi embodied.³

Modern students of Theosophy have had seemingly chance encounters with aquatic birds appearing at key moments and under varied circumstances indicative of the living presence of divine wisdom. In one case, after a particularly prolonged and deep study of volume one of *The Secret Doctrine*, a young man stepped out onto a second-floor balcony just as an unusually large seagull flew by a few feet overhead. Perhaps due to the *buddhic* apprehension awakened by study, in a single flap of the wings the student saw the entire cosmological teaching reflected.

In chapter six of *Entering into the Middle Way*, Chandrakirti describes the swan as a symbol of the *Bodhisattva*, the synthesis of relative and ultimate *bodhi-chitta*, the timebound and the timeless aspects of universal altruism and compassion:

And like the king of swans, ahead of lesser
birds they soar,
On broad white wings of relative and
ultimate full spread.
And on the strength of virtue's mighty wind
they fly
To gain the far and supreme shore, the
oceanic qualities of Victory.⁴

Similarly, in ancient Russian mythology, the deity *Tangri Kara Kan* is a pure white goose that flies constantly

over an endless expanse of water and is lord of the three realms of air, water, and land. In Egyptian mythology *Geb* is a creative deity and father of the Osirian gods, who wears the goose as a crown and who, along with *Nut*, the goddess of the sky, lays the golden egg which becomes the sun. The deific goose both transcends and radiates all. As a symbol of purity, creative fecundity, and universal luminous potency, the meaning of the great bird is in this way intimately associated with another natural symbol which HPB calls “the mystery of mysteries”, that of the egg. All birds are, of course, egg born.

The Egg was incorporated as a sacred sign in the cosmogony of every people on the Earth, and was revered both on account of its form and its inner mystery. From the earliest mental conceptions of man, it was known as that which represented most successfully the origin and secret of being. The gradual development of the imperceptible germ within the closed shell; the inward working, without any apparent outward interference of force, which from a latent *nothing* produced an active *something*, needing nought save heat; and which, having gradually evolved into a concrete, living creature, broke its shell, appearing to the outward senses of all a self-generated, and self-created being — must have been a standing miracle from the beginning.

(*The Secret Doctrine*, i, 359)

An immaculate white swan asleep on the water in an egg-like shape, with its long neck curled up upon its back and its head near the tail, reminds us also of the

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ouroboros, a serpent swallowing its own tail⁵, a symbol of spiritual seership, of divine knowledge, of the law of eternal periodicity and karma in which the end is rooted in the beginning, the effect in the cause.

In the Hindu pantheon, the white *hamsa* is famously depicted as the *vāhan*, or vehicle of *Brahmā*, who is also known as *Hiranyagarbha*, the cosmic golden egg, or womb, from which all else arises. But HPB points out an exoteric error here. *Kālahamsa* as the white swan, she says, is not the vehicle of *Brahmā*, but is *Brahmā* itself, the seven-fold creative potency unfolding from seven *laya* centers, becoming the totality of existence manifesting through seven Rays in seven great Rounds. The white swan is the periodic manifestation of the black swan, “Darkness itself, the unknowable Absolute”⁶. At the same time, the black *Kālahamsa* is also sevenfold, composed of seven “eternities”⁷.

Some Oriental mystics locate seven planes of being, the seven spiritual *lokas* or worlds within the body of *Kāla Hamsa*, the Swan out of Time and Space, convertible into the Swan *in* Time, when it becomes *Brahmā* instead of Brahman (neuter).

(*The Voice of the Silence*, note 16)

The Great Bird of Life is the primordial and sacred bridge between *kāla* and *khandakāla*, the unconditionally Timeless and conditioned Time. The Ineffable Light hidden in Divine Darkness in boundless space becomes, in the dawn of differen-

tiation, the rainbow bridge which displays the one colourless Light of the Spiritual Sun in its beatific dance with seven veils, suggesting the seven primordial rays in splendid unison as the *fons et origo* of the dazzling and incalculable multiplicity of manifestation.⁸

The one white light in passing through a triadic prism becomes the seven colors of the rainbow. Reflected in the Hindu tradition, the white swan is also the *vāhan* of a spectrum of other major deities such as Sarasvati, the goddess of music and art, knowledge, wisdom, and learning; Viśvakarman, the divine architect and builder of the cosmos; and Gayatri, the personification of the *Gayatri* mantram, the hymn to the spiritual sun. These associations are not only found in the earliest known Vedas and Indian epics but are core themes elaborated in at least three Upanishads: the *Hamsa*, *Paramahamsa* and *Nādabindu Upanishad*.

In the *Hamsa Upanishad*, we find a short discourse between the Hindu sage Gautama and the divine Sanatkumara, “knower of all *dharmas*”, who offers a distillation of Vedic wisdom. Here, the unfoldment of knowledge of the bird known as *hamsa* is given as the allegorical equivalent of the unfoldment of spiritual Self-knowledge, also referred to as *Brahma-Vidya*, the spiritual sun, “more resplendent than tens of millions of suns and by whom all this world is pervaded”.

At our birth it enters into us, the migratory bird!

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like the fire, invisibly present in the wood,
like the oil hidden in the sesame seed,
it dwells in the deepest depth of us:
to know that (the bird) is to free oneself
from death.

(*Hamsa Upanishad*)

The text encourages the contemplation of *hamsa* as “the *Ātman* in the heart” which has universal *buddhi* as its vehicle. It also describes how proper and repeated meditation upon the *Gayatri* allows one to apprehend and transcend all other lesser states of consciousness and levels of identity. The highest state of union with the AUM is called union with *Nāda*, “the unstruck sound”.⁹ In the *Hamsa Upanishad* this is *paramahamsa*, the supreme or ultimate swan. This links up with the division of the term *hamsa* as composed of two words: *Aham* and *sa*. *Aham* is “I am” or “thou art”, and *sa*, meaning “That”; “Thou art THAT” being one of the quintessential teachings of the Upanishads.

In this alone is contained the universal mystery, the doctrine of the identity of man’s essence with god-essence, for him who understands the language of wisdom. . . . The same word may be read “Kāl-aham-sa”, or “I am I”, in the eternity of Time . . .”

(*The Secret Doctrine*, i, 78)

The relation between the *pranava*, or the Word in the form of AUM, and the symbol of the swan is given additional elaboration in the *Nādabindu Upanishad* and referenced in *The Voice of the Silence*.

“The syllable A is . . . its right wing, U its left, M its tail, and the *ardha-mātra* (the half syllable) is said to be its head.”¹⁰

As an evocation of the hidden divine sun, the source of universal consciousness and all benevolent, isotropic force, the *mantram* is only to be invoked on behalf of the whole and of universal enlightenment. Otherwise it will reverse. William Quan Judge taught that it represents that “undercurrent of thought which ought to be carried on by all aspirants even while engaged in the necessary duties of life”. If properly sustained, he wrote, the practice would lead to “a knowledge of the Secret Doctrine”.¹¹

In Indian classical music, a *mātra* is a beat, the smallest sub-unit of a rhythmic structure. In the Vedic tradition, each type of *mātra* corresponds to a deity and the *ardha-mātra*, or half-beat is correlated with Varuna. Varuna is one of the oldest Vedic deities and composed of many layers of meaning. Varuna is “the Universal encompasser . . . SPACE”¹², origin of both the seven rivers of the sky, meaning “the descending creative gods” and the seven rivers of the earth, meaning “the seven root races”. Also, “Varuna [is] the chief of the Lords-Dhyanis, or Devas,” wrote HPB, who “imparts the mysteries”.¹³

Given all this, other physical characteristics and geometric features of the swan become highly suggestive. For example, when in flight and viewed from above or below, the major parts of the swan’s visible anatomy — the head and two feet, the tail and two wings — form

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interlaced triangles. Mahatma KH calls the interlaced triangles the *yantra* of 5th race humanity and “the squaring of the circle”.¹⁴ As a central feature of the Theo-sophical seal, it points to the countless seven-fold sub-divisions found in the philosophy as a key to understanding the logic wisdom pervading all Nature.

The *Hamsa Upanishad* names the seven chakras, the psycho-spiritual centers of the human constitution, from the *mulādhāra* at the base of the spine to the *brahmarandhra* at the top of the head, as also occurring within the swan. This is reinforced by the fact that the Mute Swan and some geese species have a basal knob on top of the beak between the two eyes. Correlating to the *bindu*, the dot above the crescent in the ideogram of the AUM, it metapsychologically relates to “the capacity to bring the threefold AUM into the realm of time”.¹⁵ When fully active it awakens the *buddhic* capacity for direct cognition of archetypal essences, the *amṛta* which transforms all actions in the realm of daily dharma into spiritual nourishment for all beings, visible and invisible.

Recent scientific studies suggest that many migratory birds possess visual capacities far beyond those found in humans, extending at least into electromagnetic fields and ultraviolet portions of the spectrum. But what the bird actually sees or experiences in consciousness, while known to the Adept, will never be measured by technological instruments.

As the AUM, the endlessly soaring

visionary swan resounds the logic keynote linking all humanities of all *manvantaras* and all intervening periods of rest and reunion into one family, the boundless Space, ceaseless Motion, and timeless Duration¹⁶ of the One Life. When seen in this way, it is a single intonation experienced in silent articulation as the OM.

OM is the central thread of the spiritual path and of the quintessential Hermetic current. Celebration of hymns of praise to the OM is the axis around which the entire work of the Great Lodge of Mahatmas turns. . . . One should imagine this as a constant, omnipresent sounding, capable of being consciously sounded within the consecrated temple of the human form. One should imagine it superimposed on all other sounds, all other vibrations, all other thoughts and feelings. To do so is to cooperate consciously with the great cosmic sounding of the One Resonance, but within the sphere and temple of one’s own invisible vestures. OM is the Supreme Spirit, *Ishvara*, the Most High.¹⁷

In any given period of manifestation, the OM becomes the AUM, the one-in-three Tetraktys, “Unity, or the ‘One’, under four different aspects.”¹⁸, also corresponding to the fourfold *Vach*¹⁹. The Word is the keynote of *fohatic* descent into the seven, from the seven into the seven-times-seven, synthesized in the Pythagorean decade. From the kaleidoscopic diversity of the manifold, it is the ever-sounding spiritual will, the divine Eros in every human heart, which

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alone can accomplish the upward arc: the terrible trial, fiery self-transformation, and alchemical victory of self-conscious return, of universal enlightenment. It alone can embrace the whole of humanity while wholly blessing and awakening every invisible life atom of all the lower kingdoms of Nature, transforming and preparing them for the next great cycle.

The Tetraktys links the spiritual keynote of the dawn of cosmic manifestation with the dawn of our solar *manvantaric* cycle, the dawning of the human mind at the midpoint of our current Fourth Round and all other dawns. It is the keynote of each century, each new year, and the perpetual dawn circling the globe each day — binding all in a mystic marriage. It is the keynote resounded by all babies at birth and by all great teachers who are “the Word made Flesh”. In the last twenty-five years of each century, the mystic swan of *Theosophia* descends again, and a renewed effort is made by the Mahatmas to lift all monads, to lay the golden foundation stone that will reestablish the Mystery School — the basis of the re-

generated civilizations of the future.²⁰

And while an underlying keynote of continuity is essential to grasping the logic archetypal essence, each cycle, each human being, each descending migration of the swan makes its unique contribution to the spiraling motion of the Great Wheel. The Spirit never simply repeats itself. It draws afresh from the boundless, pristine waters of universal wisdom in order to accommodate the needs of the race and the age, the ever-turning zodiacal clock.

Never again will Krishna, Zarathustra, or Jesus come back as persons recognizable as Krishna, Zarathustra, or Jesus, for the movement of the spirit is non-repetitive, invariably unique in every manifestation of its single essence. The Teacher of today will draw afresh from the timeless spring of truth and he will fill a new cup fashioned by the need of the new world age. Whoso has the heart to lift the cup to his burning lips will be healed and, then only, live. . . . Great Teachers inspire and transform their devotees by the influence of their living presence. ✧

(Phiroz Mehta, *The Heart of Religion*, p. 7)

Footnotes

1. *The Secret Doctrine*, I, 218, fn.
2. *The Light of Asia*, Sir Edwin Arnold, Book the Sixth.
3. *The Secret Doctrine*, I, 362 “. . . the nearer esoteric truth underlying these popular myths is, that Hermes . . . watched under the form of that bird over the Egyptians, and taught them the occult arts and sciences. This means simply that the *ibis religiosa* had and has ‘magical’ properties in common with many other birds, the albatross pre-

eminently, and the mythical white swan, the swan of Eternity or Time, the KALAHANSA.”

4. *Introduction to the Middle Way*, Chandrakirti’s *Madhyamakāvataṛa*, Padmakara Translation Group, Shambala 2004, verse 99, p. 226.

5. *The Secret Doctrine*, ii, 505: “In the [Kabala . . . the creative Force ‘makes . . . spiral lines of creation *in the shape of a Serpent*.’ It ‘holds its tail in its mouth’, because it is the symbol of endless eternity and of cyclic periods. Its meanings, however, would require a volume”

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6. *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge*, p. 119.

7. *The Voice of the Silence*, I, note 11; “Eternity with the Orientals has quite another signification than it has with us [Europeans]. It stands generally for the 100 years, or ‘age’ of Brahmā, the duration of a Kalpa, or a period of 4,320,000,000 years.

The Secret Doctrine, I, 36: “These ‘Eternities’ belong to the most secret calculations, in which, in order to arrive at the true total, every figure must be 7^x (7 to the power of x); x varying according to the nature of the cycle in the subjective or real world. . .”

8. *The Gupta Vidya II*, “Kalahansa and Kalachakra” by R. N. Iyer, p. 397.

9. *The Voice of the Silence*, I, note 2: The “Soundless Voice”, or the “Voice of the Silence”, literally . . . “Voice in the Spiritual Sound”.

10. *Ibid.*, note 10.

11. See W. Q. Judge’s article titled “AUM!”, first published in *Path* magazine, April 1886, under the pseudonym “Hadji-Erinn”.

12. *The Secret Doctrine*, ii, 268.

13. *Ibid.*, ii, 606.

14. *The Mahatma Letters*, # 59 [Chron. Ed., Letter No. 111, p. 379].

15. *The Gupta Vidya II*, “Kalahansa and Kalachakra” by R. N. Iyer, p. 406.

16. *The Secret Doctrine*, I, 43: “The appearance

and disappearance of the Universe are pictured as an outbreathing and inbreathing of “the Great Breath”, which is eternal, and which, being Motion, is one of the three aspects of the Absolute — Abstract Space and Duration being the other two.”

17. *The Gupta Vidya I*, “Dateless and Deathless” by R. N. Iyer, p. 104.

18. *Theosophical Glossary*, p. 326.

19. *The Secret Doctrine*, i, 137–8: “. . . the Hindu Vāch, the goddess of Speech, or of the Word. For Vāch — the daughter and the female portion, as is stated, of Brahmā, one ‘generated by the gods’ — is, in company with Kwan-Yin, with Isis . . . and other goddesses, the female *Logos*, so to speak, the goddess of the *active* forces in Nature, the Word, Voice or Sound, and Speech. . . . Mother Nature. . . . Our old writers said that *Vāch* is of four kinds (see *Ṛg Veda* and the *Upanishads*). *Vaikhari-Vāch* is what we utter. Every kind of *Vaikhari-Vāch* exists in its *Madhyamā*, further in its *Paśyanti*, and ultimately in its *Parā* form. The reason why this *Pranava* is called *Vāch* is this, that these four principles of the great Cosmos correspond to these four forms of *Vāch*.”

20. See *The Key to Theosophy*, H. P. Blavatsky, p. 306–7 “. . . during the last quarter of . . . each century . . . one or more persons have appeared in the world as their [the Masters’] agents, and a greater or less amount of occult knowledge and teaching has been given out.”

The Jivatma is called in our scriptures Hamsa, a bird which is known to possess the peculiar power of separating off pure milk from a mixture of milk and water, and Jivatma is called a Hamsa, because it, like the bird of the name, has the power of discriminating the real from the unreal in samsara, which is a combination of both.

Bhavani Shankar, *The Doctrine of the Bhagavad Gita*

The Four Gods of Christianity — II

VICENTE HAO CHIN JR

3. The God of Theologians

The teachings of the Old and the New Testaments are taken as revelations, that is, the disclosure of truths by a supernatural authority or God. To adherents, they are the unquestionable bedrock of any subsequent doctrines or articles of faith. This should make things simple, except that humans have to use reason to understand and analyze such revelations. And this is where pieces of the puzzle do not interlock smoothly with one another.

Reason is an inherent faculty of human beings. It is the primary benchmark by which we assess the truth of what we perceive. Belief systems that defy rationality immediately become suspect. This capacity gave rise to theologians who attempted to use reason to justify Christian doctrines. They are only partially successful because, by being rational and consistent, they tend to hold positions that may have to deny the traditional views of God. This is not acceptable to established Churches. In mixing revelation and reason, theologians sometimes have to warp reason to fit into the mould of pre-existing doctrines. When they do not, they become heretics, agnostics, or atheists.

Christian theologians have generally arrived at God-concepts differently from the traditionalists who rely on biblical statements. To theologians, for example, the term “God” progressively ceased to refer to a human-like being with weaknesses like anger, jealousy, remorse, and similar flaws. They tended to ignore the literal reading of biblical accounts, such as Yahweh searching for the hiding Adam or coming down to check the depravity of Sodom personally. Such God-images were no better than the characters of Mount Olympus. If God were to be truly God, says reason, he has to embody perfection and absoluteness, qualities which Yahweh obviously did not have. Even Jesus had declared his own limitations, leading to the age-old controversy of whether Jesus was really God or a human being.

Omniscience. In his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas argues that God is omniscient, even of things that have not happened or may possibly happen.

God knows all things whatsoever that in any way are. . . . Those things that are not actual are true in so far as they are in potency, for it is true that they are in potency; and as

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such they are known by God. (Aquinas, *Summa*, I,14, 9)

This contradicts the Old Testament accounts where Yahweh did not know a lot of things: where Adam was hiding in the garden; he had to see Sodom by himself to determine the situation; testing Abraham on his fear of God; plus the fact that Yahweh repented his previous actions. To regret a past deed is to admit that one did not know that the act would result in something unexpected. The God of the Old Testament was far from being omniscient.

Thus the all-inclusive view of God by the theologians does not agree with the nature of the Old Testament Yahweh. They are speaking of different Gods.

Omnipotence. Aquinas declared too that God was omnipotent, meaning he could do anything possible (*Summa Theologica*, I, 25, 3). And yet, in the Old Testament, there were things that God could not do, such as defeating chariots of iron (Judg. 1:19).

Not a Being. In the Bible, God was a being who had a personality or personalities. He interacted with human beings, got angry, and even physically wrestled with Jacob. This is not acceptable to theologians. Such anthropomorphic deities are but projections of archaic minds. The famous theologian, Paul Tillich, disagrees with the view that God is a being. Instead, God is the *Ground of Being-Itself*.

He [Tillich] holds that any “literal” talk about Divine omnipotence and omni-science (about a being who can do anything and

knows everything) must be abandoned. (Ward in Byrne, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Theology*, 356)

The mystical theologians, to be discussed below, similarly deny such a humanlike God.

In effect, many of the brightest intellects of the Christian world — the theologians and philosophers — have abandoned the traditional views of God. Their highly abstract God is something that the average mind may not even be able to conceive or imagine. What does an impersonal Absolute mean to them? What will the ordinary believer worship or pray to?

4. God of the Mystics

Mysticism, says Evelyn Underhill, is union with God or ultimate reality. While theologians and believers speak about God, mystics claim to have become one with God.

Full mystic consciousness . . . develops the power of apprehending the Absolute, Pure Being, the utterly Transcendent: or, as its possessor would say, can experience “passive union with God”. (Underhill, 39)

Mystical experience is the touchstone of spirituality and divinity. Mystics attain a quality of experience that makes them claim a high degree of inexpressible certainty and clarity not only about the transcendent world but about God itself. Their insights, in many ways, are non-negotiable, notwithstanding what some of them might have stated (as did Teresa of Avila) that whatever they wrote that was contrary to the doctrines of the

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Church would be automatically wrong. The irresistible force of experience meets the immovable rocks of dogma.

Mystics often have an authority of their own so final that they are willing to go against doctrine and tradition. They thus often get into trouble with the Church when their unorthodox declarations pull the rug from under some hallowed dogmas. Yet their influence is enduring and does not wane. In an important sense, mystical tradition is a solid rock upon which the whole of Christianity sits. Rituals and even dogmas change, but mystical insights seem imperishable and unyielding.

What is the guarantee that such mystical perceptions are not hallucinations or delusions? First, they are not centered on the self or ego, which is the source of delusions. Mysticism probes into the machinations of the self far more than psychology does. Second, they are based on a state of being which, for want of a better word, is called Love.

Mysticism . . . is non-individualistic. It implies, indeed, the abolition of individuality; of that hard separateness, that “I, Me, Mine” which makes of man a finite isolated thing. It is essentially a movement of the heart, seeking to transcend the limitations of the individual standpoint and to surrender itself to ultimate Reality; for no personal gain, to satisfy no transcendental curiosity, to obtain no other-worldly joys, but purely from an instinct of love The mystic is “in love with the Absolute” not in any idle or sentimental manner, but in that vital sense which

presses at all costs and through all dangers towards union with the object beloved. (Underhill, 72-3)

Christianity has a long mystical tradition that started from Christ and St Paul, down to people like Dionysius the Areopagite, Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and Anthony de Mello. By interpreting their insights, they develop their own theologies about who God is and what its attributes are. This has been called Mystical Theology.

Transcendent God. Dionysius, Ruysbroek, and Meister Eckhart had a God-concept that differed remotely from mainstream Christianity. There is an entity higher than God. They call it the Godhead.

While Eckhart continued to use the word “God”, he no longer regarded it as the highest being or principle but as an intermediate and limited entity. He declared:

Meanwhile, I beseech you by the eternal and imperishable truth, and by my soul, consider; grasp the unheard-of. God and Godhead are as distinct as heaven and earth. Heaven stands a thousand miles above the earth, and even so the Godhead is above God. God becomes and disbecomes. Whoever understands this preaching, I wish him well. But even if nobody had been here, I must still have preached this to the poor-box. (Huxley, *Perennial Philosophy*, p. 38)

Even the Father of Jesus Christ is but a manifestation of the Godhead:

The Father is a revelation of the Godhead,

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the Son is an image and countenance of the Father, and the Holy Ghost is an effulgence of that countenance. (Eckhart, 2001, p. 40)

God and the Soul. To the mystic, God is not only within oneself. God is oneself. Catherine of Genoa wrote:

My Me is God, nor do I recognize any other Me except my God. (Huxley, 1946)

Meister Eckhart similarly said:

The seed of God is in us. . . . Pear seeds grow into pear trees, nut seeds into nut trees, and God seed into God. (Huxley, p. 49)

This view is not new. It is found in both the New and the Old Testaments — “ye are gods” (Ps. 82:6, Jn. 10:34) — but it creates a new theological dilemma. If all are gods at their core, how can anyone be consigned to an eternal hell?

Thus the God of the mystics is rooted in oneness and identity with God, not based on obedience, rules, fear, or punishment.

God Cannot Be Thought of. God, as experienced, cannot be described in words. In contrast to the God-view of the Old and New Testament as well as the theologians, the mystics generally refuse to confer attributes to God. Whatever is said or written is a thought, and thought fails to grasp what God is.

Eckhart wrote:

So be silent and do not chatter about God, because by chattering about Him you are lying and so committing a sin. So, if you want to be without sin and perfect, don't chatter about God. Nor should you (seek to) understand anything about God, for God

is above all understanding. One master says, “If I had a God I could understand, I would no longer consider him God.” So, if you understand anything of Him, that is not He, and by understanding anything of Him you fall into misunderstanding. (Eckhart, 463)

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* stresses:

Of God Himself can no man think. . . .
By love may He be gotten and holden;
but by thought never.

The practice proposed in *The Cloud*, wrote Karen Armstrong,

. . . . is a corrective to the rather dogmatic habit that religious people often have of saying that God wills this, forbids that, or dislikes the other, as though God were a personality with likes and aversions similar to our own. (Armstrong, *Visions of God*, p. 57)

God Beyond Goodness. It is common to speak of God as good, benevolent, or merciful. The mystics take issue with this. Meister Eckhart wrote:

If I now say God is good, it is not true; rather, I am good, God is not good. I will go further and say I am better than God: for what is good can become better, and what can become better can become best of all. Now God is not good, therefore He cannot become better. And since He cannot become better, therefore He cannot become best; for these three, good, better, and best, are remote from God, since He is above them all. (Eckhart, 463)

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One will see why the Church condemned Eckhart's teachings. The views of mystics can be so threatening to established dogma.

Summary

Christian dogmas have an evolutionary history where earlier God concepts are retained and combined with later God concepts. These later beliefs can be incompatible with the earlier ones. This explains why these four strands of God-concepts in Christianity are incongruent with one another in fundamental ways. The New Testament God has qualities quite the opposite of Yahweh's in the Old Testament. On the other hand, the theologians do not subscribe to the anthropomorphic understanding of God in the Bible, particularly of the Old Testament. Neither do the mystics sympathize with the theologians. In many ways, each negates the others. Yet they are all within Christianity.

Do Christians really believe in a jealous (hence insecure) God? Or a murderous God? Or a wrathful and vindictive God? How about Jesus, the Father, or the Holy Spirit? If Jesus, as God, came to save the world, did he succeed? If not, did God fail? If so, is he a limited God?

Christianity is monotheistic and polytheistic in the same way as Hinduism is monotheistic and polytheistic. If one defines God as the ultimate Godhead, the Absolute, or Parabrahman, then both are monotheistic. But if by God we include Yahweh, Jesus, Father, Holy Ghost, Elohim, Elyon, and so on, then

Christianity is polytheistic, for these beings are evidently different from one another and even have incompatible qualities. If they do exist, they are part of the Hierarchy of Divine Beings adopted by most world religions. This view states that between the ultimate God and human beings, there exists a vast hierarchy of superior beings, some of which are considered divine. This includes the Sons of God of the Old Testament, the seven angels before the throne, Cherubims, Seraphims, Archangels, Angels, Dominions, and so forth, in the same manner that Hinduism has Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and a multitude of divine beings.

This polytheistic view, however, is staunchly denied by practically all Christians. They assume without much thought that these different Gods are one and the same. Or they just choose to be blind to the incongruences out of convenience. It is too complicated to think about these things. They just want a God whom they can pray to and who is benevolently in charge of the universe. When they reflect more deeply on this subject, however, they will inevitably discover that it is not as simple as it seems. They have to sort out which Gods they will disbelieve, or they need to redefine their understanding of God to include all these dissimilar beings in a hierarchy. Then they may discover that there are imperfections and limitations even among the so-called Gods and arrive at the existence of a celestial world that is as complicated and graduated as the material universe.

Conclusion

The only way that Christianity can integrate these is by adopting the doctrine of the Hierarchy of Divine Beings — a teaching that has long been part of both Christianity and Judaism. The essential points of the doctrine are as follows:

1. There are beings superior to ordinary humans, whether they are called saints, angels, archangels, seraphim, or others, distinct from the ultimate supreme Being. Their existence explains several historical phenomena: (a) the existence of many apparently superior beings such as the Buddha or Jesus Christ; (b) the manifestation of powers that are unexplainable by science, such as healing powers, surviving without food or water for 30 years (Therese Neumann).

Dionysius the Areopagite wrote of the nine orders of being. Christianity speaks of the “communion of saints”, Messiahs, and “spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb. 12:23). It makes sense that these beings would constitute a natural hierarchy, like the “ladder of Jacob” (Gen. 28:12), since some become part of the hierarchy earlier and some later. When these superior beings manifest in the human world, they are regarded as God or Gods. It is these that human beings interact with, pray to, or worship. While their powers may seem astounding, they are still limited and hence cannot be God in the loftiest sense.

2. There is an Absolute or Godhead, the incomprehensible principle that encompasses all existence and possibilities, beyond the grasp of the human intellect, beyond the dualities of good

and evil, time, space, and motion. It cannot even be called a being. Tillich calls it Being-itself, while H. P. Blavatsky terms it “Be-ness”. But this is not what people refer to as God. It is neither merciful, intelligent, loving, good, wrathful, or jealous. It cannot be prayed to or worshipped.

3. The manner by which human beings can experience God or divinity or become like them is to discover their inner being. This is the contribution of the mystics. This possibility is spoken of in the Bible in many ways:

Be still and know that I am God. (Ps. 46:10)

I said, “You are gods; you are all sons of the Most High.” (Ps. 82:6)

Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are “gods”?’”
(Jn. 10:34)

On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. (Jn. 14:20)

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. (Gal. 4:19)

Be ye then perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Mt. 5:48)

These doctrines are not new; they have been around for two thousand years or more. They integrate the four strands of Christianity about God or divine beings where the perceived contradictions can be reconciled. But it means that Christianity needs to recognize that what it traditionally regarded as God are but different, intermediate, divine beings. ✧

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In the end all will be well. A sweet medieval saint, the Lady Julian of Norwich, had what is called “interior locutions” in which the mystic seems to talk with God. She was very troubled about the sin in the world. “One day,” she writes, “I asked God for sin, and God showed me that there was no sin, but that for every pain we suffered here, we should in the future have added glories.” The believer in the ultimate triumph of loveliness and joy is nearer the truth than he who is weighed down with the sorrows of life. The poets are nearer the truth than the philosophers.

Clara M. Codd (Oct. 10, 1876 - April 3, 1971)
Trust Yourself to Life, A Quest Miniature, p. 115

Virtuous Qualities

CECIL MESSER

TWO and a half millennia ago, the Buddha taught the “great perfections” (Skt., *pāramitās*), which, when perfected, uniquely mark a fully enlightened being. We may practice these six modes of behavior as a spiritual path to empower us to truly benefit all beings. They will bloom into a display of benevolence as our meditation practice deepens. The six *pāramitās* are: Generosity, Discipline, Patience, Enthusiasm, Mindfulness, and Wisdom.

1. Generosity is the quality of being kind and open-hearted. There are three kinds of generosity: directly sharing our material wealth with those in need. Wise ones say that the seeds of generosity are inherently present within each of us. Witness a young child’s joyful natural behavior when sharing candy with playmates. Because generosity is innate, these seeds can be nurtured and sprouted by training.

A second kind of generosity is giving protection from fear. Mothers naturally give this to their babies as do fathers to their family. First-class governments

protect their citizens through health care, living assistance, and educational opportunity.

Third, and the greatest generosity, is to share spiritual teachings to the extent we are capable. Leading by example, most of us can teach a child about kindness and forgiveness. If we know more than another about the dharma, is it not our duty to share it?

What to do with the obvious fact that sometimes we are not generous? Let us germinate the seeds of generosity by giving away small possessions with no sense of pride or reluctance. Gradually, there will be no sense of reservation when giving away prized possessions. We may develop the habit of seeking out a homeless person to give food or money. Personally handing a gift to someone is more beneficial than mailing a check to a charitable institution. Obsessing that this gesture may foster laziness or enable addictions will cause us to discount the value of generosity. This may lead us to stray from the path and become lost in the morass of greed. Let us be grateful for our

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good fortune that makes giving possible.

2. Discipline is following right ethics and moral conduct. This also has three aspects. First is to do no harm. Similar to the ethic embodied in the Hippocratic Oath we resolve to never hurt any sentient being: human, animal, or Gaia.

A second aspect is to do virtuous actions that benefit others. Thus, karmic merit is accumulated in our life savings account.

Third is to take care of ourselves by cultivating virtue and practicing the dharma teachings on meditation. This grows the self-esteem that brings happiness and well-being to those around us.

3. Patience elegantly and skillfully attenuates anger and forestalls the arising of malice. It prevents the escalation of malevolent situations which, ironically, we may have created. Patience calms by allowing time and space for the fangs of malice to withdraw. We may cultivate an attitude of forbearance towards the faults of others as well as our own problematic dramas. Jesus taught: "Love your enemy and judge not others." Attend carefully to this precept because many of us have professed this for two thousand years and still have not got it.

4. Enthusiasm refers to a joyful and diligent attentiveness that is constantly mindful of the actions of our body, speech, and mind. Let us diligently protect our body from injury due to harmful drugs, unhealthy foods, hazardous occupations, and neglect of nurturing rest. We may allow our speech to become pleasant and non-injurious and our mind to become

calm and clear. Let us take delight in wholesome actions and joyfully practice the dharma without procrastination.

5, Mindfulness refers to the quality of being calm, clear, and perceptive. Being aware of the action of speech, we tend to not lie, gossip, or slander. Mindful awareness leads us to speak kindly to and of others. Accomplishing this *pāramitā* leads to a mind of serenity, like a still forest pool capable of reflecting perfectly. This prepares the mind to be receptive to the truth born of wisdom.

6. Wisdom sees into the destructive effects of the mental afflictions such as maintaining wrong views, obsessively craving desirable things, and indulging in hatred towards others. When perfected, this virtue exhibits loving kindness, vast compassion, and transcendental awareness. Stabilizing the mind through the practice of mindfulness and insight meditation allows us to look into the nature of mind itself and to see things as they really are. On attaining full realization we can truly benefit others as well as ourselves.

The quality of generosity is particularly relevant to accomplishing our journey, for it prevents the constant stumbling and tripping over ego. Purification in the fountain of a generous heart is the pre-eminent qualification to begin right meditation practice. This action lightens our burden of ego-cherishing.

At our core we are a spiritual being; therefore, virtuousness is an innate part of our nature and can be unfolded, nurtured, and manifested. Virtue does not arise from nothing; it is latent as a seed within us.

Virtuous Qualities

The four ghosts in Dickens' novel, *A Christmas Carol*, were able to transform the miser, Scrooge, into a generous philanthropist because the seed of generosity was present in his heart.

Practicing the *pāramitās* unfolds natural virtues and is analogous to filling our magical storehouse, our personal memory bank, with the seeds of transformation. This is not so much an act of accumulating but a process of deconstructing regressive habit patterns and making space for innate virtue to express itself. Although seemingly fabricated at first, with practice they become integral and manifest as the *Four Immeasurables*.

With a wrong motive, fabricated virtues may become disguised forms of greed and self-aggrandizement or lead to complacency and self-satisfaction. The ambition to acquire virtue as a pious possession prevents us from harvesting it for the benefit of others. One whose motives arise out of profound compassion and the pure wish to help others, and then chooses the path to enlightenment is called a bodhisattva (Skt., *bodhisattva*). The great perfections arise when the narcissistic notion of self is abandoned — the ultimate sacrifice to spirit.

Long ago, during the fourth century CE, in a small Indian village, there lived a devout monk named Arya Asanga. He was obsessed with the wish to see the

Buddha, so he left the monastery and went into solitary retreat in the mountains. There, through his diligence in practice, he hoped to connect with the Buddha. However, after practicing meditation for twelve years with no apparent success in attaining his goal, he became discouraged and decided to give up the retreat and return to his village.

Along the way back, he chanced upon a bitch lying by the side of the road. She was emaciated, her hindquarters rotting and covered with maggots. Experiencing excruciating pain, she growled and tried to bite anyone who came near. Asanga was conflicted with fear and an unbearable feeling of compassion. Nevertheless, he cut a piece of flesh off his own body and fed it to the starving beast. He then began to use a stick to remove the maggots but realized that would hurt them, and that the only safe way would be to use his tongue.

Asanga got down on his knees but was so repulsed by the rotting, writhing mass that he closed his eyes. Nevertheless, he stuck out his tongue to begin removing the maggots but only felt the ground. When he opened his eyes, the dog was gone; there in its place was the Buddha he sought. His twelve years of practice had dissolved his negative karma and obscurations sufficiently to see the dog's suffering. His compassion and kindness enabled him to see the Buddha. ✧

Compassion is an action word with no boundaries.

Gautama the Buddha

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

The Three Paths in One

SHRI Krishna enumerates at some length the marks of a true devotee: “Alike towards friend and foe, in honour and dishonour, friendly and compassionate”, and so on. These words depict a state of being in which all that is most beautiful in oneself comes to flower. It is a condition of love, not rooted in the self, in which nothing is sought, there is no expectation, there is only a giving, a condition in which all the beauty that one can imagine, or rather, a beauty that one cannot imagine, appears of its own accord.

True devotion is love suffused with the loveliness of the qualities in the object of devotion. This object may be only an image in the mind, therefore imperfect, but personifying all the nobility, strength, beauty and compassion that one can conceive; there is then the response to the qualities associated with the image. The response that comes from the depths of one’s heart is devotion, whether that image is called Krishna, Christ, or by any other name. . . .

One can be in the world but not of it. In one of the Mahatma Letters there is this call: “Come out of your world into ours.” This does not mean that one should go to Tibet, the Himalayas, the Andes or some other far-away place. That would be understanding the words in “the letter that killeth the spirit”. The words mean ceasing to be a creature of the world, following its pursuits, and living a life of pure altruism based on truth, and not on fancies or illusions. . . . What is spiritual belongs to a nature not of this world, and it is a nature of wisdom, action and love, as understood from the standpoint of the Spirit.

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

To renounce every element of worldliness in our natures is the Yoga of Renunciation of which Shri Krishna speaks. Sometimes a person thinks he has renounced, while his every action is a kind of dramatization which shows that he is but laying the flattering unction to his self. He feels different from others, which raises him in his own estimation. When he is on a pinnacle of his own, he can dispense with the good opinion of others. But this is not renunciation of the self.

The Path, howsoever it may be labelled, calls for a complete revolution in oneself, which converts one into a new Being, in the sense that it is not produced by modifications of the old. It comes into existence as if from nowhere, and that is the nature of the Spirit. It has a quality that does not have its origin at any level of mind or matter, but is derived from some unknown source and dimension. . . . [This] indicates that there is such a nature in man, present as a possibility. It is a nature of love, wisdom, beauty and many other qualities, but all as they appear in the light from within, the light of the Spirit, not as interpreted by a sophisticated, worldly mind.

The spiritual nature is the nature of the human consciousness in its pristine purity. Although this consciousness is that of an individual being, his particular field, and in its unawareness becomes modified in various ways, it can through self-understanding cancel all the changes that have taken place and restore itself to that pristine condition.

In that state the quality or qualities it manifests are those of consciousness in essence, or of that field which might be termed universal Being. Because of an identity of nature, the individual being, remaining individual, is then one with the universal Being. Shri Krishna in the Gita represents that universal Being. Therefore, after speaking of various means of purification, He refers to the possibility of this union as the highest goal for man.

N. Sri Ram (15 Dec. 1889 – 8 Apr. 1973) was the 5th International President of the Theosophical Society, Adyar. From *Seeking Wisdom*, ch. 14, Theosophical Publishing House

Theosophical Work around the World

Adyar Theosophical Academy (ATA) Annual Report — Oct. 2021–Sep. 2022

ATA switched from its online medium of instruction enforced by the pandemic and returned with much *joie de vivre*, to its campus, which now reverberates with 162 students from Nursery to Grade 5.

The end of 2021 involved making the most of the online medium and preparing for imminent in-person sessions. This was done by ensuring that students maintain a connection with Nature, an integral part of school life at ATA. They were encouraged to observe the elements at play by building a rain gauge to measure the historic rainfall in Chennai last year, by exploring the facets of Space, creating a field guide on the birds in their garden, studying patterns in Nature, and engaging in workshops such as the one by the Chennai Young Naturalists Network.

A gamut of festivals — Ganesha’s Birthday (the elephant-headed deity of prosperity and wisdom), Dussehra (celebrates the victory of good over evil), Deepavali (Festival of Lights), Christmas — were celebrated virtually with much fanfare. Come 2022, and ATA welcomed both students and staff into its green midst. Students transitioned through a hybrid system of online *and* in-person schooling.

Once back on campus, regular walks to Nature journaling expanded into learning ecological principles across grades. This was keenly captured in “Celebra-

tion of Learning”, the first major post-pandemic event. Grades 1 to 4 showcased their learning in the fields of geography, art, history, environmental conservation, ecology, languages, and nutrition. The event was open to well-wishers of the school and was a grand success. Visitors were enthralled by the displays — art inspired by Vincent Van Gogh’s *Starry Night*, a “shape city” made out of recycled items, diorama of a marshland, a hydroponics station, a photo booth made of 1,001 origami hearts, and so much more!

They were equally impressed by the confidence and ease with which students presented their displays. Guests picked up several copies of the Zentangle Birds Calendar and Nature Journal Log created by Grade 2, and a collection of poetry titled “Rhythm, Rhyme, and Reason” penned by Grades 3 and 4.

The final term of the academic year 2020-21 was also marked by a special visit from the President of The Theosophical Society, Mr Tim Boyd. Students prepared special gifts and showcases for this occasion.

The new academic year (2021–22) began with a grand celebration of the school’s third birthday and the first to be celebrated in-person on campus. The festivities took place under the banyan tree, decorated with handmade banners, models of the school, and a wall



Grade 3 students & educators with their *pièce de résistance* at the Celebration of Learning showcase — the 1001 Origami Heart Butterfly Photo Booth



Students came together for a dance drama to celebrate 75 years of Indian Independence



Deep-diving into the parts of a leaf with Shiva, the science teacher



Grade 1 students are exhilarated after their field trip to the Government Museum, Chennai



The biodiverse ATA campus plays a key role in honing observational skills – Grade 5 students engrossed in nature journaling



A couple of students from Grade 1 formed a team to create a display of India's geological landscape



Kindergarten students pose alongside their colourful diorama of evolution as part of the Navratri (literally “nine nights”, name of a religious festival in India) celebrations on campus



Kindergarten students of ATA enjoying a bullock-cart ride on a mango farm in the midst of the delicious mango season

Theosophical Work around the World

of greeting cards. The day began with a prayer followed by a recital of poems, a special birthday song in Tamil, and a dance performance that the entire school participated in. The celebrations continued in the classrooms with interactive sessions led by the seniors of Grades 4 and 5.

On India's 75th Independence Day ATA was proud to hoist the national flag with the students and staff in attendance. To commemorate the day, students put together a number of performances including a mime on the freedom movement, and a song on what the term "freedom" means. They showcased Indian toys, models capturing the evolution of the Indian railways, and Indian landforms. Prof. C. A. Shinde, Librarian of the Adyar Library, was the Chief Guest at this special occasion.

After returning to physical school, students went on a number of field trips — the Pallikaranai marshland, the Planetarium, Dakshina Chitra Heritage Museum, and the Integral Coach Factory Railway Museum. Students also attended The Little Theatre Festival held at the Kalakshetra Theater to watch a Korean folk drama and a modern adaptation of Hansel and Gretel. Pupils of Grades 4 and 5 went on a three-day visit to The Peepal Grove School in Andhra Pradesh, a neighboring province. Ahead of this visit, they were engaged in a writing project to share their ATA experience with their new peers.

During this period (2021–22), children had a number of enriching interactions — Dr Pushpa Arabindoo (Department of Geography, United College of London),

conducted a session on waste management; Ms Ranjini, a passionate ecologist and farmer, discussed soil health and composting; Dr K. Shankar, a wilderness expert, shared insight on rescue operations of elephants in Indian jungles. Also of note, a Grade-3 student received an award from the Guindy Snake Park at its Golden Jubilee for his fund-raising video created during the pandemic, urging the general public to support the institution in its time of dire need.

Educators at ATA have utilised this year to up-skill. They attended "Zoetic Wellness Art Therapy", a workshop that focused on self-love, healing relationships, abundance mindset, and mindfulness. Rituparna Ghosh conducted a workshop titled "Tickle your Story Bones". An insightful seminar on "Transformative Education" took place with Mr Vicente Hao Chin Jr., President of Golden Link College, a theosophical institution in the Philippines. Teachers also engaged in an introductory workshop on "Neuro-Linguistic Programming" (NLP) with Varsha Venkatraman. Finally, a short course on the "Art of Storytelling" was conducted by experts Noa Baum, Geeta Ramanujam, Vicky Ness, and Renu Narayan.

Adyar Theosophical Academy is set to expand further in the coming year with fresh classrooms for Grades 5 and 6. Alongside the expansion of its physical space, ATA hopes to introduce its students to even more diverse experiences in its mission to continuously augment their transformative education. ✧

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