

Freedom of Thought

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

Freedom of the Society

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

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



THE THEOSOPHIST

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THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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

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

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

The First Object of the Theosophical Society

TIM BOYD

THE Theosophical Society has three declared Objects of which the first is the most important: “To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or colour.” The second and third are also important, but they both relate to the first. The emphasis seems to be placed on various ways of understanding Oneness. When the first Object was first expressed in 1875, the times were very different from now. If we think of the context of the time in which these ideas appeared, Universal Brotherhood was a revolutionary concept.

In 1875 when the Society was founded in New York City it was just ten years after the abolition of slavery in the United States. Ten years earlier the laws of the land allowed someone to buy another person of African descent, and treat them like any other piece of property — no different from a horse, a cow, or a pig. It was a challenging time to introduce an idea that said: “Regardless of race or religion, there is a human Universal Brotherhood.” Part of the role of the re-introduction of Theosophy and the beginning of the Theosophical Society was to prepare the ground for a future moment.

H. P. Blavatsky was very clear that the wisdom she came to share could not possibly be understood during her lifetime. In fact, she said that it would not be for another hundred years until the ideas could begin to be intelligently discussed. Some advancement in human knowledge and consciousness was required. Someone had to plant seeds for this future growth, and this was the role that HPB was “unfortunate” enough to have been chosen to play. It was unfortunate at the personal level because of the normal pattern that takes place whenever any new idea is introduced.

Whether it is in the sciences or any other field, the first response to any new idea and the person(s) who present it, is that initially it is simply dismissed. The prevailing ideas or methods are so entrenched, that initially there is no doubt that this new idea is mistaken; no need to even talk about it. But as the idea starts to prove its worth, the next response is also always the same. It becomes resisted and attacked, sometimes violently. The final stage in this process is again always the same. Once the idea has proven itself and has taken root in the popular consciousness, everyone discusses it as so

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obvious that there is no need to even question it. We see this in every field.

Albert Einstein was a genius who developed the theories of general and special relativity, which completely changed the thinking and scientific view of humanity. It took a while for it to be understood, and a while for it to be accepted. But it was so clear and undeniable, that this new pattern took hold relatively quickly.

During the course of Einstein's life, another new scientific paradigm was introduced with the seemingly strange ideas of quantum physics. Today its theories are probably the most tested and verified scientific ideas of all time. Because it speaks about the basic building blocks of the universe in ways that do not conform to our logical mind and normal way of seeing, it challenges the way that we view the world. Particularly the idea of randomness was something that Einstein could not accept. He was a brilliant man — a genius — but he could not accept this new wave of thinking which conflicted with his habitual manner of seeing the universe.

In a famous debate between Einstein and Neils Bohr, one of the leading quantum physicists of the time, Einstein made the famous remark: "God does not play dice with the universe." It was an expression of his dismissal of the possibility of inherent randomness in what he believed to be an ordered universe. We are less familiar with Neils Bohr's equally witty response to Einstein: "Who is Mr Einstein to tell God what to do?"

H. P. Blavatsky found herself in the position of introducing ideas that were in such stark contrast to normal beliefs that she paid the price for it during her lifetime. Now it is the law in countries around the world that people cannot be discriminated against for race, religion, caste, and so on. In 1948 the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which uses the language of our first Object. Movements for human and civil rights have become codified in laws. The idea, if not the reality and deeper understanding of brotherhood, is in place. This necessary change, at least at the superficial level, makes it possible for the consideration of a deeper level of the first Object. It is about more than laws, or the simple awareness to treat somebody nicely because their skin color or religion is different. However, until there is a development at the superficial level, it is difficult to explore the deeper aspects.

The two gentlemen who received most of the letters from the Mahatmas, A. P. Sinnett and A. O. Hume, were British and very much of their time. They felt they knew the world much better than the Mahatmas. In their minds there were clearly superior and inferior peoples in the world; and of course to them British civilization and culture were superior. Even so, these two men were used to try to deepen the understanding of the theosophical movement. The deeper meaning of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity was difficult for them to grasp. We all look differently, have different sets of

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desires, speak different languages — where is the unity? Radha Burnier once said: “The reason that I believe I am different from you is because if I tell my hand to move, it moves, but if I tell your hand to move, nothing happens.” This and so many other factors confirm our conviction of separation.

Later in HPB’s life she made an interesting statement about the TS and its work. She said two things. The first spoke to the seeding of humanity with these theosophical concepts. HPB said that since its founding the TS had been “a stupendous success”. If we think about it, it is remarkable how deeply ideas which the TS presented to the Western world such as karma, reincarnation, unity of life, and the multidimensional nature of being have penetrated into global awareness. In the US one can be standing in line at a grocery store and hear people talking about karma, reincarnation, and so on. Today those words are in dictionaries in countries around the world. Because of the influence of the TS there is now a shared language to consider these deeper matters. In this sense the TS has been a stupendous success.

The second thing that HPB said about the TS and its work was that it had also been “a dead failure”. Outwardly, successful, but in terms of the focus of the first Object — to form a nucleus of those who can see more deeply the spiritual nature of Brotherhood — in this sense she felt the TS had failed. As people, we tend to cling to those things that make us comfortable; and the most

comfortable delusion that we carry is the idea that HPB described as “the heresy of separateness”. Somehow, we cannot let it go. It is completely understandable. Why? because everything at every moment, seems to confirm that, in fact, we *are* all separate from each other.

Albert Einstein made the statement that “there is no problem that can be solved on the level of consciousness where it was created”. In the world today, there are approximately 60 wars being fought in different places around the globe. Organized violence is a worldwide phenomenon. What solution have we applied to the problem of violence throughout history? The approach has been to apply a greater violence capable of suppressing the lesser violence.

We address the problem from the same level of consciousness that created it, and we get the same result. When the war ceases because of the application of a greater capacity for violence, we call this condition “peace”. It is hard to imagine that parents who have lost children to violence feel at peace, or that whenever this temporary suppression of violence ceases, it will not surface again. The slogan that sent people to war during World War I was: “This is the war to end all wars!” Clearly this was not true.

Our behaviour is similar even in our attempts to study the Ageless Wisdom. Many people drawn to pursue a spiritual path acutely feel that conventional study is inadequate. There must be something deeper. In response to this problem, what is it that we do? When we realize that

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there are other teachings that seem to supply other forms of knowledge, we change the books we read from one kind to another. We then change our ideas from one type to this other type, believing that in some way the shifting of the form of knowledge will answer the problem that we feel inside. At the level of mere knowledge, one knowledge is not a solution. Again we find ourselves attempting to address the problem with the same level of consciousness that created it.

Something else has to enter into the process, which was the direction that Blavatsky and the Objects of the TS were pointing toward. The Objects speak of a possibility that there is a level of experience beyond mere knowledge. Very often we are attracted to something like the theosophical teachings, because at a

very deep level it causes us to remember — something deep inside each person's heart that has a way of being covered over and temporarily forgotten. When we do remember, something powerful ignites within us that propels us along what we come to call the spiritual path.

Brotherhood as an idea is powerful. Brotherhood as an experience is profoundly different from any mere idea. Due to the force of habit during this and previous lifetimes, we associate understanding and wisdom with the lesser knowledge. In many ways we are spiritually immature and our appreciation of the difference is still undeveloped. This deeper appreciation that moves us from idea to experience is the direction in which the first Object points. ✧

It is perfectly true that we have certain great ideas which come from the mysticisms of the past as a nucleus of Theosophy. But it is only a nucleus. Theosophy is being added to by every generation. Every one of you, every human being who assimilates a single experience of life, adds to Theosophy thereby. For a man's experience is the statement by his consciousness of the relation between him and the Absolute; and because each man is different from all others, his experience is an element to be added to the sum total of experience which we call Theosophy. Therefore Theosophy is increasing, is growing from age to age; and all of us, even the youngest members of the Society, nay more, every one who lives in the world, even the coolies in the streets, are adding to what Theosophy is as the Perfect Wisdom.

C. Jinarajadasa

Voice of the Silence: Whispers of the Intuition

WILLIAM WILSON QUINN

Happy is he whose spiritual perceptions
ever whisper truth to him!

Koot Hoomi Lal Singh (KH)

The *Sāvitrī* (*Gāyatrī*) mantra is a revered verse from an entire hymn (*sukta*) of the sacred scripture *Ṛg-veda* (III.62.10), which dates to approximately 1500 BCE. When chanted properly, the *Sāvitrī* mantra is quite beautiful and spiritually awesome. The mantra's brief invocation is to the solar deity, who is asked among other things to enlighten our "intuition" (or "minds" or "intellect" or "understanding"), the English term employed depending on the modern translation from the Sanskrit. It hardly seems surprising that what we may term "intuition" was foremost in the minds of authors of the Vedas who, so long ago, first recorded its centrality for spiritual development. But just as intuition has also been a key subject of esoteric teachings in the written record since Vedic times, it is more significantly a core value or principle of the immemorial perennial philosophy, which is neither subject to nor affected by time.

The English term "intuition" is rendered differently in various spiritual traditions. In ancient Greece it was referred to as gnosis. In Sufi sacred texts, the Arabic term used is *ma'rifa*. Hinduism contains references in Sanskrit both to the term *jñāna* in its sacred texts, and to the Vedantic doctrine of the subtle bodies (*kośa*-s), alternatively "sheaths" or "vehicles" or "envelopes", of which the *vijñānamaya-kośa*, or *buddhi*, is one — the human modality through which the faculty of intuition operates as a process. HPB and her teachers used the English terms "intuition" or "intellectual intuition" to describe the same faculty as do the aforementioned terms, and correspondingly also described the *buddhi*. Ananda Coomaraswamy preferred the English term "intellection", as being the process or operation of the "spiritual intellect".

It should be noted, before leaving the subject of translation, that another Sanskrit term, *prajñā*, is occasionally translated as intuition, probably because both *prajñā* and *jñāna* share the common root *jñā* (to know). Though these two

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terms signify different things, they are closely related if not effectively inextricable. Both are equally important for the wayfarer — the *serious* traveler on the path of spiritual development — to understand and develop, since the proper functioning of both is needed in order to make any meaningful advancement on this path.

These basic facts are enough to conclude that the intuition plays a central and crucial role in genuine spiritual development, and that this has always and everywhere been the case. Accordingly, for the wayfarer, a deep and abiding focus on understanding and developing the intuition is a *sine qua non* for effective progress. Of the two main features of the faculty of intuition — existing together in connection with the modality of the subtle intuitive body (or *buddhi*) — one is that which allows the aspirant to unlock the meaning of the sacred esoteric principles of metaphysics, or *prajñā*. The other main feature, or *jñāna*, could be described as a form of prescience and also cautiously described as a form of communication, whereby guru and chela may, without words, actively receive and transmit psychic impressions metaphysically, once the chela becomes sufficiently equipped to participate in this way.

Ultimately it does not matter which of these terms, in whatever language, we decide to use to describe the faculty and operation of intuition, as long as we are clear about what is being discussed and how it operates. In its most succinct formulation, intuition can be defined as

the faculty whereby the perceiver is able to achieve a *direct* knowledge of first principles (“truths”), or universal sacred principles that are immemorial and immutable, and is also able to apply its corresponding capability to contingent circumstances — those of one’s life, for example. This involves a level of “supra-rational” knowledge, or understanding, or wisdom, that is not communicable through words, but is effectively *realized* by the perceiver through the faculty of intuition. As HPB noted, “The whole essence of truth *cannot be transmitted from mouth to ear*. Nor can any pen describe it, not even that of the recording Angel, unless man finds the answer in the sanctuary of his own heart, in the innermost depths of his divine intuitions.”¹

Those formidable individuals who have achieved higher levels of initiation and to whom many refer as Adepts — and their advanced students or chelas — would necessarily have fully (or highly) developed use of the intuition. Those who would seek to join their ranks by ascending directly upward to the summit of spiritual realization, however, and may stand at the lower slopes of that forbidding mountain, are likely to have varying degrees of capability in the proficient use of intuition. These varying degrees of proficiency in the use of intuition among such aspirants are plausibly the effects of the operation of mediate causes, or karma, that trace back to previous existences. Whatever the case, wayfarers or spiritual aspirants, differ in this regard — some have

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existing skills in the use of intuition, while others lack equal skills but may yet proceed on the spiritual path owing to other necessary qualities. Aspirants in both these categories, however, can make substantial progress only where conscious and deliberate efforts are made to undertake a sustained program of further developing and understanding the operation of intuition.

At this point the reader is asked momentarily to “shift gears”, and form a mental picture of the biceps muscle of the human arm. As an infant, the undeveloped biceps is buried in soft tissue, but as the child grows, so the biceps — as do all other muscles in the body — grows and develops normally as well. As a young adult, the biceps may have developed good muscle definition and be clearly distinguishable from other muscles on the arm and shoulder, depending upon the congenital constitution of the individual. Now, the reader is asked to form a mental picture of an accomplished bodybuilder, who trains by lifting weights daily to enlarge the biceps for taking part in bodybuilding competitions. This athlete’s biceps eventually becomes massive by means of one basic form of exercise: *repetition* of lifting heavy weights. As it turns out, basic principles of developing the intuition do not differ significantly from those of developing the biceps or any other muscle. The wayfarer must use his or her intuition consciously and repeatedly, exert heartily, and rely on the outcome of that use. In the beginning of this

intuition training regime, errors in perceptions will undoubtedly occur. But over time, as the strength of the intuition grows, so will its accuracy and dependability. Repeated enough, the use of the intuition can finally develop as second nature, as it were, and the aspirant may advance, provided he or she remains true to the rules of the spiritual path and has the requisite courage.

Intuition as *prajñā*

It is evident to those who tread or seek to tread the spiritual path that among its inexorable outcomes, or goals, is to understand or gain direct knowledge (*prajñā*) of the esoteric principles of metaphysics. This ability differs from, but is closely related to, the ability of the wayfarer to recognize correspondences of these principles in his or her spiritually directed activities — and in all contingent circumstances — by means of the intuition, but that discussion follows. It is about this intuition that KH, referring to *Isis Unveiled*, stated that “*Isis was not unveiled but rents sufficiently large were made to afford flitting glances to be completed by the student’s own intuition.*”² Study is certainly part of the spiritual path, and while the mind (*manas*) may not be able to grasp what the intuition can, the harvest of the intuition may illumine those areas of the mind that are able to be so illumined in order that it may have a more complete comprehension of truth. The mind and intuition almost always cooperate when both are active.

Works such as *The Secret Doctrine*

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and *The Voice of the Silence* were provided to us as maps to navigate the more enigmatic terrain of the path. They are the more recent of the textual and scriptural expressions of the perennial philosophy, *theosophia*, bequeathed to us by the great initiates of the past, too numerous to list here. To study and familiarize ourselves with these works is but one of the requisites of treading the spiritual path. And we can truly only unlock the deeper meanings contained in these works by use of intuition-as-*prajñā*, since their authors typically expressed themselves in such a way that by this faculty alone the “veiled” esoteric principles could be realized by the student. A core objective of this intuition is to know directly the omniscient providential knowledge (or pure wisdom) lying beyond contraries. This could also be described as being fully and constantly mindful — aware and conscious — in the now.

As explained by KH, “On close observation, you will find that it was never the intention of the occultists really to conceal what they had been writing from the earnest determined students, but rather to lock up their information for safety’s sake, in a secure safe-box, the key to which is — intuition.”³ These “secure safe-boxes” often take the form of parables and allegories within the written texts of such works, not unlike the classical “myths” occasionally found in the otherwise rational dialogues of Plato. HPB, while addressing this subject, noted that “It may be a parable and an allegory

within an allegory. Its solution is left to the intuition of the student, if he only reads that which follows with his *spiritual eye*.”⁴

As critical as developing the intuition may be to the wayfarer, he or she should not succumb to the notion that reason and knowledge of the mind are unimportant in contrast to the intuition. Well-developed human faculties — all of them — are necessary to reach the higher levels along the path, including a rational and bright mind. What is clear, however, is that the wayfarer should never confuse the two, or seek to rely solely on reason where the need is to rely on the intuition. A. P. Sinnett, it appears, may have been guilty of this, and so received an unapologetic observation from his correspondent, KH, who told him: “Unfortunately, however great your purely *human* intellect, your spiritual intuitions are dim and hazy, having been never developed.”⁵ Intuition as *prajñā*, therefore, could be fairly described as that supra-rational faculty which is of greater utility for advancement on the spiritual path than the “purely” intellectual achievements of the wayfarer. As HPB pointed out, “Only those who realize how far Intuition soars above the tardy processes of ratiocinative thought, can form the faintest conception of that absolute wisdom which transcends the ideas of time and space.”⁶

Intuition as *Jñāna*

At the same time as the wayfarer seeks to develop intuition-as-*prajñā*, that ele-

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ment of intuition needed to penetrate subtle esoteric principles such as those expressed, for example, in the Proem to *The Secret Doctrine*, he or she should also consider developing that element of intuition that may be applied to the practical requirements of treading the spiritual path, referred to as *jñāna*. This corresponding side of the faculty, and its degree of usefulness, was addressed by KH: “Chelaship admits none of these transitions [emotional-mental]; its prime and constant qualification is a calm, even, contemplative state of mind (not the mediumistic passivity) fitted to receive psychic impressions from without, and to transmit one’s own from within.”⁷ An example from history perfectly illustrates this point. In 1884, C. W. Leadbeater sought affirmatively to become a *chela* of KH, and in so doing made a considered but uncharacteristically quick decision to depart England for India to pursue his training. In the wake of that decision, Leadbeater received a letter from his guru, who told him that “Since your intuition led you in the right direction and made you understand that it was *my desire* you should go to Adyar *immediately*, I may say more.”⁸ Leadbeater was, in that moment, to use his guru’s words, “fitted to receive psychic impressions from without”, and it appears that he did.

The “psychic impressions” or “spiritual perceptions” to which KH referred, and that are “received” or realized or simply understood by the wayfarer’s intuition-as-*jñāna*, come through a multiplicity of ways. Most of these ways are

subtle, and are therefore aptly referred to as “whispers” of the intuition or, as stated in *The Voice of the Silence*, the “soundless sound”. In the past century, modern psychology has developed excellent working models of non-verbal communication based on “body language” and facial micro-expressions, by which a trained psychologist can fairly accurately “read” the reactions of individuals to a variety of issues and situations. But while this form of communication may be non-verbal, it is still physical. The intuition, as *jñāna*, is able to perceive non-verbal and non-physical impressions that provide clear vision of, or with regard to, various situations faced by the wayfarer in his or her daily activities.

Those with well-developed intuitions may hear through their Inner Person the whispers of the intuition, and this “hearing” may also occur through reading signs, signals, clues, hints, and symbols from a variety of different sources. When they receive or realize such perceptions, they *rely* on these perceptions where they may affect key decisions that must be made on the path. It does one little good to have a well-developed intuition if one ignores its perceptions. For these reasons, KH, in counseling Laura Holloway, stressed the importance for her to “Learn . . . to catch a hint through whatever agency it may be given.”⁹

One can thus see the importance of developing the intuition-as-*jñāna* — not just making one’s way safely through the vicissitudes of daily life, but as a

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necessary tool for advancement upon the spiritual path. And, for the wayfarer who aspires to align himself or herself with a guru, the need to develop the intuition aligns with becoming “. . . fitted to receive psychic impressions from without, and to transmit one’s own from within.” In this way will the chela and guru find the common ground for even greater advancement for the chela, since efficient expenditure of energy (and time) is a well-known rule under which these gurus operate. For this reason, the exhortation of Serapis Bey to Henry Olcott to “Use your intuition, your innate powers, *try*, you will succeed . . .”¹⁰ was so often repeated by these Adepts to aspiring chelas. Trying, in this regard, is not unlike the commitment of a bodybuilder who trains each day to enlarge the biceps muscle to a competition level: constant and committed repetition of use, extraordinary exertion (including, e.g., regular vipassana meditation), and reliance upon the perceptions received.

Conclusion

Omitted so far is mention of the prospect of immediate development of the faculty of intuition by means of full and permanent activation of the sixth primary, or brow (*ājñā*) chakra, associated by correspondence with the *buddhi*. This omission is purposeful because, if it is true that the probability of such an event occurring for most spiritual aspirants is virtually *nil*, the harboring of any such hope by the aspirant for this to occur becomes a useless distraction, if not a

digression from the path. In fact, even if such an immediate development were possible, it is almost a non sequitur that a faculty as central to the spiritual development of an aspirant would occur toward the end of his or her ascent to the summit of spiritual realization. This is so because, first, meaningful progress on the path requires *from the outset* reliance on a suitably developing intuition and, second, the spiritual hierarchies or enumerated initiatory “degrees” are said to correlate directly to each of the primary chakras (and thus to corresponding powers or siddhis) of the initiate. Therefore, this correspondence between full development of an initiate’s latent faculty of intuition and a high degree of initiation mandates that an immediate and permanent development of a hitherto undeveloped intuition would rarely, if ever, occur.

Far better that the wayfarer apply the model of the bodybuilder and enlarge his or her intuition by rigorously exercising it while treading the spiritual path; by constant repetition of its use and reliance on its whispers that silently sound upon the inner ear. This is one sure and true method of advancement on the spiritual path because, for most, without using, working, and relying on the intuition, it will not develop. But when at last it does develop — at some future time where the level of initiation achieved corresponds to the *buddhi* — upon that day a full and unconditioned use of the intuition is achieved, and the initiate can confirm that “There is but one road to

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the Path; at its very end alone the Voice of the Silence can be heard.”¹¹ Until that time, though, the wayfarer’s most expedient course of action is making daily and steady progress, and heeding

the counsel of Serapis Bey: “Use your will power, and may the benediction of Truth and the Divine Presence of him the Inscrutable be upon thee and help thee to open thy intuition.”¹² ✧

Endnotes

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Physical man is the musical instrument, and the Ego, the performing artist. The potentiality of perfect melody of sound, is in the former — the instrument — and no skill of the latter can awaken a faultless harmony out of a broken or badly made instrument. This harmony depends on the fidelity of transmission, by word or act, to the objective plane, of the unspoken divine thought in the very depths of man’s subjective or inner nature.

H. P. Blavatsky
“Genius”, *Lucifer*, Nov. 1889

What Is Your Way? — I

TRÂN-THI-KIM-DIÊU

Introduction

Since some individuals have freed themselves from the subordination of heaven¹ and showed the way to the rest of humanity that living righteously, without this subordination (to a personal god) is possible, ethics has proved to be the essential issue concerning the spiritual path.

Ethics concerns universal morality. It cannot be set in the form of *laws* governing a community — like those of human society — or as *rules* regulating a smaller group of people like those of a certain association. The reason is that ethics go beyond laws and the rules originating from them.

Ethics is an ideal for humans, since it is a perfect state of consciousness expressed by perfect human beings and — for those who believe in them — by angels. Therefore, ethics is like the Pole Star guiding the way. It is never fully reached by a human being, because when one reaches it, one ceases to be human, having realized the Divine within. Therefore, a human being who would like to tread the spiritual path seems to be compelled to find a possible, acceptable,

and dynamic *way of living*, so as not to slip into a passive way of life, lulled by the common illusion of being self-satisfied with just having a lofty ideal. When this way is dynamic, it takes those who practise it nearer and nearer to the ideal.

No one can pretend to be completely free or be able to entirely assume the responsibility of a human being, even within one's own limited context. Between the vast free sky, where the soul can breathe freedom whilst spreading the whole width of its wings towards the eternal flame, and the deep ocean of responsibilities of all sorts, which is life, where the same soul may sink in the deep, crashing against reefs without a chance to breathe freely, the soul has to go through the whole *process of learning discrimination*.

True reformers, real spiritual teachers, as well as authentic religious instructors would *favour this learning as being in tune with universal growth*, which, as theosophy teaches, gives the basic impulse to the evolution of the soul. In contrast, natural-born mystics — to be distinguished from realized 'self-made' mystics

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— as well as lazy ‘thick skulls’, reject it. Taking out from our conversation the latter (because it is not appropriate to talk about oneself), let us consider a few prominent philosophers, amongst them a natural-born mystic par excellence, namely Chuang-Tzu.

The way of Chuang-Tzu (369?–286? BC)

Four centuries BC a famous Taoist philosopher and writer named Chuang-Tzu stipulated that only by understanding Tao, the Way of Nature, and dwelling in its unity can man achieve true happiness and freedom, in both life and death.² Elsewhere, in numerous poems and prose, he exalted non-action, or ‘not-doing’, but not inaction.

It is the common view that action goes closely with responsibility, and that responsibility reduces freedom. This is not all wrong. But for Chuang-Tzu, there is only *one responsibility* — which he would not call as such — that is, following the Way of Tao, for, as he wrote:

Fishes are born in water
Man is born in Tao.
If fishes, born in water,
Seek the deep shadow
Of pond and pool,
All their needs
Are satisfied.
If man, born in Tao,
Sinks into the deep shadow
Of non-action
To forget aggression and concern,
He lacks nothing
His life is secure.

Moral: “All the fish needs
Is to get lost in water.
All man needs is to get lost
In Tao.”³

The philosophy of non-action promulgated by Chuang-Tzu is not originally from him. It stems from Lao-Tzu, the presumed author of the well-known Tao-te-Ching. It breathes the freedom of not being bound by anything. Yet the same Tao-te-Ching, whilst praising virtue, does not deny activity and duty:

Supreme virtue comes through activity of
Inner Life;
Then let us actively seek Inner Life.
To be less virtuous and to practise it,
Let us be active in the performance of duty.

To assume benevolence and practise it,
let us actively seek Inner Life.
To assume right conduct and practise it,
let us be active in the performance of duty.

To assume expediency and practise it,
is to find that no one honours it;
then it bares the arm,
and asserts itself by force.

Therefore, when Tao is lost, follow Virtue;
when virtue is lost, follow benevolence;
when benevolence is lost, follow right
conduct;
when right conduct is lost, follow
expediency.⁴

Whilst Lao-Tzu is not known as a historical person — like Hermes Trismegistus — Chuang-Tzu is known to be a historical person who actually existed and expressed the philosophy of non-action

in its bare and bright purity. This non-action stands for a state of consciousness where there cannot be two entities, subject and object, I and the other. We call this state “non-duality”; there is just *one*, not a person, not an individual, but just an undivided state where there is no separation, no dichotomy between ‘this’ and ‘that’.

This state was well illustrated by the story of Chuang Tzu’s dream:

Once Chuang-Tzu dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn’t know he was Chuang-Tzu. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Chuang-Tzu. But he didn’t know if he was Chuang-Tzu who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang-Tzu. Between Chuang-Tzu and a butterfly there must be *some* distinction! This is called the transformation of Things.⁵

The above experience is a fusing vision of the phenomenal world in which things, people, concepts, ideas, that is, all things, appear blended with their own true nature, in *unity*. This vision prevailed right at the moment when Chuang-Tzu woke up, so that he exclaimed: “Between Chuang-Tzu and a butterfly there must be *some* distinction!” And finally he came to the undeniable fact: “This is called the transformation of Things.” The “Things” in transformation are dharmas in the general meaning of the term, meaning everything which exists in the phenomenal world. The “transformation of

Things” points here to the whole *process of mutation of all dharmas*, including humans. It moves from the state of individuals *towards and back* to the original state of mind — or consciousness — that is, of *innocence*, where consciousness is not tainted by self. One can feel that *innocence is freedom*: consciousness has not as yet become entrenched into any form — and forms begin with self-identification — so that the individual called Chuang-Tzu does not have the certainty of being Chuang-Tzu.

Such a state of consciousness cannot generate evil, or any kind of becoming, judgement, self-consciousness, ego, and so on. Since there is none of these, there cannot be any history either to be written. This is what Chuang-Tzu described in a story called: “*When life was full there was no history.*”

In the age when life on earth was full, no one paid any special attention to worthy men, nor did they single out the man of ability. Rulers were simply the highest branches on the tree, and the people were like deer in the woods. They were honest and righteous without realizing that they were ‘doing their duty’. They loved each other and did not know that this was ‘love of neighbour’. They deceived no one yet they did not know that they were ‘men to be trusted’. They were reliable and did not know that this was ‘good faith’. They lived freely together giving and taking, and did not know that they were generous. For this reason their deeds have not been narrated. They made no history.⁶

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So, it is quite obvious that when life unfolds itself without self, there is no point to raise the issue of virtue. Chuang-Tzu for generations represents the pure Taoist, having expressed the authentic Way of Tao and having transmitted the genuine spirit of non-action. Actually, he is the *last* pure Taoist philosopher and subtle thinker, yet untainted with magic, unlike later Taoists, as history recorded. Furthermore, he is a mystic of pure lineage, for whom *ethics is definitely not morality, or a matter to be codified*. This ethics is the essence of lightness, fluttering around like a butterfly, but omnipresent in the heart of all Things, helping them move towards Tao.

Alas, ever since history has been made no one could hold back the waters. It sounds like the Golden Age is now bygone. Here we are, with things to be organized, with plans to be managed, with problems to be solved. Above all, ‘at the origin of all worries’ we travel through our lives with an *ego* to ‘bear and wear’ in the midst of fellow human beings who have the same kind of ‘luggage’.

The Way of Confucius (552/1–497 BC)

Confucius has carved the Chinese mind during more than two millennia despite social and political upheavals. He harmonized individual and community interests. His philosophy deals mainly with cooperation for the good of the community. His whole thinking is based on spiritual nobility whose first concern is for the others, making use of one’s own

intelligence to deal with things, events and people.

Confucius greatly valued and emphasized the importance of *intelligence, benevolence, and righteousness*. For him, intelligence derives from Tao, benevolence from virtue, and righteousness is just the manifestation of the two in action. But at the basis of benevolence and righteousness, and as a major adjunct to intelligence, *learning* is the capital means for humans to evolve, as related in *The Analects*:

To love benevolence without loving learning is liable to lead to foolishness.

To love cleverness without loving learning is liable to lead to deviation from the right path.

To love trustworthiness in word without loving learning is liable to lead to harmful behaviour.

To love forthrightness without loving learning is liable to lead to intolerance.

To love courage without loving learning is liable to lead to insubordination.

To love unbending strength without loving learning is liable to lead to indiscipline.⁷

Thus learning no doubt constitutes the dynamic way of living. One may say that “since virtue is lost”, learning is the principal prerequisite of many qualities, even for benevolence. In fact, learning is more than a prerequisite. *It is the keynote, the scope, and the basic valuable deed of a fruitful and worthy life.*

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One may add as well, paraphrasing *The Analects* that

To love service (in any field) without loving learning is liable to lead to routine and exploitation.

To love action (of any kind) without loving learning is liable to lead to agitation, and at worst to immorality.

To love love without loving learning is liable to lead to lust and overpopulation.

And so on.

One can see that this learning is not different from *learning discrimination*. *Discrimination is the quality of the mind to see what is right at the moment, for the good of all, in the whole process of manifestation*. To use classical theological terms, it is the function of *buddhi* that helps the soul — or spiritual pilgrim — to walk (and work out) its own path in order to move on safely amongst the material world.

The impact of Confucius influenced also the foundation of human society. He emphasized the notion of *fairness* or *equity* in human relationship. Whilst equality is the characteristic of spiritual souls (before eternity), in everyday life, equality proved more difficult to apply. With equity, human fellows are less likely to fall in condescension or hypocrisy. Referring to the *Tao-te-Ching*, which says, “Do good to him who has done you an injury”⁸, someone asked Confucius: “Repay an injury with a good turn.’ What do you think of this saying?” Confucius directly answered: “What, then, do you

repay a good turn with?” “You repay an injury with straightforwardness, but you repay a good turn with a good turn.”⁹

According to Confucius, overgenerosity is not a mark of wisdom. It is the opposite of stinginess. Wisdom is only wisdom when it finds a practical way to express itself for the sake of the well-being of both the individual and the community. Therefore, sometimes good common sense can be regarded as a form of wisdom.

Confucius’ wisdom applied to everyday life was extensively appreciated by rulers of his time. One can consistently presume that he was an influential man. But he remained modest and simple in his words and manner. Again *The Analects* reports one of his answers:

Do I possess knowledge? No, I do not. A rustic put a question to me and my mind was a complete blank. I kept hammering at the two sides of the question until I got everything out of it.¹⁰

When addressed by admirers and disciples, Confucius modestly and simply said that he is not a learned man as people tended to believe, but just a man *whose thinking proceeds from the Unique*.

A philosopher, a humanist, a philanthropist, a sage, Confucius did not leave his human fellows alone to their own fate. He did share their concern for the welfare of all. History, whenever written, records the footprints of these alike. If the keyword of Chuang-Tzu is *innocence*, Confucius’ pillars may be identified as *benevolence*, *intelligence*, and *learning through self-transformation*.¹¹ ✧

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Notes and Bibliography

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Do not make goals out of the spiritual path. A goal implies time, working toward something in the future. But the spiritual path is about discovering what you already are. You are the goal. Now come to understand what that means and live it.

Anonymous

CHORUS OF RISHIS

Ah! Ravan, couldst thou not tell why?
 Knowest thou not the mark and sign
Of the soul descended from on high
That claims its kindred with the sky?
To such no permanent rest is given
Short of its native heaven.
Love after love, joy after joy,
Rejecting like a worn-out toy,
Till upward ever drawn and tending,
From trial cloud to cloud ascending;
All earthly hopes away are cast,
All earthly loves resigned and past,
 And the spirit so weak and weary deemed,
 Enlightened, strengthened, and redeemed,
Triumphant rests at last,
 Never again to roam,
 In its own, its native home,
Its love primordial, and its last
 The Love divine!

The Dream of Ravan

Annie Besant

Her Life and Mission

RADHA BURNIER

DR Annie Besant was described as a yogi by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, even though he did not entirely approve of her eclectic approach to national problems. Earlier, during the period of her work with the Socialists of England, Bernard Shaw declared that there was no woman orator equal to Annie Besant. The impact of her oratory was not just the result of her exceptional eloquence and the silvery tone of voice for which she was famous. Her lectures were special, because many in her audience felt uplifted by the power which flowed through her, and which made them feel at their moral and spiritual best.

She was a great organizer with extraordinary energy. At the same time she was deeply religious in a large-hearted and profound sense. Her intellectual attainments were also noteworthy. Therefore one could say without exaggeration that her life was an example of karma, bhakti and *jñāna* yoga, a life of utter selflessness dedicated to the welfare of others.

On 16 November 1893, when she set foot on the soil of India for the first time, she did not come as a stranger. She had

addressed large audiences all over Britain about the oppression which colonized people had to endure. Her pamphlet entitled *England, India and Afghanistan* had been widely circulated. Thus she came here as a devotee of Indian philosophy and a champion of her people.

In 1895 she settled down in Varanasi and began to delve into India's philosophies and sacred lore. She adopted the simple Indian way of life, sitting cross-legged, living among Indians as one of them. Very soon she translated the *Bhagavadgītā*, having sufficiently mastered Sanskrit.

She delivered numerous lectures all over India on the deeper truths of the great religions. She stressed the need to be religious without being sectarian, to love one's faith without decrying those of others. "Make religion a unifying force, not a separative one," she taught.

I make no apology here for the variety of religious beliefs, for I assert that in that variety lies their greatest value to men. Men are of different temperaments, of different lines of thought. Would you have

Mrs Radha Burnier was the seventh international President of the Theosophical Society (1980–2013). Reprinted from *The Indian Theosophist*, November–December 1993.

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religion one in its forms as well as one in its essence? Then tell the sun to send out but a single ray of colour; and make all the varied world one colour.

Today's India would benefit immensely from her advice to its people about religion. Her words on the brotherhood of religions are worthy of very wide circulation as a means to combat present-day fundamentalism, fanaticism, and selfishness parading as religion.

Dr Besant also saw that Indian youth needed an education suited to their culture. The educational system at that time was organized to produce clerks and subordinates for the British. She decided to restore self-respect, to build character, and provide to the young, clear concepts of good citizenship. Hence, she founded the famous Central Hindu College and Schools in Benares, keeping them free of control by the British rulers. The institutions grew into national celebrity. Several princes came forward with support and eager young men threw up their jobs to teach. She herself inspired the students by talks about ancient Indian ideals, and taught them to be gentlemen. She was against using young people in politics. The young must learn to think and understand before acting, she said. At the same time she saw to it that her students were trained to take part in the national life.

Her Central Hindu College and Schools (one for boys and one for girls) were provided with beautiful grounds and buildings, but when Pandit Mālavīya

proposed to start the Banaras Hindu University, she gave it all away with her usual magnanimity. Then she turned her energy to opening a series of national schools all over India. She declared:

Our work is the training of thousands of India's sons into noble manhood, into worthiness to become free citizens in a free land. Some of you imagine that freedom is to be won by loud talking, by violent speeches, by noisy demonstrations, by tumultuous processions through the streets. I tell you that Liberty is too lofty and too divine a goddess to descend into a country until purity of heart, noble living, self-sacrifice, discipline, and self-control have made of the citizens a throne on which she may sit and reign.

So successfully were the young boys and girls in her institutions trained into a sense of responsibility and of public duty that even under stressful circumstances there never was any indiscipline or trouble in any of them.

Side by side with educational work, Dr Besant engaged in activities for reform of the social structure. She spoke throughout India against superstitious beliefs and outmoded customs like caste, child marriage, forced widowhood, the ill-treatment of the depressed classes, and cruelty to animals. These talks were published under the title *Wake Up India*. Many pledged themselves to abandon undesirable customs, and work for reform. The practice of consuming only India-made goods (*swadeshi*) was also part of the programme. Thus,

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the way was paved for political action.

In 1916 Dr Besant launched the Home Rule Movement, and branches of the Home Rule League were established so widely that the consciousness of even the rural people was awakened to the need for independence. This led Gandhiji to remark: "It is Dr Besant who has awakened India from her deep slumber and I pray that she may live long to witness a free India." At that time, when other leaders were hesitant, she demanded of the rulers nothing less than full self-government. The communities were divided, but she got them together for unified action. Yet she was insistent about using only constitutional means to achieve freedom. She knew, by her long experience in social and political work in England, how dangerous it is to teach the masses to flout the law. She warned: "Is Home Rule to be achieved only to find a country which is in condition of anarchy, resistant of all disciplines, defiant of all authority, where everyone is a law unto himself?" Unfortunately, her advice against using unconstitutional means was not accepted and today we suffer from the conditions she anticipated.

A powerful instrument of political action and reform was the daily newspaper *New India*, which she owned and edited for fifteen years from 1914 onwards. Though the government penalized her again and again for her trenchant articles, she was undaunted. The British government was alarmed by the impact of her campaigns, and so they interned her in Ootacamund for a few

months. The result of this imprudent decision was that when she was released, public enthusiasm was redoubled and she was elected President of the Indian National Congress in 1917, to which office she gave a new dimension by being active throughout the year, instead of for three days only.

But popularity did not last, for she opposed civil disobedience, as it meant teaching people to break the law. However, she never feared unpopularity. Undaunted she continued to do her best, in spite of advancing age. A National Conference organized by her culminated in drafting the Commonwealth of India Bill, which envisaged a graded system of suffrage and also a system of qualifications and disqualifications for holding public office. The nation did not support this effort, but the Bill reached the British Parliament and had a reading. Undoubtedly our country would have benefited immensely if some of the concepts of that Bill had been incorporated into the Indian Constitution. Sadly, today there is nothing to prevent even people with criminal records from holding high office.

Dr Besant's great work was in many fields: the Scout Movement, the Indian Women's Association, the Labour Movement, the Young Men's Indian Association, and other institutions were either started or inspired by her. But we must not forget that her mission was not confined to India. She was a world-renowned personality. In 1893, when the first Parliament of World Religions was held in Chicago, she was one of its

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outstanding figures. Even a hall seating 3,000 was not enough for the crowd which came to hear her speak on “The Supreme Duty”.

In 1907, Dr Besant was elected as the President of the Theosophical Society. She travelled to every part of the world, was revered as a spiritual guide. She nurtured several outstanding figures, none more striking than J. Krishnamurti, who was to prove that her prophetic insight about his future was justified.

The keynote of Annie Besant’s life and mission can be summed up in two words: Truth and Love. She wrote: “An imperious necessity forces me to speak the truth as I see it, whether the speech please or displease, whether it bring praise or blame.”

The other side of her nature was Love. Few know how many of the poor she benefited, how many hundreds of students she educated. If the world were blessed with a few Annie Besants there

would be hope of swift progress towards a golden era. The following words represent the spirit that was hers:

When those who have, are ready to sacrifice, then the dawning of the new era will be seen in the sky that is over our earth; when wealth and education and power are held as trust for the common good, ah! then will come the laying of the foundations of a better and nobler State. When the educated man and woman remember: “This education of mine, bought by the ignorance of thousands who have laboured in order that I might be educated, really belongs to them, and I must give it back to them in service, in order to pay the debt that I have contracted to them”; when the wealthy man feels: “I am a steward, not an owner of this wealth which has come out of the labour of thousands; let it help the uplifting of thousands” — then Brotherhood is beginning to show itself upon earth. ✧

She Lived Her Ideals

Mrs Besant has none of the false modesty of the unknown. . . . She has none of the airs of a high priestess, none of the moods of a mystic. She is simple and direct, a person of singular charm. Her favourite mottoes probably are: “For God, for King, and Country”, “There is no Religion higher than Truth”, and “In the union of all who love, and the service of all who suffer”, for these adorn the walls of her room. Every one who knows her, not Theosophists only, will tell you that she has *lived* these ideals throughout her strenuous and striking career.

Lowell Thomas
India

Gender Issues in a Changing World

DEEPA PADHI

GENDER issues are a global phenomenon, even though they differ widely in their outer form and expression, according to region and culture. They are as old as humankind itself. In fact right back in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve probably argued over who was going to do the weeding and the sweeping of the fallen leaves.

But gender issues cannot be reduced to a simple battle of the sexes. What exactly do we mean by gender issues and how can we as theosophists help to bring about progress in this area in today's dynamic and changing world?

Gender issues usually focus on men, women, and the relationship between them; on their roles, rights, and responsibilities. Gender-related issues have become of such interest and concern that many universities now have Gender Studies departments. For us theosophists, the main preoccupation is gender *equality* and doing all we can to achieve it. This is part of the first and principal Object of the Theosophical Society.

Most of us, whatever country we come from, recall a time when men generally

worked outside the home and were the sole breadwinners for their family. Women on the other hand, governed the domestic front. They were expected to stay at home, raise children and look after the comfort of their husbands. They were not supposed to take any decisions independently. In other words they did not have any individuality. In some areas they were really no more than privileged servants and objects of enjoyment. This is still the case in many countries.

The social changes of the 1960s and 1970s caused a cultural revolution, particularly in the West, that found many women changing their role from just child-bearing and rearing to include breadwinning. During this period, there were significant changes in the property rights of women in relation to their marital status. They were given the right to vote in many countries. In India and almost everywhere else, there still remains a disparity between the wages of men and women for exactly the same jobs.

Whatever change and flexibility in gender roles are evident today are due

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to the changes in the social structure, education, advancement in science and technology, and to economic factors. Unfortunately the underlying mindset of men and women in our still largely patriarchal society has changed very little and not at all in many places. With changing times, the role of women in some countries has acquired new dimensions, there is no doubt, but there is a long, long way to go.

I have no need to remind you of the many forms of violence against women: rape, war rape, domestic violence, girl child sexual abuse often in the context of child marriage, forced marriage, forced prostitution, female genital mutilation, honour killings, acid attacks, dowry killings, forced sterilization, trafficking, and mistreatment of widows.

A strong preference for sons has been causing gender imbalance in certain countries during the past decades through female foeticide, infanticide, and abandonment of newborn girls. It is evident that large parts in China and India will have a 15-20% excess of young men during the next two decades. This will give rise to other gender-related problems.

Fighting against all these crimes is considered a key issue for gender equality. It is not only men who are responsible for them. Even women are to some extent responsible directly or indirectly. They are both victim and agent within the system. The central issue now is the rights of women. Men and women need to enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities, and protection.

UN Women Goodwill Ambassador,

Emma Watson, is gathering global attention for the *HeForShe* movement launched very recently. *HeForShe* is a campaign led by UN Women in which men all over the world are encouraged to speak out against the inequalities faced by women and girls. It is really heartening to know that men have begun to defend the rights of women, to protect their interests, and promote the development of their capacities. Says Emma Watson, "Now it is time to unify our efforts. *HeForShe* is a solidarity movement for gender equality that brings together one half of humanity in support of the other half of humanity, for the benefit of all."

Last month Denmark was crowned "The Happiest Country in the world". One of the reasons why Danes are so happy is that gender equality is prioritized and that they feel a responsibility towards one another.

Some scientists today tell us that sexual orientation and gender are not biologically determined. It is the prevalent social and cultural norms that are the determining factors, they say. So-called masculinity and femininity are nothing but social constructs. The study of different human cultures down the ages and across the world today seems to bear this out. The more rigid the gender roles in a given society, the more uncomfortable its citizens feel with changing notions of gender definition and sexual orientation.

In fact, our spiritual studies indicate that men are not absolutely masculine nor are women solely feminine. Women can be female or male at the emotional level

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and female or male at the mental level. Similarly, men can be female or male at higher levels while male at the physical level. This is very much in tune with the concept of the *ardhanariswar* in Hindu mythology which symbolizes the union of Shiva or Purusha (power) and Shakti or Prakṛti (creation). It represents a balance of masculine and feminine energies in the universe. In fact, gender equality aims at a balance between femininity and masculinity as both are indispensable for human life.

There is another gender issue which is emerging recently and that is the inclusion of transgenders. Transgender is the state of one's gender identity or gender expression not matching one's assigned sex. Some people who were assigned sex, usually at birth, feel that this is a false or incomplete description of themselves. Transgender people face multiple forms of physical and emotional torture. They have been fettered in their professional and civic life. They have been restricted access to education, health services, and religious places.

Many countries have claimed to identify more than five genders, like Indonesia and India. In India, it has been found that apart from male and female, there are more than twenty types of gender such as transmen, transwomen, androgynous, pangender, and so on. In ancient India, these were referred to as "Trītiya Prakṛti".

The Supreme Court of India, on 15 April 2014 recognized a third gender that is neither male nor female, stating that "Recognition of transgenders as a

third gender is not a social or medical issue, but a human rights issue."

Now what might be a theosophical position on all this? I would suggest that every being, whether male or female or transgender, is first of all a human being and therefore has a human right which is gender equality. Every human being, irrespective of any gender, has an intrinsic value independent of extrinsic or utility values like profession, status, power, wealth, and so on. Every human being is complete and neither needs to abuse nor dominate another. No one is superior or inferior.

In the pursuit of gender equality, we are really making an effort to embrace all humanity irrespective of any gender. In fact, the issue of gender equality can be solved only with the understanding of spiritual equality. The soul has no gender. Outwardly we look different from each other, like one wave of the ocean looks different from another wave. Essentially all are one, rooted to one source. The physical differences of name and form (*nāmarūpa*) are due to our ignorance of the truth — *avidyā* or *māyā* in the Advaitic terminology. "We are all atoms, obeying the law together. Our denying it does not disprove it. It simply . . . keeps us miserable, poor, and selfish," says a great theosophist, William Quan Judge. The fundamental teaching of Theosophy is that all human beings, having the same spiritual and physical origin, are essentially of one and the same essence, and that essence is one — infinite, the uncaused cause, and eternal, whether we

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call it Pure Consciousness, God, or Nature. Therefore, nothing can affect one nation or one human being without affecting all other nations and people. In the words of HPB, “This is as certain and as obvious as that a stone thrown into a pond will, sooner or later, set in motion every single drop of water therein.” She explains it further: “Every physical action has its moral and everlasting effect. Hurt a man . . . you may think that his pain and suffering cannot spread by any means to his neighbours, least of all to men of other nations. We affirm *that it will* . . . therefore, we say, that . . . every man is . . . to understand and accept *as an axiomatic truth* that by wronging one man we wrong not only ourselves but the whole of humanity in the long run.”

While the changes so far have not all been pleasant, changes are a part of life. They can symbolize growth and development. But too often people are comfortable with their traditional mindset, with narrow and biased ideas, and when changes come their way they resist them. As life is in a constant state of change, one can either learn to live in harmony with the flow of life, or one can oppose it. But in the end the individual who obstructs the natural flow will simply suffer.

The time has come. Present-day human beings are adequately intellectually equipped to understand the unity of all life and the universality of Brotherhood, but very few are prepared to carry out this intellectual recognition in daily life. Dr Annie Besant, a great theosophist, our second international President, the

founder of the Theosophical Order of Service, and an acknowledged champion of gender equality expressed her views as “our social, religious, and economic opinions may differ, but on the cardinal fact that we are a nucleus of Universal Brotherhood, we must agree; we cannot honestly remain in the Society if we cease to believe in that supreme fact.”

The Theosophical Order of Service is the right platform for putting into practice the principle of Universal Brotherhood by educating people on gender equality issues through workshops, seminars, billboards, captions, posters, signature drives, friendly competitions in the form of essays, and so on.

In view of these changing times, I would like to suggest that the term “Universal Brotherhood” may be appropriately replaced by the term “Universal Humanhood” to convey explicitly the gender harmony we all so greatly need. I would like to mention here that the Theosophical Society in America, under pressure from its female members, changed to the non-gender-specific “Human Family” in the late 1990s.

There is a silver lining as far as the movement for gender equality is concerned. Dr Rupert Sheldrake, a scientist and a theosophist, advocates that if a critical mass of a particular species behaves in a particular way, through morphic resonance others will behave in a similar way, even in the absence of any known means of connection or communication. If all TS and TOS members, the educated classes of society,

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and the political leaders of the world try to understand the spiritual import of gender equality and promote it in practice, then there will definitely be a change in the minds of people in general. There will be a change, a change from gender discrimination to gender inclusion, from

differences to unity — the much-needed paradigm shift.

This will help give rise to a healthier civilization, where there will be balance and harmony between genders and a value system based on love, tolerance, and compassion. ✧

Society as a whole benefits immeasurably from a climate in which all persons, regardless of race or gender, may have the opportunity to learn respect, responsibility, advancement, and remuneration based on ability.

Sandra Day O'Connor

On Sacrifice

ARVIND RAMANUJAM

Whatsoever thou doest, whatsoever thou eatest, whatsoever thou offerest, whatsoever thou givest, whatsoever thou doest of austerity, O Kaunteya, do thou that as an offering unto Me.

Thus shalt thou be liberated from the bonds of action, yielding good and evil fruits; thyself harmonized by the yoga of renunciation, thou shalt come unto Me when set free.

Bhagavadgītā, IX.27–28

Introduction

The old Hindu tradition of sacrifice (yajña) is widespread, and has its correspondence in other major religions such as Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism, and cultures and civilizations like the Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, Aztecs and the Yoruba people. Such a practice of universal prevalence that has continued since ancient times could be of interest to theosophists, who explore the common ground of world religions.

The Puranas (mythological, historical, and sacred Sanskrit texts of the Hindus), and the Three Fundamental Propositions of Madame H. P. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* talk about the cyclic, incessant,

and playful manifestation and disappearance of numberless universes from the Cosmic Being, who is beyond definition and representation, and identical with souls on the obligatory pilgrimage through reincarnation according to their karma. The *Purusha Sukta* is an important hymn of the *R̥g-veda* dedicated to Purusha, the Cosmic Being, whose self-sacrifice as an act of love is held to be the primal source of all existence. *The Law of Sacrifice* by C. Jinarājādāsa and C. W. Leadbeater explains the significance of the primordial sacrifice of the Cosmic Being and the necessity of replicating it by the successive generations.

Sacrifice as Duty

Energy from food digested invariably propels a person into karma (action). (A parent taking care of a child raring to explore will vouch for this fact!) An action, if done with a selfish motive or without concern for the damage it will have on others, leads to a ripple of disturbance, distortion, and imbalance that travels far and wide, and eventually returns collecting in its wake all similar negative forces to inflict multiplied pain.

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In order to prevent such a reaction, one can practise karma yoga (union through action). A person employs all of her or his faculties like the physical body, speech, mind, senses, intellect, and innate natural tendencies, in the service of the Supreme Being without any selfish motive. At a passing glance this seems counterproductive, as there is very little inducement if any to work, and there is the prospect of loss to oneself (even death). But any benefit that accrues to the Supreme Being also benefits all the individual beings, since they are its part and parcel.

When one takes equally pleasure and pain, victory and defeat, and gain and loss, others do not get affected or offended to retaliate. While karma yoga is difficult, indirect and time-consuming, there is no loss of effort in this, and the vicious cycle of sin and suffering transforms into a virtuous cycle of merit and ease bereft of great worry, tension, and fear. As there is a one-pointed definiteness of purpose, there is a concentrated investment of attention, resources, and time, which all contribute to better efficiency and effectiveness in bringing about a result that stands the test of time. Since success and failure stops bothering the actor due to the absence of a personal interest in the outcome, self-defeating psychological impediments and traps disappear, leading to skill in action. When thus done as an autotelic activity (having a purpose in itself), one gets into the zone of highest performance and smoothest workflow.

Sacrifice in Food Intake

Food is necessary not only to sustain oneself but also to attain the Supreme Goal. From food one gets the energy to focus and be steadfast on the Divine, develop and practise skills, gain knowledge and wisdom, and be tolerant of and compassionate to others. Thus sustaining life through food is righteousness (*dharma*). However, it is also true that the food consumed by humans can be obtained only by the loss of life in other sentient beings, which is unrighteousness (*adharma*). This is a dilemma that has to be resolved.

Also, the food that has been obtained by such violence (*himsa*), does not lead to well-being since it is mixed with tendencies of the dead being. If such food is consumed, those tendencies will be transferred to and inherited by the consumers to become part of their nature and being. These then become obstacles to the blissful experience of the Supreme Being, the summum bonum of life.

In order to resolve this dilemma and malady, ancient Hindus started practising the ritual of offering food to the Divine (*naivedya*) as a symbolic reminder of sacrifice. Food, along with all of one's own self, is consecrated to the Supreme Being, who is the sum total of all the individual beings, and is both the consumer and the consumed. The impurity that is concentrated in the limited being is dissolved, neutralized, and sanctified in the vast and unlimited Being. Only the required quantity of food that is agreeable to the soul on the spiritual journey is

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obtained, consecrated, distributed, shared, and consumed, to prevent or minimize harm to any creature as much as possible. In this way, what was ordinary food becomes blessed food (*prasāda*) that is fit for human consumption.

Sacrifice as an Offering

For creatures to exist, food is necessary. Appropriate weather conditions like the availability of water, sunlight, and so forth at the correct time and place, in the correct amount is needed for the thriving of the plant and animal kingdoms, which form the food base of all sentient beings. Mother Nature (*prakṛti*) has to be predictable, regular, and seasonal for cultivation of plants and rearing of animals. Nature, by herself, is beautiful, nourishing and understandable, but if exploited, becomes ugly, uncaring, and unpredictable. When humans are on the path of selfish appropriation of natural resources without paying heed to the revolving wheel of interdependent actions and reactions, befooled by the temptation of the illusory giant machinery called *māyā*, their efforts do not bring favourable and sustainable results in the long term, and their lives are in vain. To propitiate and please Nature and the Spirit veiled behind her, which is one interconnected whole of sentient and non-sentient beings, a proper, earnest and devoted offering of one's possessions is enjoined, and this is the idea behind the ritual of sacrifice. If humans appreciate the environment around them, respecting the life even in a blade of

grass, they can rightfully partake of what they need from the abundance that Nature makes available for them.

Whether we believe in the evolution of beings from the lowest forms of existence or the return of the fallen angels to the Godhead, our needs and shortcomings necessitate the giving up of one aspect of our selves for gaining another that is worthier. This can be accomplished by sacrificing, not as a barter trade but as a gift of gratitude, to those entities who give blessings in exchange for appropriate offerings. According to the Hindu scriptures, a human is indebted to the gods, teachers, ancestors, humanity, and other creatures, all of whom are in turn indebted to the Cosmic Being. One may sacrifice to them not only to clear the debt, but also to receive further help in the progress to perfection, or redemption of the Self.

Sacrifice through Charity

There is an adage: Feed a man a fish and he will eat for a day, teach a man to fish and he will eat for the rest of his life. To this may be added: Enlighten a man about the Self within the fish and he will not be hungry ever after.

Sacrifice by Austerity

We go on a treasure hunt spending great wealth only to discover that the treasure has always been at home. Trying to possess for oneself all the natural resources is not only impossible but also leads to undesirable crises, conflicts, catastrophes and calamities. All manifestations in the universe are ever-

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changing and transient. If we look around us, we will notice that almost none of them existed a hundred years back, and almost all of them will be gone in another hundred years. Trying to possess anyone or anything is like gripping water with a clenched fist — water invariably runs out of the hand — and so also anything else.

We may believe that the diamond in our jewellery is forever as it is advertised to be, but it is changing into graphite in an extremely slow, practically undetectable, spontaneous transformation. We may think that the tree outside our house is still but it is also passing through the repeated cycle of birth, disease, ageing and death. While there can be an unchanging permanency on the spiritual level, seers have recognized that it cannot be so at the material level. Hoarding natural resources blocks their utility to others. Restriction of their free flow results in stagnation instead of progress, depreciation in value, and wasteful decomposition. One may handle, use, and channelize as much of them as is necessary for constructive purposes, but if one wants to own them as one's own property, the price for it is peace of mind and the real joy of living. Renouncing them has its own advantage: the eternal nature of the soul is such that it does not depend on any person or thing to *be*, and is pure and perfect when delinked from material attachments. One can let go and even feel good watching the undesirables leaving the system one by one, day by day. Self-control in thought, word and action, not

only purifies a person but also leads to perfection. Contentment leads to lasting peace and happiness.

Conclusion

As is often the case with the passage of time, the esoteric idea and the exoteric practice of *yajña* became subverted from the original intention, to become erroneous, mechanical, and grotesque. In the Hindu religion in which ahimsa (non-violence) is considered as the greatest dharma, what started as an ideal mechanism to satisfy one's basic necessities with no or the least harm to others, turned into an insensitive, cruel, and superstitious belief and practice, wherein creatures were slaughtered in large numbers and were left to die and decompose, and more rarely, even involved humans as sacrificial objects. Hindus have largely rectified the mistake by making the sacrifice allegorical, but still, there is not a convincing answer on why they offer into the sacred fire or over a deity's idol large quantities of costly materials and nourishment that could be used to feed people living below the poverty line.

A spiritual understanding of the dynamics behind the human-environmental interaction as a give-and-take relationship can solve the problem of climate change which has in recent times become an important ongoing concern, debate, and discussion in the world. To answer a famous question from science: "Does the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?" Yes, in the sense that, the tremor of fear a butterfly

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may experience due to the deliberate destruction of its natural habitat can prompt it to flap its wings, which is a disturbance that gets passed on over space and time. Today, people are fighting over their share of natural resources, but this does not address the root problem: the irresponsible exploitation of Nature.

There is an interesting story from Zen Buddhism: A wandering monk came to a village that had been hit by drought and found the villagers agitated and helpless. When the villagers asked him for a solution, he asked them for a space where he can sit to meditate. The villagers gladly gave him a seat and he sat in meditation. Soon, the weather changed and there was a downpour. The villagers

were overjoyed and asked the monk about his occult power. The monk explained, “When I came to your village, not only did I observe that there had been no seasonal rainfall but also that you were not in harmony with yourself and with each other. So I sat down to calm myself and when I was at peace with myself, the environment around me also became tranquil and it rained as it should have.”

Society as well as the individual will benefit if production, consumption, service, charity, and austerity, are implemented in a responsible manner with a correct understanding of *yajña*, that is, sacrifice. Let all be an offering to the Divinity (*Sarvam brahmārpanam astu*).

Help Nature and work on with her; and Nature will regard thee as one of her creators and make obeisance. And she will open wide before thee the portals of her secret chambers.

H. P. Blavatsky
The Voice of the Silence, I.66–67

Theosophical Work around the World

Ukraine

To commemorate the 125th anniversary of the passing of Madame H. P. Blavatsky (8 May 1891), a mobile exhibition devoted to her life and legacy was organized in Kiev by the Theosophical Society (TS) in Ukraine at the Taras Shevchenko National Museum from 30 July to 18 August 2016. All Branches and Study Centres participated in the creation of the displays. The Ukrainian Minister of Culture and the Kiev Cultural Director were present at the inauguration to felicitate the event.

In the week preceding HPB's birthday (6 to 11 August), the Fourth Volunteer Week was conducted at the Blavatsky House-Museum in Dnipro, with participation of guests from abroad joining in the renovation work, such as the General Secretary of the TS in Italy, Mr Antonio Girardi, Mrs Patricia and Mr Sergio Calvi, also from Italy, and the International Secretary of the Theosophical Order of Service (TOS), Mrs Nancy Secrest, from USA. The week was spent in repair and renovation work by volunteers from all over Ukraine. On 11 August, an open meeting of the TOS was held, including all volunteers, where Mrs Secrest reviewed TOS activities around the world, and Galina Burhach, TOS coordinator in Ukraine, reported on activities during the last two years. On 12 August, the birthday celebration began

with the Day of the Messenger of Light and memorable readings. On 13 August there was a presentation and discussion on the plan for further development of the Museum Centre.

An event in the memory of H. P. Blavatsky was conducted on 14 and 15 August 2016 in Kiev, attended by the above-mentioned visitors from abroad and representatives from other parts of Ukraine. They started with a solemn meeting reviewing HPB's role and influence. Commemorative stamps and medals in honour of the registration of the Society in Ukraine and the 140th anniversary of the TS were presented to the visitors. Then new members of the TS in Ukraine received their international Diplomas. The event ended with a discussion session, including the visiting Theosophists, to discuss pressing questions on future work.

Europe

After taking a short vacation in Rome in late August, the international President, Mr Tim Boyd, and his family also met with Mr Antonio Girardi, the General Secretary of the TS in Italy, and Mrs Patricia Calvi, his assistant. From Rome, they travelled on to the International Theosophical Centre (ITC) Naarden, the Netherlands, where a very intense program awaited the President. One long weekend started with the European

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Federation of the TS (EFTS), which held its Executive and Council meetings at the ITC. This also allowed Council members and most General Secretaries in Europe to meet with the President and have a much-appreciated dialogue with him on some aspects of the work. Questions discussed were: “How can we be more effective in our work”, and “In what aspects is the TS Adyar unique?” Then “European Day” began in the afternoon after the morning dialogue (on 4 September), with about 60 participants and the President as special guest. Both this and the EFTS events brought members from Belgium, England, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Spain. Also present were Lily and Angelique Boyd, the President’s wife and daughter.

The European Day activities started with the unveiling of a bust of H. P. Blavatsky in Besant Hall. The President, with the Chairman of the ITC, Mr Arend Heijbroek, and Ms Tr n-Thi-Kim-Di u, Chairman of the EFTS, participated in the simple ceremony. As with similar busts gifted to the TS Adyar and the TS in America headquarters in Wheaton, Illinois, this one was also kindly donated by the International Charity Public Fund “Dialogue of Cultures — United World”, in Moscow.

The President then talked about “The TS, from Present to Future”, referring to the important role Annie Besant played in the history of the TS, adding to the original work of the Founders, giving it a new dimension, new life. He

added that today also requires new inroads to be effective and meet the intentions of our Founders. In this respect, the dissemination of knowledge — as deep as it may be — is not enough. We need to be living examples, with kindness and constant positive group thought. The talk was followed by questions and answers, more in the form of a dialogue. It was a fascinating day, which dealt with profound aspects in the meditative atmosphere of beautiful Naarden. Among other things discussed was the 38th European Congress, to be held in Barcelona, Spain, from 21-26 August of next year.

The next day, the ITC Council discussed, among other matters, the replacement of the old guest house, Arundale House. Then a dialogue among the officers was led by Mr Heijbroek. The emphasis was on the nature of our TS work now and in the future. In the afternoon a lively brainstorming session was organized by the renowned Dutch architect, Dr Michiel Haas, on the long-term vision of the ITC, which was triggered by a question raised by Mr Vicente Hao Chin Jr. earlier in the summer at the ITC. The workshop resulted in some very useful ideas, such as the organization of staff training classes for new TS officials in Europe. There was planning about the future of the TS as well, including Adyar renovation ideas discussed by the President with Dr Haas.

All in all, Mr Heijbroek reports that they are grateful to look back at some very inspiring and fruitful days



An exhibition in commemoration of HPB's 125th passing was held in Kiev, Ukraine, from 30 July to 8 August 2016 (photos 1 - 3). Also, from 6 to 11 August 2016, the 4th Volunteer Week was conducted in Dnipro, Ukraine, to renovate the Blavatsky House-Museum (photo 4)



50 x 50



On 11 August, in Dnipro, Mrs Nancy Secrest, International Secretary of the TOS (in black top) reviewed activities around the world. The next day, on HPB's birthday, the celebration began with memorable readings. Another memorial was conducted on 14–15 August in Kiev, where commemorative medals were presented and new TS members received their Diplomas from Mr Antonio Girardi and Mrs Svitlana Gavrylenko.



The International Theosophical Centre, Naarden, had its first “European Day” event with 60 participants on 4 September 2016, with the international President, Mr Tim Boyd, as special guest. The event was earlier called “Dutch Day”.
The President’s wife and daughter, Lily and Angelique, are standing to his right.

Theosophical Work around the World



The European Federation Council had its annual meetings at the ITC on 2–3.9.2016, presided by its Chairman, Ms Trần-Thi-Kim-Điêu (front row, in grey kurta). The international President is wearing a black sweater.



School of the Wisdom (in Spanish) at the Himalayan Study Centre in Bhowali, India, from 5 to 9 September. The international Vice-President, Dr Chittaranjan Satapathy (seated, centre, wearing a vest) with the course directors on each side of him: Dr Enrique Reig (on his right) and Dr Isaac Jauli.

Theosophical Work around the World

with the international President at ITC.

India

A School of the Wisdom course in Spanish was successfully conducted at the Himalayan Study Centre in Bhowali from 5 to 9 September 2016. It was well attended, with 35 enthusiastic and energetic participants from eight countries, including three volunteers from India. The course, on the theme 'Beyond the Physical Death', was ably directed by Drs Isaac Jauli and Enrique Reig, who designed the course content and provided excellent study material. The course was inaugurated by the international Vice-President, Dr Chittaranjan Satapathy, who emphasized the two main purposes of the School: imparting

a deeper level of understanding so that the participants may carry out the objectives of the TS more effectively; and cultivating a feeling of kinship of soul with fellow students and the teachers.

Mr V. Narayanan, Administrative Officer of the Indian Section, camped at Bhowali and took great care of the logistics with the help of volunteers Shikhar, Kuldeep, and Nandita. Shikhar also conducted the Bharat Samaj Puja in the mornings, which was greatly appreciated by all the participants. In between the course, the participants were also able to visit the nearby Nainital Lake and town, as well as the hillsides, offering breathtaking views of the Himalayan mountains and terrain. ✧

In dwelling, live close to the ground.

In thinking, keep to the simple.

In conflict, be fair and generous.

In governing, don't try to control.

In work, do what you enjoy.

In family life, be completely present.

Tao Te Ching

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