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Cover: A Tibetan stupa at Lake Manasarovar, near Mt. Kailas (far left) — Alistair Coombs

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On the Watch-Tower

RADHA BURNIER

Preparing for Meditation

There are certain words — 'God', for example — which mean different things to different people, and the meaning which they give them may be trivial or profound. Thus, the word 'meditation' may have serious or superficial connotations depending on who is speaking of it. But in every school which has taken meditation seriously there has been a period of preliminary preparation followed by properly supervised practice. It is only while this preparatory work is in progress that meditation can safely begin.

For learning meditation is not a question of spending fifteen minutes or half an hour every day. That may have its place and its usefulness; but we are called on to work in a more sustained way in relation to all the activities in which we are engaged, all the attitudes which exist inside the mind, and the pursuits in which the mind engages itself, and which can distort the relationships and make real perception impossible. In the Vedāntic tradition it has been said that a person cannot find a master nor can he learn the secret teachings with regard to self-development until he is properly prepared. This preliminary work is described in *At the Feet of the Master*, where, it will be remembered, the practice of discrimination and non-attachment or desirelessness is included.

A Master of the Wisdom, although he thought highly enough of Alfred P. Sinnett to carry on a long correspondence with him, still did not accept him as a disciple, and never gave him a higher rank than that of a lay-chela. Even when the candidate was allowed to become a disciple he was put through a further long period of training during which he was tested on different levels and in many ways. Every kind of temptation faced the aspirant in this stage; not only had he to withstand trials from without, but more subtle temptations that arose from within the mind itself, every nook and corner of which was subjected to the closest scrutiny. To be faced with temptation in this sense means to be faced with oneself.

Is there any aim in meditation? The meditator may of course have an aim, and if he has, then he is in the same situation as one who never thinks of it. He wants to achieve, he wants to acquire something, he wants something to add to himself. The desire to 'become' is, as we shall see, the whole problem.

It may be that we cannot say what the aim of the meditation is. Perhaps we

can say that the end of meditation is illumination, unity, harmony, the 'peace that passeth understanding', the awareness or realization of immortality.

Meditation — or the attempt to meditate — may become a self-centred activity, a new kind of ambition unrelated to the rest of life. So a person who is indifferent to life, to its meaning, and its value, and simply says 'I want to get somewhere through my meditation, I want to achieve illumination', merely imprisons himself in a narrow state of isolation. For meditation is an awakening to the whole meaning of life; it is a progressive movement through different levels of significance.

Many have other ideas about meditation. Sometimes one would like some quick and easy way, some mechanical method, somebody to give detailed instructions — 'First you do this. Second, you do that' — because then we can live undisturbed in our dream-life. We can remain in our comfortable darkness and yet feel that we are advancing towards the light. If this is what you want, then by all means do it — there is nothing against it, but not if you want to take the whole thing more seriously.

A number of aids to meditation have been urged by various teachers — the use of sound, the use of an image or form, the use of colour or light, breath-control — and aspirants have used them for years together, and arrived nowhere because the means become the end.

This is why it is so very important to understand what meditation is. Meditation may be said to be an awakening out of what appears to us as reality into a new level or dimension of reality. Madame Blavatsky says that progress is through a series of awakenings. But at each stage there is the possibility we may entertain the illusion that we have now at last reached reality, that what we have experienced is synonymous with what *is*. A little awakening gives tremendous satisfaction; it can also boost the ego. People have had moments of upliftment when they felt themselves raised above their normal existence, and then they went on living on the memory of it. 'I had this experience. It was so wonderful! My kundalini must have risen.' They may even feel that they are ready to teach everybody else through their advanced knowledge. The mind continues to dwell in that past experience because at the time it was rather inspiring; it gave a sense of release. And it gives the illusion that at last one has arrived.

So we must not fall into the illusion that what we experience is synonymous with Truth. The awakening has to go on to deeper and deeper levels of understanding and significance.

There is a story about a recluse who used to meditate in a small room. There were many rats scampering around and disturbing him, so he got a cat and tied it to the leg of his bed, and that gave him the quietness that he required. So he meditated and lived there for many years and acquired a reputation for holiness. Afterwards, his followers laid it down as his rule that if you want to meditate

successfully you must first of all tie a cat to the leg of your bed! This is what happens very often — something which was of help for a time becomes the most important factor in the minds of the inexperienced. The means become the end.

The yoga tradition details the work to be done in preparation for meditation: Āsana and Prānāyāma (certain types of exercises and breathing); Yama, Niyama and Pratyāhāra — all of which have the effect of establishing a state of clarity and calmness in the mind which, in turn, leads to the ending of ambition, greed, the desire for pleasure, and the attachment and emotions allied with these. Only then are we able to come to meditate properly, which they say consists of Dhāranā and Dhyāna.

Now, the word '*dhāranā*' conveys much more than simple concentration. It literally means 'holding', perhaps the holding of energy since during its practice there is no leakage of energy through all extraneous thoughts. As our desires fade away there is less loss of this energy, and focussing of the mind becomes possible.

Meditation is not, in the sense in which we have been considering it, something which can be taught to another. Humanity cannot evolve by magic means or by illumined saviours doing the work for it. There is no such thing as 'Meditation in ten easy lessons'. We must use our energy and find out for ourselves, and in this 'work' there is no place for self-will; the work is not just one more pursuit or ambition to be fulfilled. We must be prepared to look into these questions in depth if we are to find out what lies below the surface. So the mind gathers its energy and retains it when necessary, and with it, it can probe and find a greater light.

What do we Pioneer?

In the old days there were many in the Theosophical Society who believed that the members of the TS had a pioneering role. Some knew that this was not a question of remaining where one is, or doing what everybody else does; nor was it a matter of wearing clothes which other people did not wear, or living a special kind of life. We are speaking about the attitude of members of the TS, who are very serious about their lives, which must move forward and not remain in the rut into which most people fall.

Humanity deteriorates as time proceeds, unless people begin to think afresh. A tendency to lose character and the humanitarian impulse which began with great ideas, can deteriorate. Pioneering means moving forward to be what man has not known before. This idea was strong in the Theosophical Society, and there is no limit to this, because people can join those who are ahead, provided they think in terms of what humanity can be, and are themselves ready to move in that direction.

Some of the things that we think of now are all right up to a point, but our relationship with Nature and with the rest of creation is not. At present we have almost no relations with other creatures; we think that man is separate and superior,

and that everything else exists for him to use. This is wrong from the wider point of view, because all things are linked together in unity. The bacteria which we think of as having little value are as closely linked to us as are the great beings who have proceeded beyond. To have that in the background of consciousness is to be a Theosophist; otherwise one is not. That state is very necessary for pioneering: to be one with Nature, to be aware of the wonderful variety it produces. We may destroy everything on earth at a great rate, and put an end to its vast processes. On the other hand, we can treat everything with respect, even the smallest creature as well as those great beings who have proceeded further than we have.

In the Sikh religion one of the things that is taught is the state of wonder. Do we feel it sometimes, we can ask ourselves; or get so used to everything, including the marvel that enables all creatures to acquire new tendencies and new possibilities around us, that there is no wish to act? Each one of these is a model, even if it does not appear to be so. Take a little insect, which seems alone on this earth. Those who examine its life and its constitution are in a state of wonder, like A. O. Wilson, who has written about ants. The ant may seem like a non-entity to us. We kill them with insecticides and think nothing of it. But the ant is a wonderful creature, and Nature does wonderful things with small objects.

What is our relationship with Nature, if we have a relationship at all? If we think that Nature has to be repressed, or encouraged in accordance with our fancies, we may have no relationship with it! But if we wait and wonder we will see everywhere around something like a miracle; the earth, the sky, the stars, the movement of the great planetary beings, everything is a miracle. There are a few who study this, but if we cannot study more, can we then look and wonder at the great things that Nature accomplishes?

Then we can look at ourselves. What is the individual in creation? Everything is individual, the insect as well as the human being. Each will grow into something beautiful, wonderful, and glorious, as the *Bhagavadgitā* says. All that has been created is beautiful and wonderful when understood, and the individual has to grow in that direction, not grow in competence, in money or in fame. There is inside ourselves a possibility of knowing what we are, not only in the ordinary way but spiritually, for spiritually we can grow into a being we have not been before.

One of the important things in the spiritual life is to abandon the concept of oneself. This is very difficult. It is based first of all on the physical body. But that is not of importance, being a temporary thing. But what am I really? To discover this is part of our work as members of the Theosophical Society.

So we have spoken about two things, to know the universe with the heart, not just know it intellectually, like reading in an encyclopedia how many kinds of spiders there are; and to think we understand more of the universe and of Nature. But if we can feel that here is something

created by a power that we cannot really understand at present, and to look at it with wonder, with no other feeling intervening in the mind, the spirit of wonder wipes away the other thoughts. So can we look with wonder at even simple things, a plant growing out of the earth, and so on?

The future is something which we cannot imagine, but we have to stretch our minds to think of the future, not only of ourselves, but of all life. Perhaps there was something comic, but also something very valuable in the Theosophical concern which existed about the future civilization and about man's place in it. For example, in that civilization hardly any time is spent in cooking. If you think of the present day, we are absorbed to a large extent in food: cooking, going to restaurants, finding different things to eat, and so on. But the new individual is not interested in that, he is interested only in keeping his body in good condition.

The implication of that is what the human being can do if he were really free of this activity in daily life. He has much more time to think, to take pleasure in the vast arena of Nature, to allow his own consciousness to flower. In future civilizations which Leadbeater describes — we need not worry about how far it is true — this element is important, and people will have much more freedom, physically and inwardly; and when we have that kind of freedom what shall we be doing? It is difficult to think of it now because so much of our life is engaged in physical things, which have little importance. We think that every little thing is important, but actually, whether we do something is not so important; the capacity to do the right thing in the right way is important.

Many people thought of a future civilization very personally and therefore it became a subject to be laughed at. But we are all citizens of a future civilization. It will include different types, because they have certain common features. The people will be much more conscious of the absence of time, like a flower opening up.

Can one say a flower is at its best when it is a bud, when it is growing, when it is opening, or when it is completely open? That is what it means to be awake to the fact that we are living in a world which is beautiful, glorious, and wonderful, awake to growth into great beauty, into qualities which belong to the spiritual rather than the material side.

On reading *The Mahatma Letters* we cannot help knowing that time does not mean the same thing to Them at all. Time is really illusion. There is a vast field beyond what we know and can see in the here and now of the physical world. The mind of the human being is capable of breaking out of such limitations. That is what Theosophy really leads us to. It is a view of things which takes a person beyond what he knows, to a different field, and this is part of the pioneering that Theosophists are expected to take up, our whole attitude towards life being that of people who are opening like a bud to become a blossom. ✧

Peace of Mind — the Only Permanent Remedy

SAMDHONG RINPOCHE

Q: Does peace in the world — between nations and between people — have something to do with peace of mind? And how do we attain this inner peace?

SR: If we look at history more carefully, ninety-five per-cent of the time humanity has remained at peace and five per cent of the time wars have occurred. Historians and today's journalists look for something unusual; usual things are not noticed. When journalists are being trained, they are taught that a dog biting a man is not news, because it is common. A man biting a dog — that is real news! In the history of nations wars are occasional and unusual, unnatural for humanity. Therefore historians have written more about them.

Of course, all conflicts are manifestations of inner conflict. This is now accepted even by the United Nations, although they claim to be very secular. They do not accept any kind of spirituality or religious way of thinking, but they also say that wars begin in the human mind. Unless we eradicate hate, anger, and other negative emotions, wars, fighting, and violence cannot be stopped. Peace of mind is the only permanent remedy to all kinds of conflict, but how we can achieve it is a complex question.

All religious traditions talk about the method, system, or way to achieve peace of mind. From the Buddhist viewpoint, the root cause of all negative emotions is ignorance of the Reality or Truth. Unless ignorance is eradicated, we cannot eradicate negative emotions. They can be suppressed or reduced for some time, but they will return unless we eradicate their root cause, or ignorance of oneself and of others. We greatly misunderstand the self. We impose the self as an independent entity existing out of its own nature, and we do not understand the concept of interdependent origination. Everything is built up through an interdependent process, which gives us the appearance of a self and, not knowing this, we take the self to be an independent entity, different from others, resulting in selfishness and self-promoting egoism.

Ven. Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche, Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, was Director of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, Varanasi, and is a life member of the TS.
Questions by Ms Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu at the European Congress of the TS in Helsinki, 16 July 2007.

How can we know the self? This requires a twofold practice: discipline and concentration — through these two, wisdom can awaken. Our mind is scattered among outer objects and not able to concentrate or look inwards. Therefore we need a really concentrated mind, and to achieve it we need outer discipline: how to behave, how to eat, how to sleep, and how to relate with others. This discipline is also called *śila*, which will help the mind to calm down. Concentrated meditation, or samādhi and analytical meditation, or vipassanā, can come about through unceasing practice. After practice, the meditative mind can concentrate on one object for any length of time. Then things will be seen without distortion, as they are: 'Thou art that', or suchness. At that moment, seeing the self is dissolving the self. When we see the self, there will not be an independent entity called 'self', and then all the negative emotions are dissolved, eradicated, and peace of mind can be achieved.

Q: Understanding seems to be the basis of harmony. Can you tell us what is the nature of understanding?

SR: The nature of understanding is to see things as they exist. Seeing things should not be interfered with or overpowered by the thought process. Our mind is deeply conditioned by the process of thought, which prevents us from seeing the thing as it is. Thought comes with an image, a name; it does not touch the thing, the entity at which we are looking. Beautiful flowers are there, my eye-consciousness can have direct contact with the beauty of the flowers and there is no distortion — this is direct perception; I can see it. But thought interferes with a name, an image: this is a red flower, this is called a flower, or in the other languages it is called so and so — this is red, this is yellow, this is big, this is small — all kinds of other things come with thought. The consciousness connected with the flowers is flowing, moving; the flowers are changing from moment to moment; consciousness is changing from moment to moment, but thought is attached to the past.

Once we perceive a flower, immediately an image emerges in the mind; then if our eyes are shut or the flower is removed, we still carry that image. The image is not the flower, the name is not the flower, but thought mixes up or confuses the image with the reality; and that image prevents us from having pure, real relationship with others. We have affection, love for a friend, but we are unable to see that friend as he or she really is. We have an image of the friend in our mind and we love that image; or we hate someone we do not know, but we make an image in our mind of that person and hate him or her.

So we are not able to communicate. Someone says something and we listen and understand according to our limitations or conditioning. We are not able to listen without the interference of thought and our imagination, images, words, names, and so on. Krishnamurti

used to say: 'Can you listen, can you see?' It is an important question. We are not able to listen to the other person's words. When we hear something, we immediately interpret it according to our own conditioning. Once that conditioning is set aside, we will be able to listen to and understand others, but this is not easy. The whole spiritual process consists in removing the thought process and re-establishing direct contact with the subject. When we are able to remove our own thought limitations, listen to others, and see their position, we will have real understanding.

At the gross level, if nothing is said about conditioning or something negative, or ignorance or something similar, even if we talk in ordinary language, we have many presumptions and prejudices. Even one statement can be interpreted in many different ways; one sentence may be interpreted or understood differently by people from various countries according to their own particular needs or selfish ends. With such prejudices and misconceptions, understanding is very difficult. When we have a free mind without any prejudices or preconceptions — just an objective, free mind — we will be able to understand.

Q: Is the personal self able to listen and understand?

SR: Each personal self will be able to listen and understand, if the person is not under the influence of prejudices or a conditioned mind. If the mind is open and unconditioned, then it will be able to listen. Prejudices are very subtle. It is difficult to recognize prejudices and conditioning — they may stem from society, education, information, one's own experiences. Each day we are going through so much which is causing deep impressions or conditioning in the mind. But one must understand that conditioning, come out of it, listen with a free mind, and then one will be able to really understand. That is a prerequisite, and is also possible with some practice. We can put everything aside, all memories, all knowledge, all thoughts, and with an absolutely open and fresh mind we can listen, see, feel, and at that moment we can have real understanding. ✧

You must first understand your own consciousness; you must understand what you are, and you can understand what you are only by being aware, which is to see yourself in the mirror of relationship, and you cannot see yourself as you are if you condemn what you see.

J. Krishnamurti

Firmness and Flexibility

SURENDRA NARAYAN

THERE is a sentence in *At the Feet of the Master* which advises us to be firm as a rock where right and wrong are concerned, but to yield always to others in things which do not matter.

Pondering over this distinction between right and wrong, one notices that the notion of right and wrong has varied from the past to the present, country to country, religion to religion, community to community, even from caste to caste. Not very long ago, a widow used sometimes to immolate herself on the funeral pyre of her husband in certain parts of India and that was considered right and holy, but not so in other parts and not so now anywhere. The law also now prohibits it. Many wars in the Middle Ages were called 'holy wars'. Even in our times wars have not abated and are considered right by the aggressor country or group of countries and wrong by many others. And the latest is 'terrorism'. Some of those perpetrating it consider it absolutely right and a service to God, religion, or country. The rest of the world calls it barbaric and totally wrong. Child labour is another practice considered right by those who employ children because it cuts production costs, enables goods to be sold in competitive national and international markets and, incidentally, also provides employment for the poor. Others consider it selfish exploitation and harmful to the integrated healthful growth of children.

The words 'good' and 'bad' or 'evil' have also been used in the same sense as 'right' and 'wrong'. It may be relevant in this context to refer here to a statement in Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*:

> Good is the separate self's conformity to, and finally annihilation in, the divine Ground . . . ; evil, the intensification of *separateness*, the refusal to know that the Ground exists.

And then, significantly it adds:

> these wrong states of mind are . . . absolutely incompatible with that *unitive* knowledge of the divine Ground, which is the supreme Good.

At the root of knowing what is right and what is wrong lies the perception of the oneness of all life. Teachers have reminded us time and again about the need for the perception of the truth that all life is one. In the Bible a beautiful sentence runs thus:

Mr Surendra Narayan was for many years international Vice-President of the Theosophical Society.

> For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. (Rom., 12:4-5)

Using a different idiom, J. Krishnamurti once said:

> It is all one movement — the stars, the heavens, the moon, the sun: one tremendous energy. Our energy is very limited. Can that limitation be broken down and we be part of that enormous movement of life? I call this goodness.

And an enlightened Sufi addressing the Supreme said: I went into the garden, looked at each and every flower therein, and noticed that each had the same colour and the same fragrance as Thou.

Perception of this oneness of all life comes as we observe carefully, watch, and try to understand the nature of life, events, and relationships from a deeper level of consciousness, beyond the 'self' — the 'me' and the 'mine'. A growing perception of this oneness begins to wash out selfishness and separativeness, attachment to things which give pleasure to oneself in utter disregard of what happens to others, and thus leads one to realize what is right and what is wrong in thought, word, and deed.

All this does not mean leaving the workaday world and retiring into seclusion. A well-known teaching of the Buddha may bear repetition here. Once, Anāthapindika, a man of unmeasured wealth, approached the Buddha and said: 'My heart yearns to do what is right and to be a blessing unto my fellows. Must I give up my wealth and my business enterprises and like you go into homelessness in order to attain the bliss of a religious life?' The Buddha replied:

> The bliss of a religious life is attainable by everyone; but he who cleaves to wealth had better cast it away than allow his heart to be poisoned by it; but he who does not cleave to wealth, and possessing riches uses them rightly, will be a blessing unto his fellows. It is not life and wealth and power that enslave men, but the clinging to life, wealth, and power.

Let us now dwell on the advice 'to yield always to others in things which do not matter'. One has often noticed much unpleasantness and even quarrels in families because the parents do not like it when the children discard some of the old traditions or customs, such as marriages being arranged only by the parents or elders in the family, or girls having to go only to girls' schools. Differences sometimes arise between parents and children about the way children dress, about the subjects they choose for study in school or college and about their careers in life — whether to follow the profession of the father or take a different line of work. Not very long ago in India in many families a proposal for widow remarriage or marrying outside the caste used to create an earthquake measuring 6 to 7 on the Richter Scale! The

advice given in all such matters is 'to be always gentle and kindly, reasonable and accommodating, leaving to others the same full liberty which you need for yourself '.

Also, looking at the ways work is carried on even in charitable and philanthropic institutions, one often notices that differences arise in things which do not really matter. It would be well to refer to advice given in this regard by Madame Blavatsky to the members of the Theosophical Society in America, who had assembled for their annual Convention. She wrote:

> The Masters require only that each shall do *his best*, and, above all, that each shall strive in reality to feel himself one with his fellow-workers. It is not a dull agreement on intellectual questions, or an impossible unanimity as to all details of work that is needed, but a true, hearty, earnest devotion to our cause which will lead each to help his brother to the utmost of his power to *work* for that cause, whether or not we agree as to the exact method of carrying on that work.

And she added in another Message:

> Self-watchfulness is never more necessary than when a personal wish to lead, and wounded vanity, dress themselves in peacocks' feathers of devotion and altruistic work. ✧

All the texts say that in order to gain liberation one should render the mind quiescent; therefore their conclusive teaching is that the mind should be rendered quiescent; once this has been understood there is no need for endless reading. In order to quieten the mind one has only to inquire within oneself what one's Self is; how could this search be done in books? One should know one's Self with one's own eye of wisdom. The Self is within the five sheaths; but books are outside them. Since the Self has to be inquired into by discarding the five sheaths, it is futile to search for it in books. There will come a time when one will have to forget all that one has learned.

Ramana Maharshi

White Lotus Day and Its Meaning

JOHN ALGEO

WHITE Lotus Day is a date on the calendar, but it is also a holy time.

A Commemorative Date

As a May 8th date on the calendar, White Lotus Day commemorates the passing of H. P. Blavatsky out of the sorrows, pains, and tribulations of this world to a state of greater Life, Light, and Love. The anniversary of HPB's death was named by her Theosophical Twin, Henry S. Olcott. The Colonel records the origin of the commemoration in *Old Diary Leaves* (IV.26, pp. 452-4):

> As we have been celebrating the anniversary of HPB's death now for eight years, and as, undoubtedly, the ceremony will be continued, it may be as well to put on record the Executive Notice of 17 April 1892, which led to the observance of the event. It was worded as follows:
>
> 'In her last Will, H. P. Blavatsky expressed the wish that yearly, on the anniversary of her death, some of her friends 'should assemble at the Headquarters of the Theosophical Society and read a chapter of *The Light of Asia* and (extracts from) the *Bhagavadgitā*'; and since it is meet that her surviving colleagues should keep green the memory of her services to humanity and her devoted love for our Society, the undersigned suggests that the anniversary be known among us as White Lotus Day, and makes the following official order and recommendation:
>
> '1. At noon, on 8 May 1892, and on the same day in each succeeding year, there will be held a commemorative meeting at the Headquarters, at which extracts from the before-mentioned works will be read and brief addresses made by the Chairman of the meeting and others who may volunteer.
>
> '2. A dole of food will be given in her name to the poor fishermen of Adyar and their families.
>
> '3. The flag will be half-masted from sunrise until sunset, and the Convention Hall decorated with White Lotus flowers.
>
> '4. Members living outside Madras can arrange for their food by applying to the Recording Secretary at least one week in advance.

Dr John Algeo is international Vice-President of the TS and Professor Emeritus at the University of Georgia, USA, with many academic distinctions to his credit.

> '5. The undersigned recommends to all Sections and Branches throughout the world to meet annually on the anniversary day, and, in some simple, unsectarian, yet dignified way, avoiding all slavish adulation and empty compliments, express the general feeling of loving regard for her who brought us the chart of the climbing Path which leads to the summits of Knowledge.'
>
> Copies of this were sent at once to the London and New York Headquarters, thence it spread to the Branches, and now I presume each of our hundreds of Branches throughout the world annually renews the recollections of the character and services of HPB.

That is what the date on the calendar means. It is a time of commemoration, when Theosophists all around the world remember H. P. Blavatsky and her accomplishments, her character and services.

A Holy Time

In what sense, however, might we also regard White Lotus Day as a 'holy time'? That way of looking at the event is not directly associated with HPB herself. The Colonel was especially anxious that the Society avoid any 'hero-worship' with respect to either of the Founders or anyone else. Rather, 'holiness' is associated with the symbolic meaning of the White Lotus and with a proper understanding of what 'holy' means.

Let us first consider the latter point. Our ordinary sense of 'holy' connects it with organized religion, divinity, devoutness, and piety. But in the case of this word, as with many another, it is useful to pay attention to its etymology. The term 'etymology' comes from Greek, in which it means literally 'the study of what is true'. So what is true about 'holy'?

The English word 'holy' comes from a root from which come also the words 'hale', 'hallow', 'heal', 'health', 'healthy', 'whole', and 'wholesome'. Physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being are all interconnected; and they all depend on our being unified within ourselves and united with the goodness of the universe. That is also the point of Yoga. 'Yoga', which is directly related to the English word 'yoke' and indirectly (through Latin 'jungere') to 'join', means literally 'union'. To be holy is to have achieved the aim of Yoga, to be whole and united within oneself and with the great Life of the cosmos.

The White Lotus is a symbol, above all else, of wholeness, of unity. The lotus flower carries a symbolic message in Hinduism, Buddhism, Egyptian religion, and elsewhere around the world. Because the lotus is traditionally depicted as having eight petals, it represents the eight major compass directions and thus the totality or wholeness of space, eight being the number of cosmic balance. There are eight spokes in the Buddhist Wheel of the Law, representing the Noble Eightfold Path, and eight trigrams in the Chinese *I Ching*. The Gnostic *ogdoad*, or group of eight, consists of eight divine beings or aeons. In Shintoism, there are

said to be eight world sages. All of these groups of eight, like the lotus itself, represent wholeness and universality.

In Hinduism, Vishnu sleeps upon the coiled body of the serpent of eternity, floating on the cosmic ocean. From his navel grows a lotus plant, whose flower produces the god Brahmā, who creates a new world. The Buddha and the Bodhisattva-s sit upon lotus blossoms. The Buddhist mantra *mani padme*, 'the Jewel in the Lotus', represents the union of opposites: the lotus flower being transitory and delicate, whereas the diamond jewel is lasting and the hardest of substances. That mantra is also a profound insight, for we discover the eternal and real in the bosom of the temporal and illusionary. Nirvāna and samsāra are one and the same. Universality is here; forever is now.

In Egyptian symbolism, the lotus is said to represent sexuality. But sexuality is simply the most intimate and best-known manifestation of the cosmic principle of polarity. Everything in the universe comes into being as a result of the interaction of the polar opposites, the duality of samsāra. The lotus thus represents creativity, life and death, birth and rebirth, the promise of renewal and of continuation.

Most famously, perhaps, the lotus represents our life in the four human worlds: the physical, the emotional, the mental, and the spiritual. The roots of the lotus are in the boggy, physical mire at the bottom of the pond. The stem of the lotus rises through the surging waters of emotion. The blossom of the lotus opens in the fresh air of mentality. And that blossom looks towards the fiery sunlight of spiritual inspiration that radiates down upon it.

Thus the lotus is a symbol of holy wholeness, of the yogic union that combines all aspects of our being in harmonious oneness. Lotus blossoms are said to be pink or blue or white. Pink and blue lotuses represent, respectively, the sun and the moon, that is, all complementary polarities. But just as white light combines and unifies all colours, so the White Lotus is a fitting symbol of the ultimate unified wholeness of all life.

Time and Holiness

White Lotus Day itself can be seen as a representation of the unification of dualities.

On the one hand, as a commemoration of HPB's life and accomplishments on the anniversary of her death, White Lotus Day represents time and imperfection. HPB was a great woman. But she was human, and all human beings are imperfect until they achieve the state of seventh-round evolution. Colonel Olcott emphasized two things: that HPB was a flawed and imperfect human being and that she was a great teacher and admirable exponent of the way to holiness, that is, the way to Unity of Being.

On the other hand, as a symbol of that very Unity of Being to which HPB pointed the way, White Lotus Day represents the eternal and perfection. The White Lotus symbolizes the holiness or

wholeness that is the aim of human evolution to achieve. Like the lotus flower, we are rooted in physicality, often a very murky, grubby condition. Like that flower, we need to extend ourselves upwards, with a resolute, firm stalk through emotional waters to blossom in the pure intellectual air of understanding. We cannot yet actually reach the blazing sun of spirituality, but we can open ourselves to its warmth; we can absorb its energy.

So on White Lotus Day, let us by all means remember and respect that great soul, H. P. Blavatsky. But let us also absorb the lesson of the White Lotus into our inmost being. Let us strive, as she did, to unify the opposites, to become what all of us are destined to be — whole and holy. ✧

Ah! Blessed Lord! Oh, Deliverer,
Forgive this feeble script, which doth Thee wrong,
Measuring with little wit thy lofty Love.
Ah! Lover! Brother! Guide! Lamp of the Law,
I take my refuge in thy name and Thee!
I take my refuge in thy Law of Good!
I take my refuge in thy Order! OM!
The Dew is on the lotus! — rise Great Sun!
And lift my leaf and mix me with the wave.
***Om mani padme hum*, the Sunrise comes!**
The dewdrop slips into the shining Sea!

Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia*

Expanding Our Centre of Consciousness

PABLO D. SENDER

ALTHOUGH almost every spiritual tradition speaks of the divine nature in human beings, humanity is involved in suffering, brutality, and selfishness. Why are we in such a sorrowful condition? Is there any way out? Eastern philosophies as well as modern Theosophy say the origin of our present state is *avidyā*, ignorance, and that only the perception of Truth will set us free. *Avidyā* is not ignorance of common knowledge; rather, it is a lack of perception of who we really are, and what our relationship with the Universe is. Therefore the ultimate remedy for our innate illness is *viveka*, or spiritual discernment. This qualification is defined in many ways, but all of them are different expressions of the same essential idea: the discrimination between the Real and the unreal. Thus it is especially related to our faculty of perception.

Viveka has different aspects, as expressed in *At the Feet of the Master*, and its development has various stages, but we will focus particularly on the development of a capacity defined by Dr Annie Besant as being the essence of spirituality, that is, the ability to intuit the unity of all life. In like manner, HPB said that 'spirituality is not what we understand by the words "virtue" and "goodness". It is the power of perceiving formless, spiritual essences',[1] without being deluded by the gross aspect of the manifested world.

Most of us deeply feel we are just our personality, that is, the 'me', the one that is now reading, perceiving. We do not have actual consciousness of the unity of life; we have not developed 'the power of perceiving the formless'. In our waking consciousness we only perceive the outer shell of the world through our five physical senses, which are very limited. Besides, we perceive it in terms of the inner (me) and the outer (the other). Our perception is confined to what is happening in 'me' at the personal level. We usually cannot feel in ourselves what is going on inside another person or being. Therefore, naturally, selfishness arises, because we directly experience our individual necessities, our pain, pleasure, hopes, and only in an indirect way do we realize other people's feelings. That limitation is the very cause

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of our suffering, since we become identified with something that is fragile, small, separated, transient, and incomplete. Theosophical teachings, however, postulate that our real identity is eternal, whole, unconditioned. If we could perceive this, the problems born of our identification with the limited 'I' would automatically vanish. But is it possible to perceive in an unbounded way?

Many mystics in different cultures and times had the experience that consciousness is ubiquitous. This experience was described by J. Krishnamurti (JK) in the following words:

> There was a man mending the road; that man was myself; the pickaxe he held was myself; the very stone which he was breaking up was a part of me; the tender blade of grass was my very being, and the tree beside the man was myself. I also could feel and think like the roadmender and I could feel the wind passing through the tree, and the little ant on the blade of grass I could feel. The birds, the dust, and the very noise were a part of me. . . . I was in everything, or rather everything was in me, inanimate and animate, the moun-tain, the worm and all breathing things.[2]

Thus we know, through the experience of the mystics, that the working of this extraordinary spiritual perception is a possibility for human consciousness; that we can perceive in a holistic way, feeling as if we were part of every living creature and even of every so-called 'non-living thing'. Let us examine, then, how we can have access to that kind of perception.

The psychological approach

When considering this subject from a Theosophical point of view, we find two approaches: the psychological and the occult. They are complementary, and, to use HPB's words, would lead us to gain 'a clear perception of the unity of the one energy operating in the manifested Cosmos'. We will begin by exploring the psychological approach, which is especially meant to remove obstacles, before building a different kind of perception. In order to have access to that complete perception, we have to discover first why it is that our consciousness works in such a limited way. In a talk with some friends, JK refers to this:

> Wait, Sir, I am all that, the past and the present and the projected future; I am born in India with all the culture of 5,000 years. That is all my point. That is what I call consciousness . . . when you say you are a Hindu and I am a Muslim; when there is focalization through identification, there is then choice.[3]

According to Theosophical teachings, our real consciousness, that which endures life after life, is beyond the personal mind, emotions and physical body. In every new life it builds those vehicles for its expression in the lower realms. But then that consciousness is limited by them during incarnation. In fact, the *focalization* of the unbounded original consciousness, limiting its capacity to perceive from a wider perspective, is due to the *identification* with the personality. In her article on 'Morality and Pantheism', HPB wrote:

> The starting point of the 'pantheistic' (we use the word for want of a better one) system of morality is a clear perception of the unity of the one energy operating in the manifested Cosmos . . . The principal obstacle to the realization of this oneness is the inborn habit of man of always placing himself at the centre of the Universe. Whatever a man might act, think or feel, the irrepressible 'I' is sure to be the central figure. This, as will appear, on the slightest consideration, is that which prevents every individual from filling his proper sphere in existence, where he only is exactly in place and no other individual is.[4]

Thus the main problem seems to be the 'inborn habit' of identifying ourselves with our limited, temporary, personal vehicles of consciousness, with the centre 'I'. This personal consciousness of ours was formed in the infant as a result of the impact of impressions from the outer world upon the brain. Since then, that limited mind became the main means of perception during our waking consciousness. We are used to perceiving through it; we do not know anything else. As JK states:

> What is the problem? I have been seeing only this fragment (pointing to a portion of the carpet) . . . My whole life has been spent in observing the fragment. You come along and say this is part of the whole, this would not exist if the other did not exist. But I cannot take my eyes off this fragment. I agree that this can only exist because of the whole carpet but I have never, never looked at the whole carpet. I have never moved away from this . . . And I do not know how to remove my eyes and look at the whole carpet.[5]

We know, in theory, that our personal consciousness is only a fragmentary expression of a greater whole, the Individuality, or Higher Ego, but we are unable to realize that. We feel that we are this person; that this is our name, our age, work, features, etc. We do not know how to perceive in a different way, and there is a force that keeps our perception limited to that narrow field during our daily life. What is it? JK dwelt on this at length:

> What is it that prevents total perception of this vast, complex, existence? . . . When I enter the room, one object catches my eye. The lovely bedspread, and I casually look at other things . . . the rest recedes, becomes very vague . . . Why has perception focused on that? . . . I see this whole field of life only in terms of pursuing pleasure . . . Does that prevent total perception? . . . How can the mind see the whole of the field when there is only the search for pleasure? . . . What is the factor of pleasure? . . . Pleasure is always personal. . . So, as long as the mind is pursuing pleasure as the 'me', how can I see this whole thing? I must understand pleasure, not suppress it, not deny it. So, it is important to see the whole, not the particular.[6]

Pleasure is a sensation born in that limited centre of consciousness, the

complex body-mind. And as long as our consciousness is pursuing sensation, it will be bound to work through the personality. Damodar K. Mavalankar, one of the most prominent characters among early Theosophists, wrote:

> The desires and passions are, so to say, chains (*real magnetic chains*) which bind down the mind to these earthly carnal enjoyments and appetites. And he who wishes to rise superior to the Māyā which pervades this world must do so by breaking those adamantine chains which hold him a prisoner in this transient world.[7]

Thus, we should examine ourselves and ask: How are we living? Are we mostly seeking personal pleasure in the different activities in which we take part? Is our daily attitude one of self-protection, self-justification, and so on, trying not to be disturbed? If it is so, we are constantly strengthening the fragmentation of consciousness that is the 'me', keeping our consciousness in the prison of personal sensation. It is not that we have to refuse pleasure as if it were sinful. If it comes, we experience it, in the same way as we experience unpleasant things. Both are part of life. But the fact that we are seeking for some kind of pleasure in almost every situation means that bodily sensations have a great influence on our consciousness. That is why, as we read in *Practical Occultism*, 'The first great basic delusion you have to get over is the identification of yourself with the physical body'.[8] Unfortunately, it is not just a question of studying or talking about it. In most cases, study has to be the first step because it points out the direction. But if there is no real willingness to live according to it, this knowledge is of little use. In this connection HPB wrote:

> Knowledge or *jñāna* is divided into two classes . . . — *paroksha* and *aparoksha*. The former kind of knowledge consists in intellectual assent to a stated proposition, the latter in the actual realization of it. . . . From the study of the sacred philosophy, . . . *paroksha*, knowledge (or shall we say *belief*?) in the unity of existence is derived, but without the practice of morality that knowledge cannot be converted into the highest kind of knowledge or *aparoksha-jñāna*. . . . It availeth naught to intellectually grasp the notion of your being everything and Brahman, if it is not realized in practical acts of life . . . . You cannot be one with ALL, unless all your acts, thoughts, and feelings synchronize with the onward march of Nature.[9]

That is why real spiritual knowledge does not come merely through study, but through an integral way of life that also includes meditation, self-knowledge, and an unselfish attitude. If we are serious about it, we should train our consciousness daily to live beyond that centre of pleasure that is the 'me'.

The occultist approach

We have seen that, according to HPB, 'The principal obstacle to the realization of this oneness is the inborn habit of man of always placing himself at the

centre of the Universe.' Let us ponder over these words from an occultist's perspective. The problem here is that we are conditioned by the sense of being that centre 'where we only are exactly in place'. As stated before, consciousness is not necessarily limited by space or form, but it is able to become aware of what is taking place in other expressions of the One Life. Since it is not habituated to perceive beyond the personal centre, our practice should involve an attempt to decentralize our consciousness, thus getting used to expanding it for a wider perception. How do we do that?

The practice of HPB's Diagram of Meditation is very useful in this endeavour.[10] The whole Diagram is designed to help us break the identification with our lower consciousness. The subject of this Diagram is too vast to be thoroughly discussed here and we will explore it in a future article, but we can refer to one portion of it. HPB suggests that we should gradually habituate our consciousness to perceive in a non-centred way, trying to live with a 'Perpetual Presence in imagination in all Space and Time'. 'From this', she adds, 'originates a substratum of memory of universality.' This means that we should try to limit the focalization of consciousness to the spot where we are in space and time. It is not an easy thing to do, but the very effort in that direction develops the capacity to habituate our consciousness to perceive in a different way. We can use whatever strategy we find useful. When walking, for example, we could try to feel that we are everything that moves around, 'our' body being just one of those objects. Or we could sit on a bench in a park and try to feel we are everywhere, or that our existence has neither beginning nor form. Then we should gradually incorporate that abstract feeling into our daily routine.

There is another interesting exercise suggested by C. W. Leadbeater:

> During meditation one may try to think of the Supreme Self in everything and everything in it. Try to understand how the self is endeavouring to express itself through the form. One method of practice for this is to try to identify your consciousness with that of various creatures, such as a fly, an ant, or a tree. Try to see and feel things as they see and feel them, until as you pass inwards all consciousness of the tree or the insect falls away, and the life of the LOGOS appears.[11]

Here Leadbeater points out two important things. The first is: 'During meditation try to think of the Supreme Self in everything and everything in it', which is another aspect of HPB's meditation just mentioned. And second, he advises us to identify ourselves with the lower forms of life. Again, it is not an easy exercise because it involves entering into a new realm, but we can find some interesting hints in the words of JK, who has also suggested a similar experiment:

> It seems to me that one of our greatest difficulties is to see for ourselves, really, clearly, not only outward things but inward life. . . . Have you ever experi-

> mented with looking at an objective thing like a tree without any of the associations, any of the knowledge you have acquired about it, without any words forming a screen between you and the tree and preventing you from seeing it as it actually is? Try it and see what actually takes place when you observe the tree with all your being, with the totality of your energy. In that intensity you will find that there is no observer at all; there is only attention.[12]

To succeed in this kind of exercise, we have to be able to silence our personal consciousness. All of these exercises may be tested by oneself in a spirit of investigation. They will gradually develop the power of perception that is latent in every one of us. Undoubtedly, when this kind of spiritual discernment awakens, an important transformation will take place. As Leadbeater said after describing his exercise:

> When we know quite certainly that we are part of a whole, we do not so much mind where this particular fragment of it may be, or through what experiences it may be passing.[13] ✧

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12. JK, *Freedom from the Known*, ch. 11.
13. *loc. cit.*

When the Self is found, when a man realizes, however imperfectly, his unity with the Supreme, when he begins really to break the bonds of the heart, then it is that, seeking liberation, he becomes intent upon the welfare of the world.

Annie Besant

Shigatze: Former Hermitage of the Masters

ALISTAIR COOMBS

SHIGATZE is Tibet's second largest town after Lhasa, with a population that currently numbers around 70,000. Much like Lhasa, since the 1960's the town has become a sprawling Chinatown with an array of gambling dens, brothels, loud bars, and grimy noodle restaurants; an unsavoury upcrop of vice. A short distance out of the town, however, one is sharply reminded of the awe-inspiring grandeur of the valley in which the town lies, a paradisiacal landscape that has resonated wonder and mystery to so many.

Shigatze is situated by the tributaries of the Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) river. The alluvial plain in which it lies is one of the most fertile in Tibet. Shigatze, which is a Chinese transliteration of its Tibetan name, means 'place of fertile soil'. The town has historically always been an important trading post between Tibet and Nepal, second only to Lhasa. The city also holds an important place in religious history within Tibetan Buddhism in connection with the Tashilhunpo monastery, situated west of the town, nestling by a mountain named Drolmari, 'Tara's mountain'.

Tashilhunpo, meaning 'heap of prosperity', was founded by a student of Tsonkhapa, Gedun Drup (1391-1478), who is considered to have been the first Dalai Lama. He had a dream in which Paldan Lhamo instructed him to establish the institution to help propagate the Dharma in the region. Paldan Lhamo, who is the Protectress of Tibet, is the Buddhist form of the Hindu goddess Kāli, she who wrathfully destroys opponents of the Dharma. Tashilhunpo and the development of Lamaism were thus inspired by this visionary encounter.

The fifth Dalai Lama created a convention that would later become a source of tension within Lamaism. Out of gratitude and reverence, he conferred on the Abbot of Tashilhunpo, who was his teacher, the title of Tashi, or Panchen, Lama. From then on the Tashi and Dalai Lamas began to be regarded as different aspects of the Buddha. The Dalai Lama was perceived as an emanation of Chenrezig and held temporal dominion over kingship and the state based at the Potala at Lhasa, while the Tashi Lama, based at Tashilhunpo, was perceived as

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an emanation of Amitābha, the parent Buddha of Chenrezig, and so held a higher position, being responsible for spiritual governance and affairs.

Students of Theosophy will be aware that Shigatze holds an important position in Theosophical history, as the Masters, while never describing themselves as Tibetan in their communications, were at one point said to be based there. HPB provides testimony of having visited Shigatze herself. Even though the question of her ever entering Tibet is one hotly debated, it is irrelevant today, given the content and widespread influence of the Theosophical exposition of Buddhist teachings:

> I have lived at different periods in Little Tibet as in Great Tibet, and these combined periods form more than seven years. Yet, I have never stated either verbally or over my signature that I had passed seven consecutive years in a convent. What I have said, and repeat now, is that I have stopped in Lamaistic convents; that I have visited Tzi-gadze, the Tashi-Lhünpo territory and its neighbourhood, and that I have been further in, and in such places of Tibet as have never been visited by any other European. (*CW*, vol. VI, p. 272)

One can only infer that Theosophy's important connection with Shigatze was also significantly linked to the sources of *The Secret Doctrine* stored there. *The Book of Dzyan*, from which the Stanzas are drawn, and on which *The Secret Doctrine* is an expanded commentary, is the first volume of fourteen commentaries on seven secret Tibetan Buddhist works known as *Kiu-te*. There also exist thirty-five exoteric volumes of *Kiu-te* which contribute to the religious literature of most monastic institutions throughout Tibet, volumes not exclusive to Tashilhunpo:

> Strictly speaking, those thirty-five books ought to be termed 'The Popularized Version' of *The Secret Doctrine*, full of myths, blinds and errors; the fourteen volumes of *Commentaries*, on the other hand — with their translations, annotations, and an ample glossary of Occult terms, worked out from one small archaic folio, the *Book of the Secret Wisdom of the World* — contain a digest of all the Occult Sciences. These, it appears, are kept secret and apart, in the charge of the Teshu Lama of Shigatze. (*SD*, vol. V, p. 389)

A significant member of the *Kiu-te* corpus is the popular Kālachakra Tantra, or the 'wheel of time' teaching. This emerged in Tibet during the year 1026 AD and was possibly introduced from India. The teaching, comprising works on meditation, astrology, and the original myth of Shambhala, is considered by many Buddhists as the highest teaching of the Mahāyāna. For a period, Tashilhunpo was the major centre of Kālachakra studies in Tibet.

Kālachakra design

Even though Shigatze has recently, at least in its physical aspect, fallen by the wayside and no longer resembles the idyllic peaceful town as described by several pre-invasion accounts, the monastery now houses something that stops not far short of a minor World Wonder. Last century a Maitreya Chapel was constructed at Tashilhunpo to preserve a colossal statue of the future Buddha Maitreya, Jampa Buddha in Tibetan. The statue, constructed over a period of nine years, is the largest seated bronze Maitreya Buddha in the world. It reaches almost eighty-six feet in height and is gilded all over by some six-hundred pounds of gold, sumptuously bedecked with jade, coral, diamonds, and numerous other precious and semi-precious stones. There is a circuit around its twelve-feet high lotus throne where clockwise circumambulation can be made around the image. The expression wrought on its face by craftsmen is one of inexpressible wisdom and compassion, with its meditative eyes truly appearing to gaze out upon something not of this world.

This monument at Tashilhunpo monastery makes one think of the intense spiritual activity of which Shigatze was once a vital centre in previous centuries, not to mention the more recent 'precipitations of light' that occurred there, now crystallized for all to see in *The Mahatma Letters.* ✧

Occult Science is a jealous mistress and allows not a shadow of self-indulgence; and it *is* 'fatal' not only to the ordinary course of married life but even to flesh and *wine* drinking. I am afraid that the archeologists of the seventh round, when digging out and unearthing the future Pompeii of Punjab — Simla, one day, instead of finding the precious relics of the Theosophical 'Eclectic', will fish out but some petrified or vitreous remains of the 'sumptuary allowance'. Such is the latest prophecy current at Shigatze.

KH, Mahatma Letter No. 18/62

Ethics of Compassion

MARTIN HAUSENBERG

ETHICS and compassion are such demanding subjects that it would be better if a lama, who truly embodies those qualities, would speak about them. Nevertheless, ethics and compassion touch all of us, because the happiness of human life depends on them. Those interested in spiritual growth aspire to develop these qualities in themselves. But even though a person is not interested in spiritual growth, ethics and compassion still touch him, because they are qualities that bring happiness to everyone's life regardless of spiritual aspirations. A compassionate person brings happiness to everyone who comes into contact with him and, similarly, if a person is not compassionate, he will constantly cause suffering to people around him.

As Theosophists, we are often interested in complicated metaphysical phenomena, the secrets of Nature, the origin of the universe and so on. Those are undoubtedly important areas of study, which increase our knowledge and widen our world view. However, if we only emphasize knowledge, there will be no inner change in us. That is why wise teachers have always emphasized that spiritual growth may come about on one condition only, which is that, in tandem with increasing knowledge, we raise the standards of our own ethical behaviour. The more we set ethical demands for ourselves, the more compassionate we become. Compassion and ethics are linked with each other: an unethical person cannot act compassionately in a wider sense and, on the other hand, a person who respects the laws of compassion is ethical at the same time.

We Theosophists usually have a fairly good theoretical understanding about a compassionate way of life, but we rather give lectures on some other subject. If compassion becomes the topic of our speech, we may feel a certain inner emptiness. It is important to pay attention to this honestly. Compassion is not merely a word — it is a centre of spiritual power. When we utter the word 'compassion' it is like a vibrating mirror which exposes our true nature; it reveals whether something is vibrating within us at the same level, or whether compassion is merely like any other word to us. This shows that the idea of compassion does not remove inner emptiness. Unfortunately,

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I am exactly in this same situation. My idea of compassion is also theoretical. I know how important an unselfish attitude and work is, but in practice the pursuit of my own happiness and personal gain often wins. It is not easy to get rid of these, but I do believe that all those who continue the inner battle against selfishness throughout their lives, will eventually overcome all obstacles, turning theoretical values into a practical way of life.

When we meet wise teachers, it is like a sort of stroke inspiring us, but then the winds of the world soon blow our attention elsewhere. That is why the great wise teachers have always taught that every day we should remind ourselves of what is truly valuable and permanent. There are many things that take our time, attention, and interest, but at the time of death these things have no true value or significance. It would be worthwhile to try, for example, the following exercise: '*Close your eyes and imagine that you are dead. Then look back at your life as a bystander. You can see it as a chain of events, decisions and emotions. Now from the other side of death we can see how we have moulded our character. Our life had love and compassion in it, but also hatred, envy, and indifference/negligence. Now, being dead, we have to be honest and confess to ourselves what kind of emotions and pursuits have been victorious during our life — whether it was compassion or the pursuit of our own interests, useless chores, or spiritual practices. This is how we can find out what is the guiding force in our action.* There is also another way of looking at this: *we can honestly look at our character and ask if I really wanted to have this person as my friend.*' These are very painful questions, are they not?

There is a possibility for change in every moment, if we only have the will and the power to use those moments. Let us imagine that I have been given twenty minutes for a speech and you have been given twenty minutes to listen. I have to think how and what I would say if these were the last twenty minutes of my life. Would I have a somewhat different tone and power in my words if I thought there would be no opportunity to correct them afterwards, and that they would be my last words? Similarly, the listeners would have the same possibility to really concentrate, if they thought that this would be the last opportunity for them to hear the dharma. The same applies to speaking in everyday life. The ability to speak is very self-evident to us and we use it in saying both good and bad things. However, not everyone has this ability, and we can also lose it suddenly. So every time we say something it would be worthwhile to ask ourselves: Would I say these words, if they were my last, since life could end at any time, as easily as a tree-branch breaks!

We often think that compassion means doing some kind of great Bodhisattva-deeds, which I cannot do — they are so removed from me still. But this is not true at all. Even overcoming our own laziness can be a greatly compassionate act, since laziness is often preventing us from doing many small but valuable

spiritual deeds and chores. For example, Lodge gatherings and public lectures are always a possibility to practise compassion. If we participate in the meetings with the motive of gaining knowledge for ourselves, that is good, but this is not a compassionate motive. If the purpose of our participation is to develop the common level of thought and to support Lodge work, this is already compassion in practice.

In Tibetan Buddhism, the idea of compassion is often linked with the word *bodhichitta*, which is usually translated as the 'mind of enlightenment'. I think that compassion is necessarily a part of the enlightened mind. When a strong and unwavering decision to reach enlightenment some day awakens in us, there is already strong compassion in it, because it means that we will no longer cause suffering to living beings. If this decision is real, it means that we are willing to suffer ourselves rather than to cause suffering to others.

All the great sages have considered compassion and ethics as signs of true spirituality. This has been expressed in a very deep and simple way by a great Tibetan teacher — Patrol Rinpoche. I would like to conclude with his words:

> Even someone who can fly like a bird, travel under the earth like a mouse, pass through rocks unimpeded, leave imprints of his hands and feet on rocks, someone who has unlimited clairvoyance and can perform all kinds of miracle — if such a person has no *bodhichitta*, he can only be a *tirthika*, or possessed by some powerful demon. He might at first attract some naive innocents who will be impressed and bring offerings. But in the long run he will only bring ruin upon himself and others. On the other hand, a person who possesses true *bodhichitta*, even without having any other quality, will benefit whoever comes into contact with him or her. (*Words of My Perfect Teacher*, p. 257) ✧

O mendicants! Just as the snow-white *vassika*,
The jasmine, putting forth fresh blooms today,
Sheds down the withered blooms of yesterday,
So shed ye lust and hate. . . .

Rouse thou the self by self, by self examine self:
Thus guarded by the self, and with thy mind
Intent and watchful, thus, O mendicant,
Thou shalt live happily. . . .

Lo, ye! a mendicant, though young he be, that strives
To grasp the teaching of the Awakened One,
Lights up the world, as, from a cloud released,
The moon lights up the night.

Dhammapada, vv. 376-81

Archaic Buddhism

N. YAGNESVARA SASTRY

THE title 'Archaic Buddhism' suggests that what passes for Buddhism today may not be what the Buddha taught. That a change has indeed come over Buddhism is explicit from a statement of the Buddha that his religion will be pure for 'just five hundred years'.[1] There is archeological evidence also to indicate a change in Buddhism. About the 1st century AD, image worship, which had been avoided for over five hundred years, entered Buddhism, though on the fringes of India it had appeared earlier.

The Chinese philosopher Wei Lang states that the Buddha is not a person, but the universal Spirit, even as God is, as taught by Jesus to the woman of Samaria; and that the Buddha saw 'no difference between himself and other things'. The early Buddhists seem to have acted on this view in assiduously turning from image worship.

The first step in narrowing the conception of the Buddha was probably taken in the third century BC when the Emperor Aśoka represented the Teacher as a Lion. The Buddha was long known as the Lion of the Śākya race. One of the sermons in the *Majjhima Nikāya* is called 'The Lion's Roar'. The *Anguttara Nikāya* even explicitly says: 'A Lion, monks, that is the name for the Tathāgata.'[2]

Though Aśoka introduced symbology, he avoided the human form, as if to suggest that the Buddha was no person. In the second century BC also, the Buddha image was avoided. He was often represented by an empty seat under a tree with worshippers before it, as depicted in what are known as the Barhut sculptures in the Calcutta Museum. The same practice continued in India proper, during the first century BC, as shown in the Sanchi remains.

There is more evidence also of a change in Buddhism. In the *Majjhima Nikāya* (*Bālapanditasutta*), evil-doers are said to suffer in hell for a period amounting almost to eternity, and the Buddhist hell is as gruesome as any other hell. The Buddha could not have preached such a doctrine.

The necessity has arisen to excavate archaic Buddhism from the debris of ages. The teachings of the Buddha, judging from a few samples, are too valuable to

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be neglected. They must be of special value to many Theosophists, for a great Adept is said to have written that Colonel Olcott, 'who works but to revive Buddhism, may be regarded as one who labours in the true path of Theosophy'.[3] Buddhism has been equated with Theosophy.

It is futile, however, to accept whatever is pleasing as Archaic Buddhism and reject the rest. Personal wishes and inclinations will have to be put aside and the excavation has to be done according to certain logical principles. One principle consists of sorting out the teachings into various groups according to their tenor — monastical, devotional, or analytical — and then deciding what could be the original teaching.

There are misogynist passages in the Buddhist books which have the mark of medieval monasticism. With this may be collated passages lauding the use of robes made from rags or prescribing meditation on corpses, etc. These have a common trait. Another set of passages, revealing the feature of faith and ardent devotion, could be classified as devotional. A third group could consist of teachings which are pure, and appeal to the intelligence.

As a sample of devotional Buddhism may be cited teachings stressing the need for faith in the Buddha as the 'Exalted One, *arahant*, wholly awake, abounding in wisdom and righteousness, the well-farer, the world-knower, the incomparable tamer of tameable men, the teacher of deva-s and men.'[4]

Another passage sharing the mark of devotion is in the *Anguttara* which says:

> Monks, as compared with orders and companies, the Order of a Tathāgata's disciples is reckoned best . . . . Worthy of honour are they, worthy of reverence, worthy of offerings, worthy of salutations with clasped hands — a field of merit unsurpassed for the world.[5]

At this stage an important issue has to be decided. Why tear up and group the teachings as monastical, devotional, and analytical and accept one as 'archaic'? Why cannot Archaic Buddhism be a blend of all features? A difficulty in making such a blend is in deciding what should be accepted or rejected. For instance, is it necessary for priests to wear yellow robes? If they can eat whatever is given to them — they are expected to — why cannot they wear whatever is presented? Is it wrong for a Bhikkhu to eat two meals, if he is moderate? Must he avoid art programmes as repeatedly prescribed? Such questions cannot be answered without much wisdom.

As regards devotion also, difficult questions arise. What is true devotion? How is it to be distinguished from various forms of frenzy, hysteria, or self-stimulation? How is it that all over the world persons are found feeling 'devotion' to almost anything? To answer these questions also much wisdom is necessary.

Wisdom, therefore, is the primary way, and all other ways can come as offshoots of wisdom. No doubt, the *Bhagavadgitā* states that all ways lead to the same goal, but it does not say that all ways are of

equal merit. Besides, the very expression 'Buddhism' means the way of wisdom or *jñāna-mārga*.

The *jñāna-mārga* has been much heard of, but every teacher of *jñāna-mārga*, so called, takes some important fundamentals for granted and proceeds thereon, whereas it is the fundamentals that are most difficult to find and of which the greatest care has to be taken. In other words, true *jñāna-mārga* does not exist today, except perhaps in the Theosophical Society, if its second and third Objects are strictly construed.

The Buddha was a teacher of the *jñāna-mārga* in the truest sense. He insisted on faith only regarding certain ethical fundamentals, not philosophical fundamentals. Archaic Buddhism can be woven round the principle: 'Be ye lamps unto yourself and depend on no external authority.'[6] As if to stress this point, he stated also the reverse: that person would thus go furthest who depended on himself.

In the address to the Kālāma-s of Kesaputta, the Buddha states that one should not accept religious teachings because of hoary tradition or with the thought, 'one must revere a recluse'. Though the 'wise' should also be considered, the essential is that 'you know of yourself'. Apparently, it does not matter if mistakes are made. Man learns even through mistakes provided they are his mistakes and not those of his Guru. This teaching matches the other one on self-dependence.

This advice to the Kālāma-s of Kesaputta was repeated to one Badiya, a Licchavi, almost in the same language. It is necessary to explain why identical language is often found in Buddhist books expounding the same idea. It is probably because shorthand did not exist and, when the Buddha preached, the sermon was written down or memorized after many consultations, and to save labour, the same formulas were used when the subject was the same.

The doctrine of self-dependence seems to have been central to the Buddha's philosophy. So much so that the disciples began to imitate the Master. For instance, a monk, Nandaka, gave the same teachings to one Sālha.[7] Ānanda repeated it to a householder. The Buddha was the first great teacher to give the Magna Carta of freedom to spiritual aspirants.

This emphasis on self-reliance in spiritual matters is akin to the Buddha's views on metaphysical speculations. He discouraged these on two grounds. Firstly, the world is in such a sorrowful state that man needs to establish peace within himself and the world by the simplest and the most direct means. Secondly, all religious beliefs are largely influenced by one's personal 'wishes' and 'inclinations' and have no validity. In the *Sutta Nipāta* (*Dutthaka Sutta*), the Buddha asks: 'How can one who is "led by wishes and possessed by his inclinations" overcome his views?'

For discovering the 'Truths' for oneself, the Buddha gave four meditations. The first meditation based on 'discursive thinking' is the simplest, but even for this

the Buddha prescribed certain ethical qualifications. The first meditation is impossible, says he, save as one gives up hankerings, ill will, sloth, flurry, and doubt![8] The other meditations seem to be degrees in the attenuation of the 'I'.

The question may arise as to why ethical qualifications are necessary even for 'discursive thinking'. It must be because of the subconscious which always deflects the thought. The subconscious is stilled only when certain ethical qualifications are there. The same idea underlies the observation of Madame Blavatsky that it is possible for one to kneel in a church and say 'Thy will be done, not mine' and 'send up waves of willpower for selfish or unholy purposes!'[9]

Ramakrishna Paramahamsa must have had the subconscious in mind when he laughed at the meditation group of his friend Keshab Chandra Sen. The group reminded Ramakrishna of some monkeys 'looking the very picture of innocence,'[10] though planning some devastation. Of course, he attributed no conscious insincerity to anyone.

As for the second meditation, it is based on 'concentration', but this word has a special meaning in Buddhism, for Ānanda says that this concentration 'is not controlled by conscious effort'.[11] In other words, it has to be spontaneous. The Buddha also says, 'the restraint that prevails is not a conscious restraint'.[12]

The next question is how such effortless concentration can come. Such concentration comes from 'happiness' says the Buddha.[13] The 'mind of the happy is concentrated'.[14] These teachings about meditation reveal great psychological depth and have features of a modern mind in the best sense of the term, which the Buddha had, though he taught in the 5th century BC, and may be accepted as archaic Buddhism.

The advice of the Buddha to those who cannot experience this spontaneous happiness and concentration is significant. He said: 'Whoever cannot obtain at will, easily and without difficulty . . . this happiness',[15] should be reconciled to his crude happiness. Struggles 'for becoming or not becoming such or so'[16] are not conducive to 'detachment'. It is necessary to grow 'as the flower grows, unconsciously,' for 'spiritual aspiration' could be 'intensely selfish'[17] as observed by 'an adept'.

As regards ceremonials, the Buddhist scriptures deal with them profusely. In *Abhidhammatha Sangaha* (translation by Maung Tin) 'mere rite and ritualism' is stated to be a fetter (p. 172). The word 'mere' may indicate that the Buddha opposed only an exclusive reliance on ritual. In the same book, on the very next page, the 'practice of rite and ritual' is shown as a fetter and the word 'mere' is omitted. In the *Anguttara Nikāya*, it is 'wrong handling of habit and rite' that is said to be a hindrance. In the *Digha Nikāya*, 'trust in the efficiency of ceremonials' is declared to be one of the bonds and there is no distinction between 'wrong handling' and right handling.

The Lives of Alcyone contains an interesting observation which throws some

light on this issue. In the thirteenth life, Alcyone was the grandson, it is said, of the Lord Maitreya and is reported to have asked: 'Why have we no temples here, grandfather?' The Lord Maitreya replied:

> We have no temples because our wise forefathers have taught us that God is everywhere, and that we need not set apart one time or one place more than another in which to serve Him, because our love to Him should always be in our hearts, so that every grove, or field, or house is to us a temple of His service, and every day a holy day upon which to do Him honour. We think that the trees and the sky which He has made are grander than any human work and so we make them the pillars and the roof of our temple. (pp. 187-8)

According to another passage Alcyone lived in India in the 5th century BC, and was ordained as a Buddhist by the Buddha himself. In the 7th century AD Alcyone again became a Buddhist, and the ordination ceremony now is described thus:

> It was very different in its ornate form from the simple yet most impressive ceremony by which the Lord Buddha Himself had received him in his previous birth. Then he had simply bowed before the Lord, had answered some searching questions and made some promises . . . . That was the custom of the Lord, but this time, the whole affair had become an elaborate ritual.

It may be assumed that the Buddha permitted simple rituals like the one described.

A modern mind is again revealed in the Buddhist approach to the 'soul', but to appreciate it, a passage in the *Bhagavadgitā* needs to be noted. It says:

> As a man casting off worn-out garments, taketh new ones, so the dweller in the body, casting off worn-out bodies entereth into others that are new . . . unthinkable, immutable he is called.[18]

If it is conceded that the soul is 'unthinkable', the Buddhist position becomes strong. How can it be said of an 'unthinkable' principle that each person has one, that it grows, that some are bigger, that they reincarnate, etc.?

To the Buddhist, anything that the mind can think of is not the soul, not even the 'higher mind'. It is only the lower mind that prescribes behaviour for the higher mind and adjudges it. The 'higher mind' is thus in the grip of the lower mind and at best there is only the higher part of the lower mind, or *vinnāna*, which is not the soul.

The Buddha was astonished at the concern of many people for their 'unthinkable' soul. He said that it was like being in love with somebody whom nobody knows. Says the *Digha Nikāya*:

> Just as if a man should say, 'How I long for, how I love the most beautiful woman in the land!'
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> People should ask him: 'Well! good friend! this most beautiful woman in the land whom you love and long for, do you know whether that beautiful woman is a noble lady, or of priestly rank, or of the trader class, or of menial birth?'
>
> And when so asked, he should answer: 'No.'

> And people should ask him: 'Well! good friend! this most beautiful woman in the land whom you love and long for, do you know what her name is, or her family name, or whether she be tall or short or of medium height; whether she be dark or brunette, or golden in colour; or in what village or town or city she dwells?'
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> And when so asked, he should answer: 'No.'[19]

The Buddha was apparently capable of much humour, besides being profound, humane, and independent. Yet he was remarkably humble. Once when several Brāhman-s went to him with gifts of homage, he requested them to go back and told his attendant: 'I have naught to do with homage, Nāgita, nor has homage aught to do with me.'[20] He was not for *Buddham Saranam Gacchāmi*' (I take refuge in the Buddha). But it is difficult not to pay homage to a Teacher who rejects homage. It is difficult not to follow Him who wants no following.

BUDDHAM SARANAM GACCHĀMI ✧

References

1. *Anguttara Nikāya*, VIII.6.51.
2. ibid., V.10.99.
3. *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, 1st series, pp. 2-3.
4. *Anguttara Nikāya*, IX.3.27.
5. ibid., IV.4.34.
6. *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*.
7. *Anguttara Nikāya*, III.7.66.
8. ibid., VI.7.73.
9. *The Key to Theosophy*, ch. V.
10. *Prophet of the New India*, Romain Rolland, p. 122.
11. *Anguttara Nikāya*, lX.4. 37.
12. ibid., V.3.27.
13. ibid., X.1.1.
14. ibid., XI.11.12.
15. ibid., V.3.30.
16. *Majjhima Nikāya*, Horner's translation, 1959, p. 157.
17. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 1924 ed., p. 360.
18. *Bhagavadgitā,* II.22.25.
19. *Potthapada Sutta*.
20. *Anguttara Nikāya*, VIII.9.86.

Books of Interest

THE LOST LAND OF LEMURIA: *Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories*, by Sumathi Ramaswamy, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, 2004, pp. xvii + 334.

Scholars are increasingly recognizing the influence of Theosophy on modern thought. The author of this book is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, specializing in Tamil studies. She traces the history of the Lemurian concept through three incarnations.

The first incarnation was a scientific hypothesis to explain the distribution of certain animals, specifically the lemurs, arboreal mammals now found chiefly in Madagascar but earlier more widespread from Africa to India. In 1864 an English zoologist, Philip Lutley Sclater, published a scientific article in which he used the name 'Lemuria' for a hypothetical continent once existing in what is now the Indian Ocean by which the lemurs and other life forms spread over a wide geographical area. A few years later, a German biologist, Ernst Haeckel, proposed that Lemuria was the cradle of the human race.

The second incarnation was the Theosophical one, when Madame H. P. Blavatsky and others in the 1880s used the term 'Lemuria' for the continent of the third root race (the first fully physical one), located in the Pacific Ocean. That concept was subsequently expanded by other writers, supplying specific descriptions of the land and its inhabitants. The concept was taken up by various New Age writers and further imaginatively elaborated, often to fatuousness.

The third incarnation is the one that most interests Prof. Ramaswamy. It was the adoption in 1903 of Lemuria by Tamil nationalists as the primeval homeland of the Tamils. They renamed it Kumarinādu 'virgin territory' or Kumarikkandam 'virgin continent' and (following Haeckel) supposed it to be the source for the world's population, thus making 'Tamil speakers . . . ipso facto, the most ancient peoples of the world and the ancestors of all of humanity'. The nostalgic loss of that homeland is emotionally charged. This third incarnation is founded on the two earlier ones and developed, significantly, in the region of the Theosophical Society's international headquarters in south India. MORTON DILKES

Lemuria. A modern term first used by some naturalists, and now adopted by Theosophists, to indicate a continent that, according to the *Secret Doctrine* of the East, preceded Atlantis.

H. P. Blavatsky

Theosophical Work around the World

Indian Headquarters

A Study Camp organized by the Indian Section at Varanasi from 24 – 29 March was attended by members from Orissa, Bengal, and Bihar, with some members mainly from Delhi. The subject for study was *Freedom from the Known* by J. Krishnamurti. Prof. P. Krishna, former Head of the Physics Department, Benares Hindu University, and now head of the Krishnamurti Centre in Varanasi, gave talks every morning, while the international President, Mrs Radha Burnier, also lectured in the afternoons. Both lectures were followed by questions and answers and discussions. On the last day, Prof. Krishna and the President held a public discussion which was much appreciated. On the whole, the Camp proved to be interesting, covering many aspects of the subject.

Singapore Lodge and Southeast Asia

Singapore Lodge has been active for many years and has a membership of 336. Recently, Pedro Oliveira, Matius Ali and others lectured there.

There are seven Lodges functioning in Bangladesh. Comilla Lodge (founded in 1889) has the largest number of members, 42, some of whom meet weekly. Its library is open daily, and the very old building is being renovated as funds are received. At Siddhartha Study Centre and Dhaka Lodge, regular study classes are held. The latter publishes news and articles in both English and Bangla newspapers, publicizing Theosophical work. In the three Lodges of the Chittagong region, work was disrupted last year due to natural disasters, but members are trying to hold regular meetings. In Bangladesh, many members subscribe to *The Theosophist*. Bro. B. L. Bhattacharya, of Kolkatta is very helpful. He sends out the monthly Bulletin in Bangla, the regional language, to all members.

In Malaysia, only Selangor Lodge is functioning, holding study classes and public lectures. Some members attended the School of the Wisdom at Adyar in both 2007 and 2008. In Yangon (Rangoon), Lodge meetings have ceased due to Government restrictions.

Russian Translations

Mr Konstantin Zaitzev, of the Moscow Theosophical group, reports that two important Theosophical works have been published for the first time in Russian: *Occult Chemistry* by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, and *The Hidden Side of Things* by C. W. Leadbeater. ✧

The result of what a man is or does is held not to be dissipated into many separate streams, but to be concentrated together in the formation of one new sentient being, but the same in its essence, its being, its doing, its Karma.

A. P. Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*