

Freedom of Thought

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

Freedom of the Society

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

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



THE THEOSOPHIST

VOL. 143 NO. 5 FEBRUARY 2022

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Note: Articles for publication in *The Theosophist* should be sent to: <editorialoffice@gmail.com>

Cover: From “Angels in Paradise”, c. 1909 by Lithuanian musician/painter/theosophist Mikalojus K. Ciurlionis (1875–1911). (See Wikipedia and Wikimedia Commons sites.)

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

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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

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

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

A Life within a Life

TIM BOYD

IN the *Tao Te Ching* Lao Tzu makes the statement: “The person who seeks knowledge grows more and more each day. The person who seeks the Tao (the Way) grows less and less each day.” Our focus today is on growing less, what that might mean, and how it is we might involve ourselves in that level of seeking.

When I was very young I met a truly great lady, Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt. She was quite well known and active on the world stage. She was the wife of former President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who navigated the country through the Great Depression and World War II.

Mrs Roosevelt was a person in her own right, she had her own identity with her own views, and was extremely active on behalf of a variety of different causes. I was seven or eight years old when she came and spoke to a group of us. I remember my impression of her at that time was that she was a very sweet, nice, old lady. Perhaps it was one or two years before she actually passed away. It was only later that I came to understand something of her greatness, not just of the greatness of her ideas and her work, but of the sacrifices that were required for her to do the things that she did.

She was an activist for civil rights in

the US at a time when that was unpopular. It was on the wrong side of the sentiments of the nation. She stood up for women’s rights and workers’ rights. She was the first delegate from the United States to the United Nations (UN), and was instrumental in the UN’s founding. She chaired the committee that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which incorporates a great deal of theological thinking. Among those thoughts is that people should have four freedoms: of speech and worship, and from want and fear — big ideas.

When I first met her I was a child, not knowing any of that. But during her visit she said something that stuck with me. It was a statement about the life of the mind. To her the mind was what was all-important, what enabled all other things in life. She spoke to us young people about a direction that we might want to consider for our growth, our becoming. She laid out three categories of mind, saying: there are small minds, and “small minds talk about people”. It is the idea that when we are at our smallest, we are picking and gossiping about others. Then there are average minds, and “average minds talk about events”, things that happen in the world. And then she said, “Great minds talk about ideas”. So this

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was her hierarchy of mind; and to a large degree, this is useful.

But there is another quality of mind that gets less attention. It relates specifically to the idea that there is such a thing as a life within — qualitatively different from our normal, outwardly-turned way of living. In Zen Buddhist practice, there is an expression: “To the mind of the expert, there are few options. To the beginner’s mind there are many options.” The trained mind, conditioned through its expertise, its association with specific streams of information, and knowledge becomes limited, blinded to options for what might be described as reality.

I think we can all go back to a time of a beginner’s mind — a time when we were open, as yet unconditioned. To that mind that is learning something new, or seeing something for the first time, with fresh eyes, the possibilities are many; we could even say limitless.

So, what I would really like to talk about is intuition. Not specifically *the* intuition, but an intuitive approach to something fundamental to all people. There is a universally shared intuition. It is not a theory per se. It is not something that has the stamp of scientific approval, but it is a universally shared deep knowing that, each of us is a part of something more; something greater. We could call it a greater life. Whether it is proven scientifically or not, an Inner Life is undeniable.

All of us think, feel, see, and hear. But we think, feel, see, and hear at different levels, in different ways, to different

degrees. In a family we have brothers, sisters — each one exposed to the same things, but seeing the world from a different perspective and responding accordingly. For some, the balance of their attention is rooted in the world of the senses — taste, smell, or touch — the material world. That is the focus — the place where people feel at home and make their home. Then there are others who live in a different world. They “hear the beat of a different drummer” and live in a different world — parallel — but a differently sensed experience.

During the course of my life, I have known some people who have been deeply clairvoyant, which is not saying that they are infallible or 100% accurate, no more than you would say that someone looking at something with normal eyes is infallible and sees every aspect. Clairvoyance, literally, means “clear seeing” — people who see much as we do, but at a different level, in a slightly different dimension.

Each of us dreams, whether we remember our dreams or not. We close our eyes, our consciousness retreats from its involvement in the day-to-day world, and we dream. In those dreams there is an unquestioned sense of their reality. There are some people who even have the habit of what is described as lucid dreaming, which is to say, that they are fully awake, and aware in the dream — that it is a dream — and yet, still participate in the unfolding story and activities that go on in this other reality. We use the same language to describe

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a dream as we do to describe a trip to the grocery store.

Each of the world's spiritual traditions has scriptures. And those scriptures use the same language we use in talking about day-to-day things to try to describe things that are so far beyond our current perception, that we would think there can be no possible connection. I am fond of stories from various spiritual traditions. Stories are a way of connecting us to a deeper wisdom that is unavailable in recounting information or sharing knowledge.

There is a distinct difference between information, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Sometimes we feel as if knowledge is the gateway to all other things. And, while it has deep value, it has been said that we can become knowledgeable from someone else's knowledge, but we cannot become wise from someone else's wisdom. Wisdom is of a completely different order than knowledge. Wisdom is a perception of reality that so many spiritual teachers have come to try to communicate to us using the language of their time. So we have the Bible, the Mahābhārata, the *Bhagavad-gītā* — all using stories to try to touch something within us, to try and lead us to some deeper experience.

In *The Stanzas of Dzyan* — the basis for *The Secret Doctrine* of H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) — there is this statement using the language of fairytales: “The eternal parent, wrapped in her ever-invisible robes, had slumbered once again for seven eternities.” It is a beautiful

image similar to the “once upon a time” stories that we share with children. But this is an image symbolizing something that is indescribable. It points to a state prior to the formation of universes, prior to the manifestation of everything that we think of as real. “The eternal parent” — asleep, wrapped in the robes that would ultimately become the material of future universes. It is a language used to describe something deeply, deeply interior — interior to the point of not even being in existence, as yet.

Even though we all share aspects of both of these inner and the outer dimensions we find that our effectiveness in speaking across this divide is challenging. Where does the outer life become the Inner Life? There is a quote from HPB, which speaks to this idea. The question is: How is it that we all can see things so differently, living in the same world? How is it that there are so many different points of views? She states: “Whatever plane our consciousness may be acting in, both we and the things belonging to that plane, are for that time, the only realities.”

If our mind is rooted in the world of matter, things, and jobs, while that is our focus, and the plane of consciousness in which we are active, that is what is real. Close your eyes, go to sleep, live in a dream — that is what is real. There is also the possibility spoken of in the spiritual traditions of the world that through our own efforts we can shift our center of gravity to other, more interior planes of consciousness. The idea of

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this practice is not that we remove or separate ourselves from the world, but that it is possible to create an untroubled space that can become constant. It is an intuitive approach to being.

There is an example of the hurricane or cyclone in Nature. They are huge, organized patterns of weather. They spin and all around them everything is in motion, but at their centre there is always the “eye of the storm”. From the human point of view hurricanes are quite destructive, but when someone is in the center of the storm, they look up at the sky, and it is clear, unclouded, completely calm. This is the possibility that the spiritual traditions of the world speak to.

There is the well-known story from Plato about the dwellers in a cave, who have been chained, and all they know are shadows. Because this is the only reality to which they have been exposed they have built a very structured — and very real, to them — way of viewing shadows and interpreting them. The story is about the awakening and deepening of consciousness. One of them is gradually led out of the cave, to the upper world, where the sun, in all of its brightness, and all of its intensity, can now be seen as the source of all light. The process of adjusting to the vision of this light is what is described. It is about dwellers in two worlds, the worlds of the intuitive mind, or spiritual mind, and the darkened world rooted in viewing and interpreting shadows. The two are not separate. When he finally sees the sun, he is standing on the same earth that he was stand-

ing on in the cave, but from a different “location” in consciousness.

There are people we know who have seen a different vision of reality, and then come back and have to deal with it. Anyone who has a son or daughter, or who themselves have been involved in war, the war ends, but that person has seen something that changes them. Their way of seeing humanity and the world, shifts to another perspective, not shared by someone who has not had that experience.

There are people who become parents for the first time, and the world, pre-parenthood and post-parenthood, is very different. Different demands are placed on your way of seeing and behaving in the world. Once you see, you cannot unsee. For someone who refuses to accept and change, their sole option is trying to deny through distraction. I have known a number of people who have had near-death experiences in which, from a medical point of view, the body had died. But the consciousness has a life independent of the body, and it experiences a variety of things. Those people return changed — their priorities are reordered.

In the theosophical, and other spiritual traditions as well, there is the idea of initiation — profound spiritual experiences of a deepening nature, where for a time one is exposed, and lives within a different dimension of being. There is an exposure to a wisdom; there is the absorption, and then there is the return. We can walk up the mountain, but we always have to come back down. There

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is an expression, "after the ecstasy, come the dishes". All of our mundane affairs, the household chores, do not just go away with a change in perception.

How do we bridge these alternative realities? How do we bring them together? For people who have had these other levels of experience, there is great difficulty in trying to communicate it to others. There is the need to communicate, but there is difficulty for one who has seen to be able to speak in ways that can be received and understood by those who have not. We are all at various, different stages of our unfoldment.

For those who have seen more deeply there is the possibility of a fear arising, preventing a deeper exploration. The main fear is that our changed level of experience will not be understood, or will not be acceptable to those around us. Krishnamurti made the statement that "it is no sign of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society." For our purposes we might paraphrase him as: it is no sign of health to deny or suppress the reality of our own experience. There is no one who has not at some point, probably early in life, felt that there was some deeper dimension that needed to be explored, and asked the questions: "Who am I?" "What am I here for?"

If that fear does not prevent us from moving more deeply into it, then often people will develop some approach to remaining in connection with this Inner Life. What we describe as study is one of the means for deepening this connection. We connect ourselves to an ever-

expanding ladder of thought. We utilize the mind at that level by moving it to consider things that are initially beyond its reach — abstractions. In that way, we move to the limits of our mentality, and in so doing, provide ourselves the opportunity of taking that next step into the world of intuitive insight.

As this practice develops, we connect with, and find the need to maintain that eye in the centre of our individual storm. We experiment with quiet, and with all of the benefits that can come from stilling the mind, and allowing its contents to settle — the possibility of going from quiet to ever-deepening states of stillness, and ultimately even of silence, where all of the clamoring of the various levels of mind and senses drop away.

As part of this practice there is the necessity for it to flow. It is not just a stagnant pond of thought and experience that we are trying to accumulate. Everything must flow. For many people, the practice of service to others — conscious compassionate activity — becomes an outlet, as well as a tool in deepening our connections.

There is the idea from the field of nutrition that we are what we eat. That what we feed our body is what determines its condition. There is genetics. But then, there is also how we deal with those genetics. So, if we eat junk food, we have no reason to expect vibrant health. If we eat quality food, we can have the expectation that whatever bodily disadvantages one might have, even genetically, that it can limit and

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suppress those, and lead to some sort of vibrancy.

We all have dull spots in our makeup. But we try to behave in ways that will magnify the qualities that are beneficial, and limit the ones that are not. We take on the qualities of not just the physical foods, but of everything we consume at every level of our being. What is it that we look upon? Is our world, and our place, disordered? Is it something that does not speak to beauty? These are things that we feed ourselves, such as ideas and emotions. That is why we turn on the TV. We may tell ourselves we are turning it on just because we have a moment and we just want to relax, but all the while, we are being fed images and thoughts that are created and marketed for us. Consciously or not, these are choices we make.

We choose to expose ourselves ever more deeply to our Inner Worlds, knowing that our embrace of the Inner Life is, as yet, not perfect. I have frequently given the example of “How is it that you make a friend?” We all have friends. None of us were born with them. Along the way we developed friendships. We met someone; there were things that we saw in them that we admired or liked, and we repeatedly put ourselves in their presence. Through that process of continually putting ourselves in the presence of that which we admire, that which feeds us at our deepest levels, we become linked.

With a good friend we can look at their face and know what their mood is. With

this Inner Life we can associate ourselves with it in such a way that we can become transparent to it, we can become linked to it. For those who have had some experience of a deep quiet, of a profound peace or happiness, of an altered reality from the norm of our day-to-day living, what do you do? How is it possible to make this altered reality something that becomes an actual presence in your life, and the way you work and live in the world? It is the challenge of the ages.

For most of us, there is a sense that there is something we have which we need to give. I came of age in the United States at a time of great social upheaval. There were powerful movements of thought and activity going on at the time, for civil rights, for greater extension of human rights, for an end to war — what was called a peace movement, but which often degenerated simply into an anti-war movement — the same violent mind where there was a battle being fought with an enemy. For the “peace” movement it was a different enemy, not the Viet Cong, but the enemy became the ones who were waging war, even if it was friends and colleagues who had been sent off into these battles.

It was also a time of an influx of Eastern spirituality. Teachers from India and elsewhere were suddenly arriving on the shores of the United States with a message about a different possibility for living. It was a moment in which it was strongly felt by many young people that we were on the cusp of a major change, that some deeper realizations of peace,

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love, brotherhood were on the horizon.

An aspect of the process of living is that everything seems to be immediately possible when we are fresh to this world. Wordsworth's poem says, "By trailing clouds of glory do we come" into this world from a very different home. We come into this world with a different vision of what is real, then we learn, are trained in how this place functions. The movement toward deeper states of unity often comes too slowly.

This can be frustrating. It can cause difficulties. From the perspective of the Ageless Wisdom this is just one of many lives. This does not mute the fact that we are here to bring a more wholesome reality into being. This is another, our most recent, opportunity to do that. Many people who were involved in the various movements at that time of my youth became disillusioned and angry. Some felt that because change was not coming quickly enough, they needed to resort to the means of *this* world. So, they chose violence in its various forms, to try to move toward their ideals.

For others, there was a dawning understanding that because these things do not appear immediately does not make them less real. Their energies were channeled toward a deepened commitment to compassionate service, to finding those areas of life, and of livelihood where service can be done to express this unity that has yet to be realized. Part of the difficulty of seeing something profound is that you cannot unsee it. It does not go away. So it is not just a matter of seeking

the truth or finding the truth, but having learned a truth, we have to suffer that same truth, hopefully with some patience.

Everyone is here for something, regardless of education, finance, or any of the countless ways we have devised to separate ourselves from each other. The nature of that "something" may be unclear to many. But even if a person's vision is as simple as, "I am here to be happy", the universal wish of every living being, it is a start. In our often misguided search for happiness we find countless ways to create unhappiness for ourselves and others. It is our deepest experiences of happiness that shape our lives, because along with these moments there is a sense of peace, a sense of not being divided from others. There is a sense that, this self that we cultivate, and which absorbs our constant attention, is actually an obstacle to our deepest desire.

Nothing of what we do, or say, occurs in isolation. Each of us has an intuition of our universality. Although we are continually working toward that deeper possibility, the world around us does not necessarily move as quickly. This cannot be allowed to hamper our coming together with others who share this vision, and our efforts to alleviate some of the self-induced suffering that we see in the world.

Whether our activity takes place within a Theosophical Society, where there is the view of a possibility to form a nucleus of a universal kinship of the human family, or whether it is in other fields — religion, science, philosophy, art, healing

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— all of these are avenues to magnify our understanding of a shared world. Will this happen today? The possibility is there. As enough minds come together, as there is enough clarity of vision, and shared understanding of the unity of all life, then at this very moment, things can change.

But if it does not, the work for us remains the same, day after day, life after life. The pledge of the *Bodhisattva*

is one that bears some scrutiny. “May I gain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.” I am here to become fully rooted in that place in consciousness that recognizes that we are one, that all life is one. And based on that realization my life and actions can serve others at their deepest level of need. That is the purpose of a life along this particular path, and it is unending. We do our part, and we are thankful for it. ✧

“By the destruction of ignorance, the *samkharas* [tendencies of the mind] are destroyed, and their consciousness, name and form, the six regions, contact, sensation, thirst, attachment (selfishness), existence, birth, old age, death, grief, lamentation, suffering, dejection, and despair are destroyed. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering. . . .”

“When the real nature of things becomes clear to the meditating *Bhikshu*, then all his doubts fade away since he has learned what is that nature and what its cause. From ignorance spring all the evils. From knowledge comes the cessation of this mass of misery, and then the meditating *Brahmana* stands, dispelling the hosts of *Mara* [temptation] like the sun that illuminates the sky.”

Gautama Buddha
The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett
Letter No. 88, Chron. ed., (ML-10)

The Esoteric School of Theosophy

LINDA OLIVEIRA

THROUGHOUT history esoteric groups have existed within a number of spiritual traditions, each with its own emphasis in relation to deeper aspects of life, and appropriate to its time, place, and milieu. H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) observed:

Whatever differences are to be found in the various presentations of the Esoteric Doctrine, as in every age it donned a fresh garment, different both in hue and texture to that which preceded; yet in every one of them we find the fullest agreement upon one point — the road to spiritual development.¹

The Esoteric School of Theosophy (ES) is one such group. Since 1888 it has provided an avenue for living a theosophical life, not only through the study of Divine Wisdom, but through its understanding, assimilation, and practice. Its members voluntarily undertake the work required in preparing for the Spiritual Path. A spirit of harmony with all is emphasised within the School, as well as active support for the Theosophical Society (TS) and its activities. TS members of at least two years' good standing, who are willing to abide by some basic conditions which include a life of sincere altruism and harmless living, may apply to join.

It can be seen immediately that, although the ES is organised separately, there is essentially a symbiotic relationship between it and the TS, for each benefits from the existence of the other. On the one hand, members of the School must be engaged members of the TS in the first place, and the School's very existence depends on the existence of the TS. On the other hand, members of the ES actively support the Society, and have done so over the years right down to our time. The existence of the ES is not secret, but its activities are private.

The ES was originally founded by HPB in 1888, under instruction from her Master, based on principles of Raja Yoga. It has therefore existed since the early decades of the TS's existence. Also, it can be mentioned at the outset that the ES was originally known as the "Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society". HPB subsequently modified it to the "Eastern School of Theosophy". Later still, Dr Annie Besant changed the name to the "Esoteric School of Theosophy", which has remained to this day.

Background to the Formation of the ES

In 1888, after some doubts on his part about initial plans for the ES, Col. Olcott

Mrs Linda Oliveira, former international Vice-President of the TS, was also National President of the TS in Australia and editor of their magazine, *Theosophy in Australia*, for many years.

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received a letter from the Master KH.² The letter instructed Olcott that, while he was to direct everything in regard to the external growth of the TS, HPB was to be given perfect freedom with regard to the arrangements of its inner and occult basis. He subsequently accepted this.

Many details regarding the history of the ES have been published in *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. XII. From this, a few selected extracts from the “Preliminary Memorandum”, issued in October 1888, follow:

This degree of the Esoteric Section is probationary, and its general purpose is to prepare and fit the student for the study of practical occultism or Raj yoga. Therefore, in this degree, the student — save in exceptional cases — will not be taught how to produce physical phenomena, nor will any magical powers be allowed to develop in him; nor, if possessing such powers naturally, will he be permitted to exercise them before he has thoroughly mastered the knowledge of SELF, of the psycho-physiological processes (taking place on the occult plane) in the human body generally, and until he has in abeyance all his lower passions and his PERSONAL SELF.

The real Head of the Esoteric Section is a Master, of whom H. P. Blavatsky is the mouthpiece for this Section. He is one of those Adepts referred to in theosophical literature, and concerned in the formation of the Theosophical Society. . . .

The value of the work of this Section to the individual member will depend entirely upon:

1. The person’s power to assimilate the teachings and make them a part of his being; and
2. Upon the unselfishness of the motives with which he seeks for this knowledge; that is to say, upon whether he has entered this Section determined to work for humanity, or with only the desire to benefit or gain something for himself alone.³

It is clear from the above that the ES expected of its members from the outset a seriousness of purpose in life, a willingness to work on self-purification and to assimilate the teachings given. Above all, it required them to seek for such knowledge without any desire for personal benefit. These principles still apply today.

Stress was laid on the essential practice of giving up superficial and inattentive habits of thought. Instead, an attitude of mind which would develop intuition was emphasised. Furthermore, trials of a special nature were not to be sought as these would come in any case in the affairs of life; this is true enough. A further requisite has always been a conviction of the reality of the Masters of the Wisdom, and therefore the possibility of developing a greater affinity with their consciousness.

Some further points from the “Preliminary Memorandum” are of particular historical interest:

The Theosophical Society has just entered upon the fourteenth year of its existence; and if it has accomplished great, one may almost say stupendous, results on the exoteric and utilitarian plane, it has proved

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a dead failure on all those points which rank foremost among the objects of its original establishment. . . .

The object of this Section, then, is to help the future growth of the Theosophical Society as a whole in the true direction, by promoting brotherly union at least among the few. . . .

The Masters can give but little assistance to a Body not thoroughly united in purpose and feeling, and which breaks its first fundamental rule — universal brotherly love, without distinction of race, creed, or colour; nor to a Society, many members of which pass their lives in judging, condemning, and often reviling other members in a most untheosophical, not to say disgraceful, manner.⁴

Highlighted here was the distinct lack of solidarity and harmony in the TS at that time, which also meant that the Masters' uplifting influences could not easily penetrate it. The Society was clearly at a critical juncture. As things stood, the TS was an inadequate instrument for their work, and they wanted this new impulse in the world to succeed.

Their *sine qua non* for the true and enduring success of the TS is clear, implying also the enduring importance of the first and primary Object which places solidarity, harmony, understanding, and acceptance of others at the centre of its work. The actual realisation of this Object is a work in progress and its significance cannot be underplayed; it is not simply an ideal, but requires our ongoing engagement. Consider that if this one Object were achieved then much of the work of

the TS would be accomplished today. For when there is deep harmony with all, then the modes of study which form the second Object can be undertaken in a more balanced and sympathetic way; and it becomes possible to discover one's true latent powers through a consciousness that is aware, impartial, and still.

Some General Remarks

Forgetfulness of the personal self and sincere altruism are emphasised in the ES, along with consistent spiritual aspiration. One meaning of "aspiration" is the act or process of drawing breath. It is possible — and beneficial — to take a regular "breather" from the external demands of life, metaphorically speaking, and turn the awareness towards what is really important. When this is undertaken daily, then the consciousness can be transmuted into an ever more perfect expression of one's divine nature.

Teachings, pointers for daily life, and material for reflection are provided in the School, with a general emphasis on living the most pure and ethical life possible, in preparation for the Spiritual Path. The work needs to be done by the individual through an essentially balanced life of meditation, study and service, underpinned by self-discipline, as well as increasing selflessness and intuitive awareness. One of the Holy Ones mentioned: "the adept *becomes*, he is not *made*."⁵

The production of psychic phenomena is not taught at all in the School today, "initiations" are not offered, nor is one led along by the hand. Furthermore,

The Esoteric School of Theosophy

individuals who are, or have been, seriously involved in other spiritual training or practices, including magical practices, may not be admitted to the ES. There is the well-known, general admonition that it is not advisable to mix one's drinks. The same principle applies in the spiritual life; it is a matter of safety as well as sound common sense. HPB wrote: "*True Occultism, or Theosophy, is the Great Renunciation of SELF.*"⁶

To help dispel the occasional erroneous impression, it needs to be emphasized that members of the ES are no more special than other TS members. Indeed, given the foundational teaching of the One Life, with its numerous and varied expressions, how could this possibly be the case? As *The Bhagavadgītā* (6:29) says:

The self, harmonized by yoga, seeth the SELF abiding in all beings, all beings in the SELF; everywhere he seeth the same.⁷

The School's members have simply chosen one particular pathway for putting the Divine Wisdom into practice.

Members of The Esoteric School of Theosophy do, however, continue to play a definite role in helping to maintain the heartbeat of the TS, along with other dedicated members of the Society around the world. The ES still has its place, partly because the achievement of true Brotherhood and Sisterhood within the ranks of their Society is still a work in progress. Also, the possibility of entrance to the Path remains ever available to those who are sincere and who are willing to put in the selfless effort required. The ES is a portal to this glorious future. ✧

Endnotes:

1. H. P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. VI, p. 331.
2. C. Jinarājadāsa, "HPB and the EST", *The Theosophist*, October 1928.
3. H. P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. XII, "Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society — Preliminary Memorandum", pp. 488–489.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 489–490.

5. Barker, A. Trevor (comp. & transcrib.), Chronological Edition arranged and edited by Vicente Hao Chin, Jr., *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, The Theosophical Publishing House (TPH), Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines, 1993, p. 294.

6. H. P. Blavatsky, *Practical Occultism*, TPH, Adyar, 1959, p. 43.

7. Annie Besant (transl.), *The Bhagavadgītā*, TPH, Adyar, 2005.

It is impossible to employ *spiritual* forces if there is the slightest tinge of selfishness remaining in the operator. For, unless the intention is entirely unalloyed, the spiritual will transform itself into the psychic, act on the astral plane, and dire results may be produced by it.

H. P. Blavatsky
Collected Writings, vol. IX, pp. 156–157

Applied Theosophy — Adyar

H. S. OLCOTT

THE real Theosophical Society (TS) is an indivisible unit, animated by an individual life! Its soul is the love of truth, its vital principle is kindness, and it dwells in a world above the material, where no enemy can touch it. It depends for its manifestation on Earth upon an appropriate vehicle, and the first condition necessary in that vehicle is that it shall be a *united whole*. The TS is an ideal power for good diffused over the whole world, but it requires material conditions, and the most important of these is a material centre, from which and to which the efferent and afferent [outgoing and incoming] forces shall circulate.

This is a condition of the life of all organizations, and of all organisms, and the TS is both; it is an organization on the material plane, an organism on the spiritual. A common centre, therefore, is as necessary for spiritual as for physical reasons. “Adyar” is not a place only, it is a principle. It is a name which ought to carry with it a power far greater than that conveyed by the name “Rome”. ADYAR is the centre of the theosophical movement — not “7 Duke Street, Adelphi”, or “Post Office Box 2659, New York”.

ADYAR is a principle and a symbol, as well as a locality. ADYAR is the name which means on the material plane the headquarters of an international, or, more properly speaking, worldwide society of persons who have common aims and objects, and are imbued with a common spirit. It means on the supraphysical plane a centre of life and energy, the point to and from which the currents run between the ideal and the material. Every loyal Fellow [TS member] has in his heart a little ADYAR, for he has in him a spark of the spiritual fire which the name typifies. ADYAR is the symbol of our unity as a Society, and so long as it exists in the hearts of its Fellows the powers of the enemy can never prevail against the TS.

What then, to recapitulate, must be our answer to the questions with which we started: Is such a thing as “Applied Theosophy” possible? If so, of what, does it consist?

We have seen that there is no reason why the ideas and influence of the TS should not be as great in combating wickedness in the practical department of life as in combating error in the

H. S. Olcott (2 August 1832–17 February 1907) was a co-founder and President of the Theosophical Society. Reprinted from *Applied Theosophy and Other Essays*.

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philosophical. The Objects of the Society neither order nor forbid interference with either; but they predispose the Fellows to exert an active influence in both, by evolving in their minds a perception of truer and better things, and a desire for their realization.

We have seen that it is not by making the Society itself an instrument on the physical plane that its power can be utilized for good; but that its influence must be a moral one, consisting of the combined and united thoughts and wishes of the whole Society, focussed upon any individual point, and acting through the personality of its individual Fellows.

We have seen that all that is necessary to make such a united power manifest is that its existence should be acknowledged and felt by the Fellows themselves; and that to acknowledge and feel it, and thus bring it from the latent to the active condition, the Fellows must perceive that the TS is a living entity, “ideal” if one chooses to call it so, but an entity *one and indivisible* alike upon

the material plane and on the supra-physical plane. We have also seen that the visible Centre of the Society, “ADYAR,” is symbolical of the principle of unity, as well as of the material life of the Society, and that in every sense loyalty to “ADYAR” means loyalty to the Objects of the Society and to the principles of Theosophy.

The answer to our questions then must be that Applied Theosophy is surely a possibility; and that it consists of the moral influence brought to bear upon the practical evils of life by the exertions of individual Fellows who have behind them, severally and collectively, the spiritual power created by unity of purpose, of ideas and of loyalty to the truth; a power for good of which the terrestrial ADYAR is the physical centre and Headquarters; while the spiritual ADYAR is the channel by means of which powerful influences from a higher sphere, unseen but not unfelt, enter the Society through the hearts of each and all of its Fellows, thence to be outpoured upon the whole world. ✧

Clarity of perception, insight, is the freedom from the pain of choice. Total order is the light of freedom. This order is not the child of thought for all activity of thought is to cultivate fragmentation. Love is not a fragment of thought, of pleasure. The perception of this is intelligence. love and intelligence are inseparable and from this flows action which does not breed pain. Order is its ground.

Krishnamurti's Journal

Blavatsky on the Mission of the Theosophical Society

PABLO SENDER

IN H. P. Blavatsky's (HPB) *The Key to Theosophy*, she defined the mission of the Theosophical Society (TS) as follows:

It was formed to assist in showing to men that such a thing as Theosophy exists, and to help them to ascend towards it by studying and assimilating its eternal verities.¹

This succinct statement, seemingly simple at first sight, encapsulates the essence of the theosophical work. So let us proceed to examine it closely.

Letting people know about Theosophy

The first point in this statement is that the TS was founded to help make known to people “that such a thing as Theosophy exists”. As I examined at length in a previous article,² in some parts of the theosophical world there is a trend to move away from the spreading of theosophical teachings. In fact, there is frequently the tendency to even drop the word “Theosophy” from publicised activities, replacing it with phrases such as “Ancient Wisdom”, “Ageless Wisdom”, and so forth. While in certain contexts this

choice may be appropriate, when this becomes a widespread practice, it is counterproductive.

A common argument for not using the term “Theosophy” is that the public is not acquainted with the word — it sounds foreign to most people and, therefore, it is better to use more general terms. While it is true that most people have never heard the word “Theosophy”, one wonders whether the best response to this is to hide it. I would say that if people do not know this word, it is because we, as members of the TS, have not been as diligent as we need to be to make it known.

Even from a mere marketing point of view, when one wants to introduce a new brand in the market the first step is to put the name “out there”, making efforts to expose as many people as possible to it — even those who may not be interested in the product at all. Once this is done successfully, the term becomes part of the collective mind, and it ceases to sound foreign. In fact, the mere familiarity with a brand name, even without knowing anything about the product, makes people

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feel more predisposed to engage with it.

There are clear examples of how our culture has become acquainted with foreign terms connected to spirituality, as in the cases of hatha yoga, reiki, tai chi, and many others. This happened because people were consistently exposed to these words. Therefore, if we are concerned about the possible negative effect of the little-known term “Theosophy”, hiding it will only increase the problem. We should make sure that people interested in the spiritual become familiar with this term so that, when coming across theosophical publicity, their attitude is, “Oh yes, I heard that word, what is it?”

Making people familiar with the word “Theosophy” is, of course, only a preliminary step. As Master KH wrote to Francesca Arundale:

You should, even as a simple member, much more as an officer [of your Lodge], learn that you may teach, acquire spiritual knowledge and strength that the work may lean upon you, and the sorrowing victims of ignorance learn from you the cause and remedy of their pain.³

The Theosophical Society is primarily an organization for spiritual education. In order to fulfil this role effectively, two things are necessary: to know the theosophical teachings, and to be able to communicate them skilfully. It is obvious that if our National Sections and local groups do not encourage an engagement with these teachings, we will not be able to share them with others. In those places where there is a decline in the study of

Theosophy, new members do not have the opportunity to appreciate the value of these teachings, and in the future they will not feel inclined to promote them. In these cases, the interest of members is often replaced by whatever else is fashionable at the time in the field of spirituality.

To be clear, I am not proposing here that the spreading of theosophical teachings should be the *exclusive* activity of the TS. Doing so would mean that the Society becomes another sectarian organization in the world. What I am suggesting is that theosophical teachings should always have an important presence in our programs — both for the public and members.

Now, according to HPB, spreading these teachings does not cover the full extent of our mission. If this was the case, the TS could be reduced to a publishing house, producing books and videos.

Helping people awaken divine wisdom

In addition to spreading the teachings, HPB says we also need to *help people ascend towards Theosophy*. What does this mean? HPB used the word “Theosophy” in a few different ways.⁴ In its deepest sense, *theos-sophia* refers to a state of consciousness in which a person has awakened to the “divine wisdom” that is latent in all of us. Thus, the ultimate aim of our mission is to help people rise to their higher consciousness, to that state in which actions spring from wisdom instead of ignorance.

Today, there are an increasing number of people who seek to get their minds

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out of the humdrum of daily life and be stimulated in ways that are more or less aligned with the spiritual search. They need to feel good, be encouraged, and heal the wounds produced by modern life. As good and necessary as this may be, in my opinion, it is not the essential mission of our organization. Otherwise, HPB would have said something like “the TS exists to offer people a spiritual respite from the stresses of life and a place to heal”. While there are many organizations today that offer this kind of spiritually friendly solace, since its inception the theosophical approach has sought to look at the problem of human existence from a deeper perspective. As Master KH stated in the earlier quote, the main goal of theosophical education is to help people realise “the *cause* and *remedy* of their pain”, instead of merely offering ways to cope with it.

If we organize interesting talks about new and exciting spiritual topics, but we fail to address the root of life’s problems, we become just a momentary distraction. The same thing can be said about activities aimed at making people feel happy, empowered, grateful, and so forth. Arousing emotions through words is not hard to do. However, although generating positive emotions is beneficial, the effect of this is short-lived and quite insufficient to deal with the daily challenges of life. If we have not provided anything deeper, when the good feelings wear off, people are left in a similar place to which they were before coming to our activities. Even the passing on of information about

various religions, philosophies and sciences is, per se, insufficient. If we limit our activities to doing this, then we become not much more than a spiritual Wikipedia or Discovery Channel.

Again, by all this I do not mean that our activities cannot have some element of entertainment, or aspects where people can feel empowered, or talks where information is shared; but this should not be the core of what we offer to people if our aim is to help them live from a state that is in touch with the divine wisdom. If we do not present the deep spiritual perspective proposed in our teachings and communicate how to face life from this vantage point, we waste our limited resources in peripheral activities. In other words, if we fail to inquire into how to raise consciousness beyond the personal level of existence and the limited understanding of the mundane mind, then we may be falling short of our mission.

Certainly, this is easier said than done, so those who feel inspired by this lofty goal will naturally ask, “How can we help people in this way?” HPB provides the answer in the last part of her statement.

Studying and assimilating the teachings

To learn how to raise our consciousness to the state of divine wisdom (and thus be able to help others to do so), HPB advises two actions — (a) the study of the eternal verities expressed in the theosophical teachings, and (b) the effort to assimilate them.

In this age where deep reading is on the decline, and spirituality is often

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reduced to a mechanical application of techniques, some people may not see the need to invest time in the study of spiritual literature. However, if Theosophy is to have a transformative effect on our lives, knowing the theory is an unavoidable step. Let us take, as an example, people who want to become proficient in some experimental science. Before students can start working in the field or a laboratory, they are required to spend some years studying the theoretical foundations of their science. While going through this initial phase, it is common for students to fail to see how all the information that they are acquiring may be relevant for their careers. This is but natural, because at this stage it is difficult for them to comprehend their science as a whole.

However, as their studies advance, they start realising how the different concepts they learned fit together and how they create the foundation for their future practice. The same applies to Theosophy. When beginning their theosophical studies, members may feel that they are just acquiring intellectual knowledge and may fail to realise that this information, when properly understood, will have a most practical impact on their lives. Hence, if they do not find proper guidance and encouragement by more experienced members, they will drop the study of Theosophy or do it in such a half-hearted way that the result will be hardly useful.

It is also true, however, that a person may study for decades without moving beyond the level of gathering more and more information. For the teachings to

have a real effect on our lives, a further effort is necessary, and here comes the second action advised by HPB — the *assimilation* of the teachings, that is, making the teachings part of ourselves. The following considerations may help to tackle this last element in her statement:

(1) Just reading the teachings is clearly not sufficient. Careful pondering over and meditating on the information we are gathering is necessary, so that we can really grasp it. We must go beyond the level of merely understanding what the words mean, onto that of being able to see their soundness and realise their implications. For example, if we learn about karma in a superficial way, our view of it will not be too different from the idea, “If you do good things, God will reward you, if you do bad things, God will punish you.” We just replace the word “God” for “karma”. Or we may learn superficially about our sevenfold constitution, and still feel that the real “us” is our personal self, while all the higher Principles are some kind of “spiritual attachments” to ourselves. Only through careful consideration of what we study can we get our own insights, which will gradually change our understanding and response to life.

(2) Then, we must make an effort to examine ourselves and our daily lives from the perspective of what we are learning. This is necessary, so that our understanding does not stay at the level of abstractions. For example, one should consider, “What would be the ideal way of dealing with this difficult situation that I am facing right now from the perspective that everything that happens is the

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expression of a cosmic order (karma)?” Or, “What would be the right action from the perspective of my real self, which is eternal and beyond the passing sensations and desires of the personality?” This kind of enquiry will gradually develop the ability to apply the teachings to real-life situations.

(3) Once we have arrived at our own understanding of how we should respond to the situation from the perspective of the teachings, the last step is making an effort to *act* in that way. This is the most challenging aspect of the process. We will frequently find that we failed to act as we intended, and this realization may be painful and disheartening.

Now, if we were attracted to the TS by a well-intentioned but perhaps misguided speaker, who promised that spirituality would bring us some kind of instant gratification, self-affirmation, and so on, then we will perhaps choose to avoid future embarrassment trying to apply these high ideals again, turning instead to shallower and warmer waters. But if we were lucky enough to have an experienced member helping us understand the sacred nature of this work of self-transformation — which is at the same time the transformation of the

human consciousness — chances are that we will be inspired to ignore our personal feelings and try again, in pursuit of such a noble goal.

In any case, it is only by making an effort to apply the teachings in this way that we can “make manifest” the divine wisdom in our lives. Working in this way, we will discover where our grasp of a particular teaching may be too simplistic, or not quite right. For example, if our understanding of karma (or any other subject) is ill-conceived, it will just not make sense when trying to apply it to daily life. This observation will then stimulate us to go back to the teachings and the newly acquired experience will help us understand the subject a bit more deeply.

Without this personal experience we will be unable to show newcomers why acquiring theosophical teachings is important. The effort to study and apply the teachings will not only become a powerful force to gradually change our lives, but also enable us to convey to others their practical value, thus helping them to elevate their consciousness and be more and more in touch with the divine wisdom. Such is the wonderful service that the TS and its members can offer to our ailing humanity. ✧

Endnotes

1. Section IV, “The Relations of the Theosophical Society to Theosophy”, subsection 2, “The Abstract and the Concrete”.
2. *The Theosophist*, vol. 136, Sept. 2015, “The Public Work of the Theosophical Society”, pp. 9–16.

3. C. Jinarājadāsa, *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, 1st Series, The Theosophical Publishing House (TPH), Adyar, Chennai, 1988, Letter No. 4.
4. *The Theosophist*, vol. 129, Dec. 2007, “What is Theosophy?”, pp. 100–106.

The Seer Who Walks Alone

CECIL MESSER

THE eminent philosopher and teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti (aka Krishnaji) presented a meditative mind with a seminal view of the matrix of meditation. From childhood, he was marked by a singular lack of an operative self-image. Although raised under the umbrella of Theosophy, his teachings appear fresh — arising from depths comparatively free of psychological conditioning. His approach to meditation is in sharp contrast to the many traditions he was exposed to. Like counterpoint in music, wherein different melodies interplay to weave a harmonic whole, uniqueness has its role.

Krishnaji's entire work reflects a passion for meditation and is primarily concerned with communing with those having the capacity to relate therewith. After his long daily walks through the local countryside, he would often record the observation that not a single thought came to his mind during the walk. Obviously, perceptions occurred as evidenced by his vivid descriptions; but there was no comparative judgement, no involvement, no entanglement with thought. Perhaps thoughts or emotions arose but could find no place to dwell or stick;

they were naturally freed, like wisps of clouds on a sunny sky. Walking, seeing, and hearing were integral with thought-free awareness.

The original beauty of his teachings is easily corrupted both through interpretation or ready acceptance. During the immediate experience of listening to him speak or even while reading passages from his transcripts, one sometimes feels a certain resonance with *truth*. Afterwards, when trying to recollect the experience, facts may be ascertained but truth dwells not in the residue of memory. If we are “lucky”, unobstructed awareness may sharpen our inquiry and foster a direct connection with the truths unveiled. In a state of meditative serenity, Krishnaji wrote the following vignette in his *Journal*.

In the silence of deep night and in the quiet still morning when the sun is touching the hills, there is a great mystery. It is there in all living things. If you sit quietly under a tree, you would feel the ancient earth with its incomprehensible mystery. On a still night when the stars are clear and close, you would be aware of expanding space and the mysterious order of all

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things, of the immeasurable and of nothing, of the movement of the dark hills and the hoot of an owl. In that utter silence of the mind this mystery expands without time and space . . . This is love. With this the whole mystery of the universe is open.

Krishnaji approaches the problematic issue of *seeing the fact of what is* when he speaks of a kind of observation that perceives without judging, without desiring to become larger. He refers to this condition as *choiceless awareness* — seeing the whole, the *what is*. That clarity of seeing is inherent to freedom from conditioning and sacred to meditation. Looking at life from a particular viewpoint prevents one from totally seeing. The truth of something seen only intellectually is at best partial, for thought, which is inevitably limited and conditioned, has colored that observation. When illuminated with the light of open inquiry and reflected back onto a quiet and receptive mind, we come upon a characteristic wholeness inherent to meditation. The following passage from his *Journal* allows a view of that wholeness.

At night there would be extraordinary silence, rich and penetrating. The cultivated meditation is a sacrilege to beauty, and every leaf and branch spoke of the joy of beauty and the tall dark cypress was silent with it; the gnarled old pepper tree flowed with it. You cannot, may not, invite joy; if you do, it becomes pleasure. Pleasure is the movement of thought and thought may not, can in no way, cultivate joy, and if it pursues that which has been

joyous, then it is only a remembrance, a dead thing. Beauty is never time-binding; it is wholly free of time and so of culture. It is there when the self is not. The total inward non-action is the positive attention of beauty. In the quiet stillness of the mind, that which is everlasting beauty comes, uninvited, unsought, without the noise of recognition.

Must not “the cultivated meditation”, like leaves on a tree as winter approaches, die and dissolve back into the ground to nurture the renewal of pristine awareness? Perhaps one cannot really know what meditation is, but one may know what it is not. From his *Notebook*, Krishnaji addresses the burning issue as if observing a jewel of many facets:

Meditation is not a search; it is not a seeking, a probing, an exploration. It is an explosion and discovery. It is not the taming of the brain to conform nor is it a self-introspective analysis; it is certainly not the training in concentration which includes, chooses, and denies. It is something that comes naturally, when all positive and negative assertions and accomplishments have been understood and drop away easily. It is the total emptiness of the brain. It is the emptiness that is essential, not what is in the emptiness; there is seeing only from emptiness; all virtue, not social morality and respectability, springs from it. It is out of this emptiness love comes, otherwise it's not love. Foundation of righteousness is in this emptiness. It is the end and beginning of all things.

In his last journal, *Krishnamurti to*

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Himself, he rotates the jewel of meditation to reveal another facet:

In meditation there must be no measurement . . . Meditation is a movement without any motive, without words and the activity of thought. It must be something that is not deliberately set about. Only then is meditation a movement in the infinite, measureless to man, without a goal, without an end and without a beginning . . . And in meditation which is without measurement, there is the very action of that which is most noble, most sacred and holy.

On a more leeward tack, in *Freedom from the Known*, he again turns the jewel and further describes his perception of the next facet:

Meditation is one of the greatest arts in life — perhaps the greatest — and one cannot possibly learn it from anybody: that is the beauty of it. It has no technique and therefore no authority. When you learn about yourself, watch yourself, watch the way you walk, how you eat, what you say,

the gossip, the hate, the jealousy — if you are aware of all that in yourself, without any choice, that is part of meditation. So, meditation can take place when you are sitting in a bus, or walking in the woods full of light and shadows, or listening to the singing of birds, or looking at the face of your wife or child.

Yet, paradoxically, in conversation with a young student about meditation, recorded in *Krishnamurti on Education*, he says:

Sit very quietly and be still not only physically, not only in your body, but also in your mind. Be very still and then in that stillness, attend. Attend to the sounds outside this building, the cock crowing, the birds, somebody coughing, somebody leaving; listen first to the things outside you, then listen to what is going on in your mind. And you will then see, if you listen very very attentively, in that silence, that the outside sound and the inside sound are the same. ✧

If you would like to deepen your listening awareness, listen to the language of trees. When you touch them, listen to the eloquence of their soft and hard parts: the solid trunk, cascading leaves in autumn, new buds in spring. Trees sing hallelujahs to the dawn, but we rarely are silent enough to hear them. They speak most directly and clearly to human beings when they sway in a breeze.

Cynthia Overweg
*Silent Awareness: The Revelation that
Changes Everything*, 2021, p. 62

Beauty, the Arts, and Spirituality — I

GRACIELA RICCI

A novel examines not reality but existence. And existence is not what has occurred, existence is the realm of human possibilities, everything that man can become, everything he's capable of.

Milan Kundera

It might seem daring to discuss the role of beauty in such a limited space, as the vastness of the task could be tackled from different perspectives: What is Beauty? What is the observer's role in his interpretation? What have the theories on Beauty been in the history of philosophy and the arts in general? And, finally, what is the role of Beauty in spiritual research? We should examine our practical experience at first, as this can provide a starting point for defining a concept that does not have a unique definition.

Based on my work on literature and the arts I could offer an account of my personal life experiences on the matter, but I prefer to leave aside my story and focus on the aesthetic dimension of the world, which is so vast as to inspire a sense of humbleness and admiration. The world is in fact so full of beauty as to arouse amazement and wonder, despite all the irresponsible actions that our civilization is repeatedly perpetuating, impoverishing the planet and leading us towards

the brink of an environmental catastrophe.

It is not easy to either provide a definition of Beauty with a capital "B", or understand whether it resides in the objective world, or in the eye of the beholder; nor is it simple to define the role of the observer or the artificer in their own interpretation. I have highlighted three aspects: artistic, relational, and creative, because there is a big difference between the polymorphic concept of Beauty in history in all the various arts, and the observer's greater or lesser creativity in interpreting beauty. The second aspect refers to the empathic and relational effect between the observer and others, the latter being either a person or a work of art, either visual, literary, or musical. In this field as well, the empathic effect is highly ambiguous and therefore polymorphous.

Since all these aspects are quite complex, they are characterized by a great amplitude of perspectives. As a matter of fact, Remo Bodei provided us with a cluster definition which contains all the various concepts of beauty being developed by the Western tradition. Consequently, this article will be necessarily lacking and incomplete, owing to the vastness of the topic in space and time. My aim is simply

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to offer some light insights to my readers, so as to encourage them to research this topic themselves and draw their own conclusions.

1. The beholder's aesthetic sentiment and the theories on Beauty

The Swiss writer Heinrich Wölfflin wrote years ago that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. On the one hand this is a questionable statement, even though we know that simple observation can modify the behaviour of electrons. Anyway, we need to acknowledge that aesthetics is part of human sensibility. The same etymon of the Greek word from which it is derived, *aisthesis*, confirms this, as it means “feeling, sentiment”. Edgar Morin wrote: “The aesthetic sentiment is an emotion which derives from shapes, colours, sounds, but also from tales, shows, poems, ideas.” (Morin 2019:11)

This sentiment, which is difficult to define, can derive from different sources: the observation of Nature (for example, a sunset or a starry sky), a work of art, the experience of listening to music or reading a story or a poem, and so on. The aesthetic emotion, from which the impression of beauty derives, is universal, even though it is influenced by culture and the conception of beauty of the historical period in which one is immersed (for example, Picasso, Kandinsky, Mondrian, Dalí, and many others would not probably have been understood before the 20th century).

Therefore, beauty can manifest itself and be perceived in different ways, according to the observer's sensibility,

everyone's personal tastes, and the cultural norms and beauty canons of the specific times and places. Throughout history there have been countless theories on the beautiful and beauty, sometimes in relation to what is good or to the idea of moral excellence or perfection.

In Ancient Egypt beauty was linked to symmetry, while in Ancient Greece measure and order prevailed (for example, maxims such as the following were inscribed on the external walls of the temple at Delphi: “the most just is the most beautiful”, “know your limit”, “nothing overmuch”, and so on). (Bodei 2017:21) The idea of measure would later generate the theory of proportions which would become for a long time the Great Theory, with the famous sentence: “The ratio of the lesser part to the greater part is the same as the ratio of the greater to the whole.” (This proportion contains the so-called “Phydias constant, phi” with the golden ratio 1.618.)¹

With Pythagoras (sixth century BCE) we find a new, threefold conception of Beauty associated to what is true and good. For him, “all worldly measures are knowable because they comply with laws which manifest themselves through numbers”. (*Ibid.*, 24) It is believed that Pythagoras was the first to name the universe as *kosmos* (a word which before him only described women's ornaments or makeup, from which comes the word “cosmetic”). His reflections upon the concept of “musical harmony” in connection with numbers and the music of the spheres are well known.

From Pythagoras on, the idea of

“cosmic order” became the model of beauty, truth, and goodness in the whole Western tradition, which was brought to new fame during the Renaissance humanism, when *kosmos* (order) and *polis* (city) were tightly bound. After the Baroque period, with its rejection of order, the new discoveries in astronomy and physics brought back the threefold idea of truth, goodness, and beauty, in connection with the new cosmic model (*ibid.*, 22–35). The idea of Beauty as an absolute value beyond the senses began with Plato, but we shall discuss this matter later.

Going back to the relationship between Beauty and those who get in contact with it, we might state, as a rule of thumb, that human life is polarized between what our responsibilities require us to do in connection with the prosaic aspects of life, and the things that we love doing and with which we feel a sense of communion, such as the poetic aspects of Nature and human actions, or in other words, those things which touch our hearts. For this reason, I agree with Rita Levi Montalcini when she claims:

Everybody says that the brain is the most complex organ in the human body, and as a physician I might even agree. But as a woman I assure you that there is nothing more complex than the heart, whose mechanisms are still unknown nowadays. In the reasonings of the brain we find logic, whilst in those of the heart we find emotions.²

As a matter of fact, it is the heart which allows for the creation of bonds of affinity both with our fellow human beings and the situations of life, and so, from

Levi Montalcini’s words we can gather that beauty strikes the observers the very moment when it touches their hearts and awakens their sensibility. It is the most beautiful and poetic aspects of life which make us rejoice and make our everyday life meaningful. Edgar Morin also states:

Life acquires a meaning for us in the poetic state. The aesthetic sentiment is a contemplative and/or enchanted component of the poetic state. An intense poetic state leads us towards bliss. The maximum bliss becomes, evidently, ecstasy in its various forms. We strive for ecstasy, which, if we are blessed, we might sometimes experience (Morin, 2019:119).

If the poetic quality of life pushes the observer towards communion, ecstasy, and love, it is true that, as Dostoevsky once said, beauty might save the world. But, owing to the shortsightedness of the contemporary world, I believe that only few people are aware of this wonderful opportunity.

These reflections lead us to the main topic of this article: the role of Beauty in spiritual research. But it is appropriate to first make a distinction between the beauty of what we perceive through our senses, and the beauty of the invisible. Spiritual research touches both dimensions, even though it particularly regards the latter.

2. Visible beauty

First of all let us begin by examining visible beauty and its empathic effects on its creator and observer. When artists are painting, or authors are engaged in writing a poem, their conscience is in a state

defined as “second or semi-trance” (*ibid.*, 96–97). When artists are engrossed in such a state, they are, so to say, in another dimension. While being in this state, they can compose, modify, create, or in other words, bring into the material dimension something that was previously hidden in the unconscious of their psyche. In fact, they are at the same time using both the conscious and unconscious layers of their spirit.

It is a state similar to the one some enter when in deep meditation: at the beginning they concentrate by using discipline and their conscious will, which guide them towards a certain direction, but after a while they enter a state of deep meditation and establish a contact with spiritual forces beyond the mental level. As Morin very well said, spiritual forces allow us to understand what bliss or ecstasy really are, when they manage to make us experience, at least partly, the Unity of Life, either by leading us towards a creative act or by encouraging us to take part in creation as observers.

I have here associated artificers and observers because when we look at a work of art, listen to a symphony, or read a narration with which we resonate even without being their creator, we can, in relation to the mystery of life, experience that same emotion which led the artists to create them. Talking about creativity, Milan Kundera said that in order to be considered as artists, writers “must turn their own emotions into aspects that their readers can recognize”. Here we find a correspondence with Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk, when he says: “Narrative talent consists in speaking about our-

selves as if we were another person and about others as if we were in their shoes.” (Casadio, 2015:51) And it is empathic resonance which makes possible the miracle of making us feel the dimension of Beauty with a capital “B” inside of us, because it touches our hearts. I agree with Edgar Degas that: “The painting is not what you see, but what allows you to see.”³ And this brings us back to the importance of empathy, in both creating and sharing the various arts as spectators, listeners, or readers. Therefore, we are going to analyze what is meant by “empathy” and its relation to ethical and aesthetic values.

3.a. The empathic process

It is taken for granted that the capacity to understand and share the experiences of others constitutes the basis of communication and human interaction, because common sense points out that a fraternal feeling of sharing opens the door to a good living and the acceptance of others. Among students of Theosophy I think this aspect is quite undisputed. Yet, the lively debate among the various neurosciences, the philosophy of mind, and phenomenology has raised the problematic issue of finding, through the years, a unanimous definition of “empathy”.

As a matter of fact, this word, from the Greek *en-pathein* (to feel inside), lets us understand why its meaning has led to a series of semantic shifts relative to its proper definition. This word dates back only to around one hundred years ago. It was first used when Robert Vischer (1847–1933) wrote a philosophy dissertation in 1871 in order to explain how the

human mind reacts to abstract shapes. To describe his concept, he used the word *Einfuehlung* (to feel inside) (Searls 2018:118), which was translated as “empathy” but also as “sympathy”. So, we might say that the evolution of the meaning of empathy has been marked by translations. Towards the end of the 19th century, while being translated from one language into another crossing different philosophical traditions — from the English “empathy” to the German “*Einfuehlung* — the word became a synonym of the word “sympathy”.

Max Scheler (a philosopher interested not only in biology but also in the theories of the unconscious), in his *The Nature of Sympathy* (1913, English transl. 1954), denounced this prevailing terminological confusion and proposed, as a possible solution, to adopt a double terminology, taking into consideration that “empathy” and “sympathy” corresponded to two different phenomena. The term “sympathy”, from the Greek *syn-pathein* (to feel with) similar to the French *sympathie*, was to be used when referring to the ethics of compassion, while the word “empathy”, which includes a number of processes in transformation, was to be used in relation to those neurobiological and cultural-anthropological phenomena of the physical and preverbal type which point out the interdependence of human beings and their participation as individuals in the entire living universe (Boella 2019:70–73). Interest in these definitions dwindled in the first half of the 20th century but quickly arose again from the postwar period with a lot of controversies about their meaning.

The word “empathy” has been used in various contexts to refer to a multiplicity of phenomena, from *mirroring*, which describes one’s unwilling identification with other fellow human beings involving mirror neurons (for example, when facing a person in distress we will be unconsciously inclined to imitate their condition), to what is termed as *mentalizing* or “mind-reading” in the field of pragmatics of communication (that is, we assume we know what another person is thinking or feeling and we attribute to them what is in reality only our own mental state). Moreover, the word “empathy” can also mean “to put oneself in someone else’s shoes” and to take care of those who we value as fragile or in need. (*ibid.*, 75–77)

Regardless of the word-specific meaning, in most cases the expression “empathic effect” is used in relation to emotions, considered from a perspective which has been modified according to the passage of time.

Until recently, for example, a technique which was often used in training seminars implied the visualisation of a transforming tree: participants were guided through an internal visualisation in which they perceived themselves as a growing tree which produced flowers and fruits. This was a very nice symbol of the evolution of the human soul. Lately, a new technique involving virtual reality and multisensorial elements has been developed for a project named “Tree”, which aims at making participants experiment with the growth and transformation of a plant or tree. With the aid of an interactive backpack, participants are im-

mersed in a first-person experience of the difficult process a tree must undergo while trying to emerge from the ground or when facing drought or a fire. It is a very dramatic experience of identification, to the point that many of the participants end up in tears when they remove their virtual reality visor.⁴ Contrary to what people usually think, this technique has nothing to do with empathy as it works on creating a sympathetic effect.

We can therefore say that empathy is a widely discussed topic in the contemporary public debate, owing to its multi-ramified meanings, although we can add that, thanks to the results of research on the human brain, empathy has also been considered as a sort of collective myth to calibrate the relationships between science and humanities at a global level.⁵ All controversies apart, empathy has nowadays become an umbrella term, implying a lot of different usages which make it easier to define what it is not than what it is.⁶

In conclusion, empathy can be considered as a process, a real *work in progress*, which varies according to different contexts; at its core we can find a relationship between one individual and another, which does not imply immediate affinity nor a comprehensive understanding of the other person. Otherness remains at the basis of each relationship, excluding the possibility for oneself to feel in the same way of the other person, since the exploration of another's world occurs through multiple activities, such as getting to know the other person's story and investigate the reasons behind their suf-

fering; in other words, through other cognitive activities which go beyond the empathic phenomenon.

This clearly implies a total redefinition of the current widespread ideas about empathy. Therefore, we can say that empathy allows us to look at things from an unusual perspective because it entails a person's movement from one's personal world towards another's, in a dimension that goes beyond one's own personal experience, yet maintaining everyone's specific differences. The other is and remains another person (*ibid.*, 103–104).

3.b. Art, technology, and empathic effect — the invisible link between Art and Esoterism

For what regards the empathic effect, we have seen how contemporary sciences have not come to a unanimous definition. Another problematic aspect is the present relationship between empathy and the technological revolution, which has radically changed our civilization and has dulled the sensitivity of human beings with its excesses. Although this revolution has now become inevitable, it has caused a lot of criticism even from Silicon Valley. Here, despite the well-known risks of the addiction to smartphones and all the potential dangers arising from the advancements of both artificial intelligence and machine-learning algorithms that can learn by themselves, incessant technological research is carried out, which presents us with great perplexities when we think of the possible consequences for the future of humanity.

The anonymity of the global virtual world hinders real-life encounters which

are the basis for empathy. And the same occurs in public or collective scenarios. Here, empathic actions are misunderstood when applied to social environments such as hospitals, schools, cinemas, law courts. This happens because, although the discovery of another fellow human being can occur even when the other is unknown and absent, the empathic act is not produced. We may feel sympathy or compassion for situations of suffering, which can have an ethical, social, or pedagogic value, but these emotions are not part of the same phenomenon and should not be confused with the empathic process.

I have elaborated on these reflections because the relational aspect is fundamental to understand the implications of empathy in artistic, group, and social relations and in spiritual research. Let us now go back to the main topic. We said at the beginning that there is a type of Beauty which regards sensory perceptions, and which is relative to both the visible universe of Nature and the artistic, literal, and musical worlds; there is also a Beauty which regards the invisible world. I will briefly describe how the passion for the invisible was born within the artistic world and its historical connection to the esoteric world.

The end of the 19th century, with post-Impressionism, the symbolist theory, and a widespread interest for seances, can be considered as the period when a passion for the occult and anything mysterious arose. Artists wanted to replace the physical conception of the universe with a search for the invisible and their freedom to create. Kandinsky used to say: “The world resonates. It is a cosmos of

beings who exert a spiritual action upon it, so that the dead matter is living spirit.”

⁷ In this period, which anticipates the historical Avant-Garde of the 19th century, many readers got literary inspiration from the *poètes maudits* like Baudelaire and his *Correspondences*; also popular readings were H. P. Blavatsky (HPB), Edouard Schuré, Nietzsche, Bergson and the theosophical magazine *Le Lotus Bleu*. The colour white was chosen as a symbol of silence and ascension towards the invisible world of spirituality. The artist became like a demiurge, a creator of worlds.

The fascination for mysteries, the unconscious, the suprasensible, the revival of the hermetic tradition, the magical attitude of prehistoric men, the fascination of the Far East, these were all elements that brought the shift from imitative to abstract painting, where colours and musical rhythms converted into brush strokes were the priority.

The movements of that period, such as Cubism, Symbolism, and Surrealism, in addition to Péladans Rosicrucians, the experience that the German group named *Der Blaue Reiter* (founded by Vasili Kandinsky and Franz Marc in Berlin in 1911) had on *Monte Verità* near Ascona (Switzerland), and above all the contact with Theosophy and Steiner’s followers, encouraged the artists to investigate the invisible world. Particularly relevant are the carvings of *The Voice of Silence* by Kupka, inspired by HPB, and the booklet by the French painter Delauney titled *The Light*, where eyes were defined as “the windows to the soul” and Art as “the voice which light makes us hear and which

Hermes Trismegistus described in the Pimander”. (Parisi 2018:17–32)

Spiritualism and mysticism merged and blended, helped by Freud’s discoveries and the scientific discoveries of quantum physics. That period was ex-

tremely important because it brought to the foreground both the suprasensible world and the possibility to get in touch with the invisible through the meditative forms of the various arts.

(To be continued)

Endnotes

1. It must be said that the golden section/ratio was already known in Ancient Egypt: the pyramids were built using these proportions.
2. Quoted in Di Muro 2016:46.
3. Quoted in Casadio 2015:14.
4. Cf. Giuliana Ferraino, “Vivere come un albero”, *Corriere della Sera*, 23 gennaio 2019, p. 21.
5. These expectations towards the “civilization of empathy” (Boella 2018:7) quickly declined when it was observed that, for instance, in the United States, empathy, which had been the slogan of Obama’s presidency, turned into rage to the point that Obama was substituted by such a character as Donald Trump. Therefore “the most recent research has shown that the empathic effect is not always a good guide for moral conduct, as it can interfere with justice and introduce partiality in favour of one’s membership group. [Nevertheless it has become] in a vast interdisciplinary context, a catalyst for the interest in crucial matters of the contemporary world: individualism and the supremacy of Economics on a global scale, the bursts of strong emotions in the media in connection with tsunamis, the destruction of archaeological sites, the tragedy of mass

migrations, terrorist attacks, the environmental crisis, and finally the transformation of experiences due to digital technologies.” (Boella 2018:9)

6. Various phenomena are classified under the umbrella term “empathy” and they are all at the same time different but interconnected, such as extended and restricted empathy, *mirroring* or low-level empathy, and *mentalising* or high-level empathy. It is therefore easier to list what empathy is not:

– Empathy is not sharing an analogous feeling (you can also empathise intentions, thought, volitions).

- Empathy does not correspond to intersubjectivity, as the latter is a fundamental element of the human condition.

- Empathy is not *mind reading*, which means that it does not correspond to convincing oneself that we are capable of knowing what other people are thinking, which is an attitude that lots of people have and leads to serious misunderstandings.

- Empathy is *not the origin of morality* interpreted as ethics of care” (Boella 2018:86).

7. Quoted in Jolanda Nigro Covre, “Esoterismo e Astrattismo”, *Arte e Magia* (Francesco Parisi ed.), Milano: Silvana editoriale 2018, p. 57.

It is proof of a base and low mind for one to wish to think with the masses or majority, merely because the majority is the majority. Truth does not change because it is, or is not, believed by a majority of the people.

Giordano Bruno

Supplement to Annual Reports in Presidential Address, December 2021

(Covering from October 2020 to September 2021)

IN EUROPE, Stroemmen is the one active local group of the TS in Norway and Dharma Lodge is where the members meet four times a year studying *The Secret Doctrine*, including a few who are unattached. Online meetings were the norm with a maximum of six persons meeting physically as per government guidelines. Some meeting topics were on the Norse tradition, Master Eckhart, Science and Spirituality, Sri Ramakrishna, Simone Weil, Dzyan Yoga, Blavatsky's Diagram of Meditation, and so on. The Organizing Secretary, Audun Solberg, was newly elected during the year.

In Portugal, traditional commemorative days were celebrated, and online meetings held fortnightly, ranging from the traditional public talks to panels and discussion groups, all well attended. The Section celebrated its centenary online in September on "Theosophy: the Flow of Life", with dignity and simplicity, and there were participants from around the world. The website provided information on the history and activities. A regular newsletter was published and social media were used for publicity. Lodges and Study Groups used video conference platforms.

Slovenia has four Lodges and two

study centres. There were 31 weekly lectures, all online, including the celebration of Foundation, Adyar, and White Lotus Days. Meditation at the beginning and end and discussion after lectures were an integral part of all two-hour meetings. Though no schools/events could be held, the online platform enabled members to attend functions conducted by other Sections and Adyar. The magazine *Theosophical Thought* dedicated a whole issue to Blavatsky on the occasion of White Lotus Day. The website <teozofskodrustvo.si> has soft copies of all magazines. The general meeting was conducted in April.

The **Spanish** branches have used online means for studies and lectures, including from other Sections and international centres. Having past lectures on YouTube made it easier for those unable to attend the lectures live, including those of the International Convention. Most importantly, non-English speaking members could follow the Convention thanks to translations, bringing together all TS members seeking spiritual growth individually as well as globally. A basic Theosophy course, "Theosophy in the 21st Century", was offered online and those who completed it were offered an

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advanced course. Some workshops were organised where attendees contributed their opinions and visions on the topics addressed. The annual silent retreat was held in December online on “Practical Occultism” with a higher attendance than in previous years. There was also greater participation in the School of the Wisdom organised at Adyar in Spanish.

With eight branches and a study centre, **Ukraine** had its annual convention online on the theme, “Cultivation of the Divine Seed”. A six-month online study course was conducted on “Ageless Wisdom for Beginners”. There were 18 lectures in Russian attended by an audience from Ukraine, Russia, America, and Israel. A two-month spring course, “Highest Laws and Rules of Spiritual Life in Different Traditions”, was held with followers of the Christian, Buddhist, Sufi, Kabbalah, Bahai, and Masonic traditions, and others who were not TS members. White Lotus Day was celebrated online jointly with Italy in Italian, Russian, and Ukrainian. A department of education was newly created. Vicente Hao Chin’s book “On Education” was translated into Ukrainian and published.

In the **INDO-PACIFIC** region, the **East and Southeast Asian** Presidential Agency consists of 4 Lodges, one each in Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar and Singapore. The Singapore and Myanmar Lodges were founded by Col. H. S. Olcott, and are among the oldest in the TS world. Website: <theosophyasia.net>. The Nippon Lodge in **Japan** held online monthly webinars. Books published in Japanese

were *The Ocean of Theosophy*, *Light on the Path*, and *The Voice of the Silence*. The Selangor Lodge in **Malaysia** was closed from 1 May to 5 September. Meetings were held online and members participated in various international group events. No annual report was received from the Olcott Lodge in **Myanmar**. The **Singapore** Lodge held weekly meetings and study classes at half capacity. The 48th edition of “A Course in Theosophy” was held in June with 11 new members participating. Foundation, White Lotus, Wesak, and Lodge anniversary Days were celebrated without food or drinks.

In the **AMERICAS**, although **Canada** experienced obstacles due to Covid-19, several opportunities emerged by adapting to the situation using imagination and learning to “think outside the box”. Following the success of online study sessions, the national conferences attracted more members than many past, in-person events. It also enabled inviting global speakers for seminars and lectures. While the return to face-to-face meetings was welcome, there is a clear intention to maintain and improve the online method, for pan-Canadian and international conferences and seminars, further facilitating the development of a nucleus of Universal Brotherhood.

The four Lodges in **Costa Rica** held their sessions online, although it had to be gradually introduced due to non-familiarity of many members with the technology involved. It is noteworthy that this did not hold up the sessions. No summer schools, seminars or workshops were planned during the year. Each of

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the celebratory days were organized by a different Lodge and all the Lodges participated.

Juana Maldonado Ruiz was elected as the new General Secretary of the **Mexican** Section for three years. She has the ambitious plan of increasing the membership to over 1,000 in that period by implementing measures for active participation of members, forming a theosophical training and dissemination school, formation of new study centres, and so on. The 100th anniversary of the Section was celebrated. The library, book store, archives, and maintenance of the main building are being organized. Monthly meetings are planned with the officers of all the Lodges. Lodges and study centres have regular online meetings. The headquarters building is being renovated. The membership is being verified. Information is shared via the website, Facebook, and YouTube.

Weekly meetings continued online in

Uruguay without interruption through-out the year. Members also took part in online global events mostly in Latin America and Spain. Books by Blavatsky, Krishnamurti, Carol Pearson, and others were studied. Members also watched videos of Sadhguru, Borja Vilasecas, Emilio Carrillo, Marys Brigitte Cham-potier, Eckhart Tolle, Mario Sabán, Enric Corbera, Mario Alonso Puig, Nazareth Castellanos, and Rudolf Steiner, and also the Disney movie, *Soul*.

The two Lodges in **Venezuela** celebrated Foundation and White Lotus Day's. The members met for two hours every Sunday and studied *Talks on the Path of Occultism* (a commentary on *At the Feet of the Master*), *The Eternal Wisdom of Life* by Clara Codd, *The Theosophical Movement* by K. Parvathi Kumar, *Study and Reflection on Compassion* by Katherine Beechey, and others. They also held a seminar on "The Divine Pymander" by Martin Leiderman. ✧

The student of Theosophy will look ever for the good in everything so that he may endeavour to strengthen it; he will watch for the working of the great law of evolution in order that he may range himself on its side and contribute to its energy his tiny stream of force. In this way, by striving always to help and never to hinder, he will become, in his small sphere of influence, one of the beneficent powers of Nature; in however lowly a manner, at however unthinkable a distance, he is yet a fellow worker together with God — and that is the highest honour and the greatest privilege that can ever fall to the lot of a human being.

C. W. Leadbeater
An Outline of Theosophy,
Ch. X, "What Theosophy Does for Us"

Theosophical Work around the World

International Convention, Adyar

The 146th International Convention of the Theosophical Society, Adyar (TS), on the theme, “Living in the Now: Challenges of the Inner Life”, was conducted from 27 to 30 December 2021. It was fully online for the second time and had 1,610 registrants. A total of 5,099 viewers participated in the Convention from 62 countries. The Convention Committee started preparations last July, led by international President Tim Boyd. The regional coordinators were Barbara Hebert, TS in America President, for the Americas; Chally Romero, General Secretary of the TS in the Philippines, for the Indo-Pacific region; Krista Umbjarv, European Federation Secretary, for Europe and Africa; and Catalina Isaza-Cantor for the Youth Forum, with Marja Artamaa, international Secretary, overseeing the project. Worth noting is the role of Sabine van Osta, General Secretary of the TS in Belgium, who was the central contact for all the translators worldwide. The subtitle team and technical team also had a lot to work on. The planning and coordination work was enormous, and over 150 members from around the world volunteering substantial time and effort was a much appreciated sign of cooperation.

The Indo-Pacific region offered an interesting variety of programs of two lectures, four talks, two Indian dance performances, guided meditation, a recap of

the China project by the Singapore Lodge, and together with the Adyar Theosophical Academy and Golden Link College in the Philippines, we listened to Children’s Wisdom. The European and African regions’ programmes were quite varied, including so many countries: three talks, two interviews, two panel discussions, a symposium, and guided meditation. The Americas’ region gave two full lectures, four short lectures, and guided meditation. In addition, each region gave their TOS annual report, and visual tours to a variety of country headquarters. Each region had Youth Forums, gathering young participants (under 41 years) for discussions.

In addition to these regional presentations, the Indian Section Convention had a report of their activities during the year (Oct. 2020 to Sep. 2021) and five talks. Also we saw presentations about the centenary of the Surenda Narayan Archives and a Question-and-Answer Panel with Tim Boyd, Deepa Padhi (international Vice-President), Chally Romero (General Secretary of the Philippine Section), moderated by Manuela Kaulich (General Secretary of the German Section).

For decades the International Convention has had three main lectures: (1) the Theosophy-Science Lecture, which this time was in the form of an interview of David Lorimer (Scientific and Medical Network) by Ravi Ravindra (Professor

Theosophical Work around the World

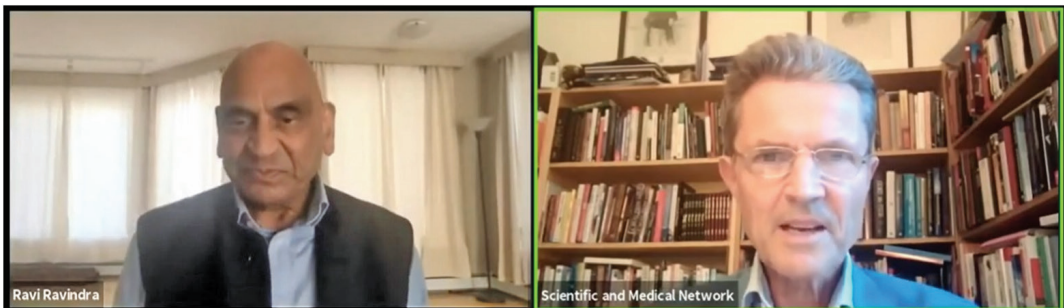


Above: President Tim Boyd’s lecture “Life within a Life” was translated into 13 languages online



Left: Antonio A. Oposa, Jr (Philippines) gave the Besant Lecture, “Let Me Tell You a Story”

Below: Ravi Ravindra (Canada) interviewed David Lorimer (Scotland) on the Theosophy-Science Interview, “What Does It Mean to Be Human?”



Theosophical Work around the World

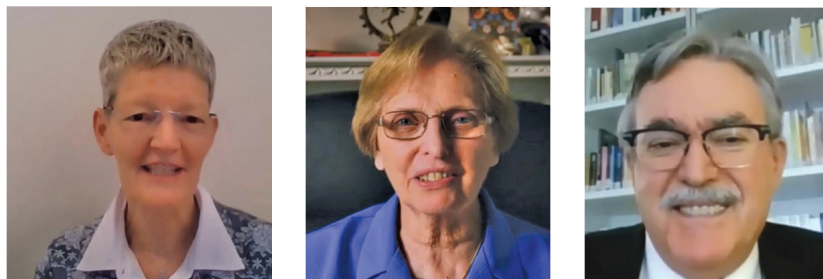
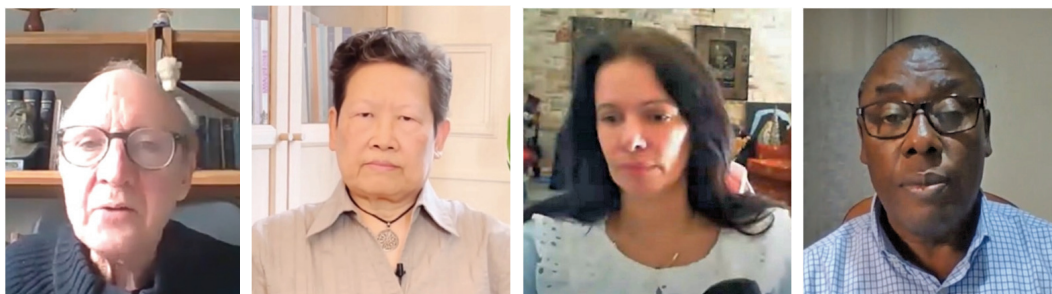


Indo-Pacific Region: *Top:* Lectures by Richard Sell (New Zealand) and Simon O'Rourke (Australia). Dance by Suhani Mohapatra (India). *Middle:* Moderators Emily Zen Chua (Philippines), Celeste Sasuman (Philippines), and Kristin Lim (Singapore). *Bottom:* Talks by Rashmi Misra (India), Michelle Simtoco (Philippines), Renuka Balasubramaniam (Malaysia), and Renée Sell (New Zealand).



Theosophical Order of Service (TOS): Talks on "The Inner Side of Service" by Nancy Secrest, TOS International Secretary (Adyar), Sofia Gimenez (Argentina), and George Wester (Australia)

Theosophical Work around the World



Europe and Africa region: *1st row:* Gary Kidgell (Scotland, moderator). Talks by Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu (France), Erica Georgiades (Greece), and Paul Martin Lukusa Mbwebwa (DR Congo). *2nd row:* Els Rijncker (the Netherlands) interviewed Jenny Baker (England). Anton Girardi (Italy) was interviewed by Sabine van Osta (last photo below). *3rd row:* Symposium: Adrienne Nagyiday (Hungary, moderator), Svyatoslav I. Lipsky (Russia), Nathan Chola (Zambia), and Irena Prime (Slovenia)



Europe and Africa region: Panel 1: Vipinchandra Shah (Kenya), Diana van Vloten (Spain), Patrizia M. Calvi (Italy), Maria Joao Figueira (Portugal), and Sabine van Osta (Belgium, moderator)

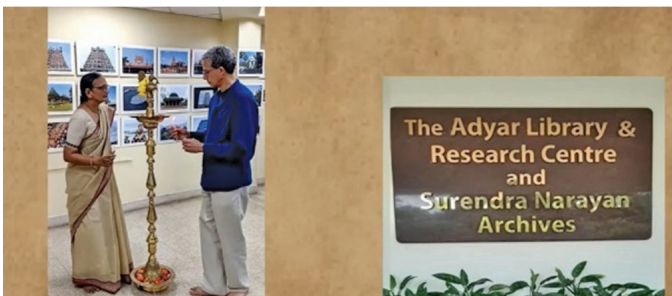
Theosophical Work around the World



Europe and Africa region: Panel 2: Mary Harkness (Ireland), Angels Torra-Buron (Spain, moderator), Jón Ellert Benediktsson (Iceland), and Manuela Kaulich (Germany)



The Americas region: Lectures 1: 1st row: Barbara Hebert (USA, moderator), Juliana Cesano (USA), Kurt Leland (USA), and Teresa Ayala (Mexico). Lectures 2: 2nd row: Blanca González Cáceres (Chile, moderator), Pablo Sender (USA), Ariel Tarazaga (Argentina), and Encida Carbonell (USA)



Tim Boyd, International President, lights the lamp while Jaishree Kannan looks on

Theosophical Work around the World

Emeritus, Halifax, Canada); (2) the Besant Lecture, including story-telling, poetry, prose, anecdotes, song, and music by Antonio A. Oposa; and (3) the President's Lecture, which concluded the Convention.

This time the program had new elements, like video tours to some of the headquarters of the TS in various countries. Also, instead of the earlier practice of having a day set aside for each region, each day of the Convention had some activities from all the regions, the planning of which was a challenge, considering the different time zones. Full-length live broadcasts were made simultaneously available on YouTube, ranging from 1.5 to 7 hours. Each program was also translated into several languages that the viewers could choose from. The number of languages rose from 9 to 14 this year, which is the maximum possible using the Zoom program.

Within about 10 days after the event, every talk and presentation was edited, subtitled, uploaded on YouTube, categorized as playlists, and the links were shared freely with subscribers in *Adyar e-News*. The richness of the whole program must be seen to be believed. Since it was fully recorded, one can go back to the contents any time and benefit from the shared wisdom. A few words from the Besant Lecture by Antonio A. Oposa, Jr, are relevant here: "The gift of kindness makes a world of difference. Kind words have the power to change the destiny of the world. . . . Maybe you and I cannot do great things, we may not change the

world in one day, but we still can change the story of the world by simply changing the storyline in our small ways." Join him in the song "What a Wonderful World".

We conclude with Tim Boyd's closing words: "We come together like this, every year. We listen, we share, we sit together, and ultimately, we leave. Hopefully, we leave with some sense of renewal or some sense of recommitment. And then we carry what we have gained, back to our little corners of the world, back to that unique space of family, friends, and community, through which we make our contribution to this greater world. It is the way these things work.

As individuals, we are small, and often we can feel as though we are in some way powerless, like grains of sand on a beach of life, an infinite number of grains, of no importance. This is a thought we cannot accept, mainly because it is a thought that is not correct. The statement has been made in another context, that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. It can equally be said that this long arc of this cycle of unfoldment, within which we all participate, bends toward freedom, awareness, solidarity, and ultimately, toward a realized Unity. This beach of life is composed of an infinite number of grains just like us. Wherever there is the activity of love, understanding, and kindness, there is a living example that touches everything and everyone around it. It sweetens and illuminates the whole. It is a big picture, a long road, but the only road for those whose eyes are open." ✧

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

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

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