



THE THEOSOPHIST

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Cover Picture: Annie Besant (1847-1933) in her earlier years — Adyar Archives

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Theosophical Philosophy

RADHA BURNIER

SCIENCE is our greatest ally. This does not become true simply because the recent thoughts of a few scientists seem to be in tune with occult philosophy. Occult science deals with facts, just as ordinary science does. It does not need validity through the corroboration of what society says at the moment; it stands on its own, just as when a scientific pronouncement turns out to be wrong, it is no longer part of scientific knowledge. A certain number of scientists seem to indicate the truth of such a thing as the existence of *ākāshic* records, but occult science by no means becomes an ally of occult philosophy because of this. More importantly, scientists are unable to see the moral implications of what they have discovered. There are other aspects which science has hardly touched upon and which are at the very heart of all spiritual knowledge. Modern scientific thinkers do accept the reality of invisible fields of force, but they are quite unconscious of the extent of those invisible regions.

Śri Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavadgītā* says that animating the manifested with one fragment of himself, He stands above

it all. When so personified, it does not appear very factual, but it may be more of a fact than we realize. Not only may there be a vast unknown or even unknowable region, but according to the Ancient Wisdom, all that is manifest and unmanifest in the whole of the cosmos is a living presence. It is not matter at all; it all throbs with life, because it emanates from a vast sea of consciousness. The word 'consciousness' is difficult to describe. It includes profound wisdom and love. Everyone who is able to transcend the limitations of brain and mind has realized that Presence. They feel it to be a loving Presence; in fact, an extraordinary blessing called *Ānanda*. No difference is then experienced between the individual and essential happiness. This is a small reflection of the very nature of the cosmos. Similarly, our experience of happiness, although limited, is an experience of the love which is the nature of the universe.

Earlier this century, some thought was given to the fact that there are manifestations of life which have nothing to do with the evolutionary process. For example, the intricate beauty of the

Lecture given at the Centenary celebration of the Finnish Section in Helsinki, 15 July 2007.

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peacock's attire has nothing to do with survival or with the process connected with survival. All the work put into it is not necessary for attracting the peahen. Similarly, there are birds which sing complicated songs that are not necessary for survival or for attracting other birds. Raynor Johnson has written about this in his book *The Imprisoned Splendour*.

The true purpose of existence has little to do with the material world, although it appears to have everything to do with it. The bee serves a purpose according to our thinking, because it pollinates flowers, and produces a sense of beauty or a fruit, but this usefulness has little to do with a purpose connected with the whole of the extraordinary cosmic existence, manifesting itself at material levels also. Perhaps it is not trying to do anything. The bird may not be trying to produce a song, but sings because it is a bird. Krishnaji perhaps meant something of this kind when he asked, 'What is the purpose of a sunset?', something into which a purpose cannot be instilled; and we have to admit that the purpose of the sunset is, because it is.

The whole cosmos may have a purpose. A part of it makes us human beings aware — that is sufficient. So purpose may not be inherent in everything where life is, and has nothing to do with the purpose that a human being has in mind. Therefore we could say that the true purpose of anything is, though it has nothing to do with material existence,

the deepest core of life itself. We can grasp it when our own mind lets go of the sense of selfhood, which separates it from the rest of existence.

When the sight becomes clear, it sees the Presence in everything, the supreme purpose which is God itself. In the ancient Vedāntic philosophy, one of the great sayings is 'You are that' (*tat tvam asi*), and the disciple has to go on meditating on this. When we think we have a purpose, we feel our life must have a certain quality. This is the kind of nonsense that goes on in the mind. But if we understand the basic truth of that statement, then there is no part of the whole which does not have the Presence, and then everything changes.

In the *Bhagavadgītā* Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who represents the whole, says he is this and he is that. He invokes an entity which refers to the whole of the species, the elephant, the horse, the cow and so on. This is not to be taken literally, but in the sense that the Presence is everywhere, in every part of existence. If we like we can say that the Presence is in the archetypal form. Nothing requires any reason for existence except that it is part of the eternal, which is described as glorious, beautiful, and mighty.

If only we could see it in all that is about us, we would see it in ourselves. It is the energy which moves all things, what HPB calls absolute motion. That is perhaps what the ancient Indians believed when they said that everything is Brahman. It is our perception which makes it appear different. If a mother has a baby, she is enamoured of it, she

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does not ask what the purpose of that baby is, or whether it will support her when she grows old. Its loveliness is its own purpose. Similarly we can see what the Mahatmas called 'the latent purpose

in all individual existences'. To the extent that science can glimpse something of this, it will become one with the religious teaching given to humanity, which is the heritage of all human beings. ✧

With the information revealed in Occult Chemistry a great expansion of our knowledge of Chemistry lies in front of us. It is just because this expansion is inevitable, that our clairvoyant investigators have toiled patiently for thirty years. They have claimed no recognition from chemists and physicists, because truth accepted or rejected is truth still, and any fact of Nature seen and stated clearly will sooner or later be woven into the whole fabric of Truth. The fact that this generation of scientists hardly knows anything at all of an extraordinary work of research extending for thirty years, matters little, when we contemplate the long vistas of scientific investigation which the imagination sees awaiting mankind.

Occult Chemistry

The Future of the Media — Part I

(Besant Lecture, Adyar, 27 December 2006)

N. S. JAGANNATHAN

ADYAR — which is synonymous with the Theosophical Society — is an old haunt of mine, having lived here in my college days in the early nineteen forties with my brother, Dr N. S. S. Gopalan, who was then the resident doctor of the Society. I have ineffable memories of those days.

Public amnesia being what it is, recent generations of Indians might not even have heard of Dr Annie Besant, who in her time strode the world like a colossus. They might be even less familiar with the myriad faces of her intellectual and spiritual journey from conventional Christianity and incurious politics to militant agnosticism and radical socialism and eventually to the certitudes of Theosophy. She was one of those rare individuals who pursued truth where it led them, unmindful of earlier beliefs being superseded by later discoveries. As Emerson said memorably: ‘Consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.’

Her insatiable intellectual curiosity and amazing range of interests made her an exceptional person even in a period like the second half of the nineteenth century, when England was passing

through an unprecedented intellectual ferment. New currents in political sociology and life sciences such as Marxism and Darwinism were toppling age-old beliefs and radically altering the way people were thinking. She was a familiar figure in the intellectual circles of London, with friends like Charles Bradlaugh and George Bernard Shaw. A regular contributor to the learned journals of the time, her conversion to Theosophy is an interesting story in itself.

When the two thick volumes of Madame Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine* arrived at the office of *The Pall Mall Gazette* edited by the legendary William Stead, he felt, as he put it, ‘an obligation to notice them, though I shrank in dismay from the task of mastering their contents’. He then thought of his friend Annie Besant and asked her to tackle them, saying, ‘My young men all fight shy of them, but you are quite mad enough on these subjects to make something of them.’ She agreed and read the book and produced the review and the rest is, as they say, history.

After this momentous revelatory experience, it was inevitable that she should

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drift to India and make it her permanent home. She incessantly travelled all over the world to win new adherents to Theosophy but she always returned to Adyar, an enduring monument to her amazing capacity for building institutions.

And, being Annie Besant, she was sucked soon enough into the burgeoning national movement for political emancipation from British rule. She launched the Home Rule League in September 1916 and vigorously propagated the ideal of self-government for Indians. Acquiring the *Madras Standard* from G. Parameswaran Pillai, himself a legendary figure of the times, she renamed it *New India*. It had an enormous influence in its time over the middle ground of Indian political opinion. Her goal, in her own words, was 'the building up of complete self-government from village councils to national Parliament, equal in powers to the legislative bodies of the self-governing colonies'. *New India* remained a powerful tool of the Home Rule League and dominated the political scene until Gandhi's advent.

Annie Besant's Indian politics, founded on secular liberalism and political emancipation by strictly constitutional means, were soon overtaken by Gandhi's unorthodox techniques of Satyāgraha, or aggression by truth, that he had successfully honed in his South African days. Gandhi and Annie Besant had enormous respect for each other, but their political principles and styles were entirely different. Consequently, soon after Gandhi's maladroit speech at the

foundation-stone laying ceremony of the Banaras Hindu University (earlier the Central Hindu College, founded by Annie Besant), they parted political company.

Despite political differences, many important leaders of the time had tremendous admiration for Annie Besant. The great leader of Bengal, Bipin Chandra Pal, once said:

There is no other person to whom the heart of the awakened India goes with greater reverence and deeper affection than it does to this strange woman from beyond the seas.

K. Rama Rao, the fearless editor of the *National Herald* of Lucknow founded by Jawaharlal Nehru in the late nineteen thirties, once said:

To Annie Besant, journalism was the handmaid of nationalism. Brought up in freedom, she displayed a fine contempt for the repressive laws of British India. She was a born controversialist, hitting hard, giving no quarter and asking for none.

Soon enough, *New India* became the target of the powers that be. Action was taken against the paper under the Press Laws of 1910 on a number of occasions, and security deposits forfeited and fresh ones demanded time and again and paid readily, and the paper continued its campaigns. Her writings in *New India* during the years of the First World War were subversive enough in the eyes of the Madras government of the day to intern her along with George S. Arundale.

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But soon enough orders came from Delhi and London to the overzealous local government to release them.

During the short period of her detention in Ooty, B. G. Horniman, himself a distinguished Briton and champion of the Indian cause, edited *New India* for a while. He then said, 'Before Besant entered into journalism, the most valiant editors, including myself, found it difficult to give free and fearless expression to their thoughts.' On one of the many occasions when a security deposit was demanded of *New India*, *The Hindu* wrote:

It is an arbitrary step to undermine the influence of Annie Besant, an English woman of striking personality and generous instincts, who has done splendid service in the cause of India and who has recently given powerful stimulus to the movement for self-government for India. The zeal and earnestness with which she is advocating the cause of Indian political development on the platform and in her paper *New India* have rightly earned for her the gratitude of the people of this country, whose resentment and grief at this official action will be keen and poignant.

But the most significant tribute to Annie Besant's politics came from no less a person than Rajaji, who at the relevant time was an ardent follower of Gandhi's confrontational politics. At a meeting to celebrate her birthday held on 1 October 1956 at the Gokhale Hall in Madras by the Young Men's Indian Association (also founded by her), Rajaji made a revealing confessional statement. As retold by

Arthur H. Nethercot in his book *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, Rajaji said:

As a young man, he had 'kept somewhat away' from Mrs Besant, but by her centenary he had realized, with a larger perspective, how great a person she really was, how foolish all the attacks on her and the Theosophical Society had been, and how much she had been misunderstood. Now, in 1956, he continued his self-castigation for his blind error of judgement. He spoke of the various phases of the struggle for freedom and reminded his audience that Dr Besant had dared to differ boldly from Gandhiji on the efficacy of mass non-cooperation coupled with disobedience of laws. He pointed out that she had foreseen how these methods would leave a heritage of disrespect for law and how prophetic her words had proved at the present 'when people talk in terms of breaking the law and offering hunger-strikes and satyāgraha for everything'. He gave her full credit for being the real beginner of the Home Rule movement and told them how it had captured the imagination of every Indian patriot. He also mentioned that Gandhi had many times sent representatives to her, asking her to support him and admitting his own.

This rather longish homage to Annie Besant is not just an act of piety on this memorial occasion. As mentioned earlier, among the incredible range of her interests was journalism both as a freelancer in England and later as the founder-editor of *New India*, which was a powerful vehicle of her politics. As in everything

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she did, she set the highest professional standards in journalism. This has an immediate relevance to the 'Future of the Media', the theme of the evening.

At the outset, it is necessary to fix the context. The years since the mid-nineties have seen an unprecedented churning; mind-boggling changes have taken place both in media technology and in what is transmitted through them for public consumption. This shift is in every way as revolutionary as the so-called 'Gutenberg Revolution' of the fifteenth century. At a time when oral transmission or manuscripts laboriously transcribed by hand on paper or on palm leaves were the only means of transferring knowledge (and wisdom), the arrival of the printing press was a giant step towards the universalization of education.

Something as momentous has happened in the last thirty years or so when satellite television and the Internet have ushered in a new era of interactive communication of knowledge and experience. This change is the most telling example of the cliché of our times — globalization. In less than a decade, India, like the rest of the world, has been caught up in the whirlwind of new ways of absorbing information, knowledge, attitudes, prejudices, and ideologies.

Globalization is rarely value-neutral. Some see it as benign and an infinite extension of human experience and knowledge. Others see it as destructive homogenization of ideas, tastes, and ways of living and a perverse obliteration of

precious nuances in the heritage of mankind, incrementally accumulated over centuries of slow evolution. They deplore the overload of information incessantly assaulting our senses through twenty-four hour TV channels and instant access to websites providing an incredible amount of information and experience.

It is as though the famous yearning of Keats for 'A life of sensations rather than of thought' has become an everyday reality. We, however, mourn with T. S. Eliot:

Where is the life we have lost in the living?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in the knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in the information?

The sociology of this transformation has been analysed in less apocalyptic terms by Marshall McLuhan in several of his works. In his influential work, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man* (1964), he invented the slogan, 'The Medium is the Massage'. According to him, television and other audiovisual media do not so much convey a message to be perceived by the mind, as provide a sensation that is to be savoured by the senses. In other words, 'they massage the sensorium' rather than address the intelligence. In any prognosis of the future of the media, this fundamental change in human perception that privileges sensation over thought and its effect on media behaviour has to be taken into account.

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This worldwide phenomenon has seriously affected the fortunes of the print medium. In a recent detailed survey of the worldwide media scene, *The Economist* of London said that newspapers have become an 'endangered species'. Circulation of newspapers has fallen significantly in America, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Latin America. Newspaper employment fell by 18 per cent between 1990 and 2001. 'Selling words to readers and space to advertisers is an enterprise that is falling apart.' The paper quotes expert forecasts asserting that during the next few decades half the rich world's newspapers will die. The Internet is where people now go for reliable information, a task that had traditionally been performed for at least two centuries by the printed newspapers. A more recent report by the British Telecom regulator confirms *The Economist's* finding: 27 per cent of those who use broadband high-speed Internet connections read fewer newspapers. Similar is the situation in Europe, Japan, and the United States.

Over the next few decades, classified advertisements, the basic bread and butter of newspapers, will have moved over to the Internet, which is rapidly becoming the place where job seekers and bride seekers go to find what they want. There are even free sites of this kind. The *Economist* says that this has 'done more than most other developments to destroy the income of newspapers'.

The other looming threat to the monopoly once enjoyed by the print medium

is the emergent phenomenon called 'blogging' or postings on various sites by countless numbers of people, young and old, of their views and ideas. There is a continuous buzz of exchanges, agreeing and disagreeing with what has been posted earlier. This is not always a frivolous activity. Called 'the citizens' newspapers on the net', these are often serious enterprises in which there is an unceasing free-for-all of views and counter-views that eventually lead to valid conclusions. One such non-profit group that has a site called <newassignment.net> plans to combine the work of amateurs and professionals to issue investigative stories on the Net.

Coping with this unrelenting competition from the Net, newspapers have themselves gone online in the hope that with advertisement support for their online edition, they may make up what they have lost on the printed version. The Italian newspaper, *Stampa*, gets more than a million visitors every day, twice the number of the readers of its printed version. According to *The Economist*, in the next few years, for many newspapers, there will be an annual growth of 30 per cent in advertisement income in their Internet editions. Online papers have the additional advantage of not having printing costs.

There can be no doubt that the audiovisual media have certain intrinsic advantages over the print medium. With its ability to present news even as it occurs, television has the inestimable advantage of immediacy and intensity of visual impact. This can never be the privilege

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of the print medium. Those who have witnessed on their TV screens the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001 and similar events such as the attack on the suburban trains in Mumbai would recall the stunning impact of the TV reports. This can never be duplicated by the newspaper accounts read the next morning. The cathartic effect of television news on such occasions is comparable to that produced by witnessing a Shakespearean tragedy on the stage.

What then could be the medium-term outlook for the media industry and profession? According to the best informed opinion quoted by *The Economist*: 'Unless newspapers reinvent themselves on the Net and other media platforms like the mobile phone and portable electronic devices, they will not survive.' Against such a dire forecast, the most that one can hope for is the 'emergence of an elite group of newspapers available everywhere online, with competent independent journalists providing the news and views'. In such a scenario, the print medium as we know it will soon be an artefact of the pre-electronic age, whose place will be the museum and not the marketplace. In other words, at least in the Western world, print medium will be dead.

If this is the grim prospect for the newspapers in the Western world, what is the outlook for them in India? The short answer is that this fate does not await India, at least in the near future. For one thing, everything happens much more

slowly in India. These new technologies came rather late to India and their penetration, particularly into non-urban areas, is still not very deep. Unlike in the West, addiction to the radio or TV for news is still feeble in India. All India Radio came into being in the mid-nineteen thirties, and Doordarshan followed three decades later. Both were more valued for their entertainment than for the news they broadcast. As government monopolies, they lacked the first attribute of a free medium — an adversarial relationship with authority, which the Indian Press has enjoyed historically and has exercised with gusto. Though the spread of computers and the reach of the Internet (not to forget the cellphone with its versatile capabilities) has been striking in the last few years, the best judgement of media professionals is that the print medium's primacy in communication is unlikely to be upstaged by the newer media.

It may be argued that the low literacy levels in India would give a natural edge to the audio-visual media. But this is more a theoretical advantage than a practical one, since, as stated earlier, listening to the news on the radio or viewing the news on TV is yet to become a habit among most of our people. As already mentioned, these two media are still largely entertainment-oriented, with mushy soap operas holding in zombie-like thrall the urban middle-class viewers (mainly women, if you will allow a sexist remark!) at any time of the day or night.

So the print medium in India is in no immediate threat from its rivals. In fact,

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ironically, the current modest status of literacy is a factor in favour of the growth of the print medium. Unlike in the West, where mass literacy has reached saturation point, there is much leeway to be made up in India to reach that state of felicity. With the serious efforts being made to improve literacy, newspaper readership can only increase. Many of us driving past villages will have seen eager faces of men (and now women) sitting in the village *chaupāl* and listening intently to the news read from a newspaper by a literate man of the village. With increased literacy, these listeners would themselves be newspaper readers.

That, unlike in the West, the print medium is a long way from being dead is evident from the 2004-05 annual report of the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI). According to this report, some 1,948 new newspapers have registered themselves with this authority, and there has been an increase in circulation of all newspapers and journals. Also the number of dailies being published in the country in the same period was 1,834, with a claimed circulation figure of 78,689,266 copies, 7 per cent higher than in the previous year. Hindi had 799 dailies claiming a circulation of nearly 34 million copies, and 181 English dailies sold nearly 11 million copies.

There are other interesting titbits in

this report, but I shall not weary you with them. The plethora of newspapers and periodicals in every language crowding most news-stands is eloquent evidence of the pervasive presence of the print media. It is possible that statistics conceal the fate and fortunes of individual newspapers, especially the bigger ones with a national presence. The fierce competition among them is evident from the price war they are often engaged in, with some papers seeking to extend their reach to non-traditional areas by selling at below-cost prices. This loss is sought to be made up by advertisement revenue, which is dependent on circulation figures.

The other threat to the finances of newspapers arises from the unequal competition for advertisement they now face from the visual media. At least in the case of consumer goods such as cosmetics, newspapers, with their static pictures, can never match the visual impact of TV ads. Consequently, advertisers have moved on to TV channels to lure buyers. Nevertheless, the fact that the newspaper is something to which one can return at leisure, and at a time and place of one's choosing, gives it an inestimable edge as a durable medium. Indeed, for any serious student of affairs, the evanescent images on the screen, however often repeated during the day, are of no value at all.

(To be continued)

The only man who behaved sensibly was my tailor; he took my measurements anew every time he saw me, while all the rest went on with their old measurements and expected them to fit me.

George Bernard Shaw

Annie Besant as Instructor and Educator

JOHN ALGEO

LEARNING is of two types, which we might call exoteric and esoteric. Exoteric learning puts facts into the minds of students and develops their skill in using those facts; it preserves and expands the traditions of a culture. Esoteric learning elicits from students an interior wisdom that they did not know they possessed; it attunes their outer minds to inner archetypal truths. Both sorts of learning are good and necessary.

One of my university mentors taught a course that was an introduction to advanced work for new postgraduate students who were studying to become college teachers. He told us:

You are the last of the Romans. The city of Rome is surrounded by invading barbarian hordes. You have only two options: you can let the barbarians overrun the city and destroy it, or you can make Romans out of the barbarians. I am here to tell you how to transform the barbarians into Romans.

He was, of course, speaking metaphorically. By 'Rome' he meant Western

culture and by 'Romans', those who had inherited that culture and valued it; by 'barbarians' he meant the new generation of young people who had not yet fully absorbed the culture.

Exoteric instruction is about making Romans out of barbarians. To be sure, instead of 'Rome' we can also use some other metaphor for any of the great world cultures: Indic, Sinitic, or whatever. All of the great world cultures are important; each has something to contribute to the total civilization of humanity. All those cultures need to be preserved by transforming the invading barbarian hordes of each new generation around the world into Romans or Kurukshetrans or Confucians, according to the land of their nurture. More than that, the barbarians need to know, not just about their own culture, but also about Rome, Kurukshetra, the land of Lu, and all the great cultures. For humanity is one, and the diverse great cultures are the many facets of its diamond unity.

Exoteric instruction, although fundamentally important for the future

Dr John Algeo has been international Vice-President of the TS after serving for nine years as President of the TS in America. He is Professor Emeritus at the University of Georgia, USA, with many academic distinctions to his credit.

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of humanity, is not, however, enough. Esoteric education is also vitally necessary. It needs a different metaphor. We are all rough stones that need to become perfect ashlar so that we can assume our proper place in the Temple of Humanity. We are base metallic lead that needs to be transformed into incorruptible gold by an alchemical process of sublimation. Such change cannot be imposed from without. Such change is not a matter of instruction by building something into students ('instruct' is from Latin, meaning 'to build in'). It is rather a matter of true education or of leading students out of the darkness of ignorance into the light of true knowledge ('educate' is from Latin, meaning 'to lead forth').

Esoteric education is the aim of all the great world teachers: the Buddha, Christ, Zoroaster, Śankarāchārya, Confucius, Plato, and the rest. Esoteric education opens our minds to what we already knew, but did not know that we knew. It switches on an interior light. It makes it possible for us to hear the Voice of the Silence. It reveals to us, not just the knowledge of time, but the wisdom of eternity. It sets our feet upon a Path that leads, not outward, but inward to the very heart of Being.

Annie Besant, born on 1 October, 160 years ago, was one of the world's great teachers — an accomplished instructor and a master educator. Throughout her life, she advanced the cause of learning, both exoteric and esoteric.

As a young woman, Besant worked in the National Secular Society and the

Fabian Society to free her fellow Britons from the stifling chains of narrow-minded bigotry and economic exploitation. She collaborated with Charles Bradlaugh on the radical newspaper *The National Reformer*. She worked to instruct women in matters of personal health, safety, and rights, including her ground-breaking organization of the exploited 'match girls', who worked under appallingly dangerous conditions for disgracefully low pay. The union they formed under Annie Besant's inspiration engaged in a successful strike that produced more humane working conditions and improved compensation for those women. It also showed their fellow Englishwomen and Englishmen that they could learn to better their state in life by their own endeavours.

In 1889, Besant was elected to membership on the London School Board by a decisive majority of the vote. In that role, she worked for radical reforms in the schooling of children, introducing free meals for poor and undernourished pupils and medical examinations for all elementary students. Besant knew that the mind cannot be instructed if the body is weak or ill. Her view of the human constitution was always a holistic one. The whole human being must be tended to if any human being is to thrive, just as all human beings must be cared for if our species is to progress.

In that same year, 1889, Besant's concept of holism was vastly expanded. She read H. P. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* because she had been invited to write a review of it for *The Pall Mall Gazette*.

Annie Besant as Instructor and Educator

That review led to Besant's meeting Blavatsky and opened a new era in her life. Her emphasis changed from an exclusive focus on exoteric instruction to a combination of it with esoteric education. Besant never abandoned the exoteric, but she enlarged her concerns to include the esoteric. She realized the importance of both outer instruction and inner education for the development of a whole human being. Under the inspiration she drew from her contact with Blavatsky and her discovery of the Ancient Wisdom of Theosophy, Annie Besant became not just an effective instructor, but a true educator.

After H. P. Blavatsky's death in 1891, Annie Besant succeeded her as the spiritual leader of the Theosophical Society and the primary esoteric educator for Theosophists in her time. She first travelled to India in 1893, and thereafter that land became a major focus for her work — social, instructional, and educational. For example, in 1898, she founded the Central Hindu College in Varanasi, where students received both secular instruction and spiritual education. In 1904, she founded the Central Hindu College Girls' School. Besant supported improved education for all women:

India, she insisted, could never become great again unless women and men walked side by side and hand in hand, just as a bird could not fly high with one wing broken before it starts upon its flight. . . . She also spoke out against the seclusion of women, arguing that this shutting up

of women is unworthy of civilization. Indian men do not deserve to be free politically, until they give freedom socially to Indian women. (Nancy Fix Anderson, 'Bridging Cross-cultural Feminisms: Annie Besant and Women's Rights in England and India, 1874-1933', *Women's History Review*, 3 [1994]:574).

At the same time, Annie Besant continued her involvement with political matters in India. By 1914, she was editing the politically focused newspaper *New India*. In 1916, she established the Indian Home Rule League. She had earlier become a prominent member of the Indian National Congress, founded in 1885 by another Theosophist, Allan Octavian Hume. In 1917, Besant became the first woman and the first non-Indian to serve as president of that organization. Eight years later, in 1925, she was succeeded in the office by Sarojini Naidu, a poet called 'The Nightingale of India' and the first Indian woman to serve as president of the Congress.

Sarojini Naidu admired both Mohandas Gandhi and Annie Besant. The Welsh Cardiff Lodge's Web site (<http://www.theosophycardiff.care4free.net/besantcongress.htm>) reports this eminent Indian artist and activist as having said of Annie Besant:

Had it not been for her and her enthusiasm, one could not have seen Mr Gandhi leading the cause of Indian freedom today. It was Mrs Besant who laid the foundation of modern India — Dr Besant was a combination of Pārvati, Lakshmi and Sarasvati.

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That is high praise indeed by one daughter of India for another, the one native and the other adopted.

Beyond all of Annie Besant's social activism and exoteric instructional work, she was an esoteric educator. And her great achievement in that role is attested, among other ways, by the Theosophical books she published or that were compiled from her inspiring talks. It would be unfeasible to attempt a full or even extensive listing here of her writings. But a sample of her publications, of varying lengths and perhaps familiarity, will suggest the range and depth of her writings:

Ancient Ideals in Modern Life
The Ancient Wisdom
Avatāra-s
Beauties of Islam
The Bhagavadgītā; or The Lord's Song
Brahmavidyā: Divine Wisdom
Buddhist Popular Lectures
The Building of the Kosmos
*The Changing World and Lectures to
Theosophical Students*
Civilization's Deadlocks and the Keys
Creating Character
Death — and After?
Dharma
The Doctrine of the Heart
Duties of the Theosophist
*East and West; and The Destinies
of Nations*
*Esoteric Christianity, or, The Lesser
Mysteries*
Essentials of an Indian Education
Evolution and Man's Destiny

Evolution of Life and Form
The Future of the Theosophical Society
*H. P. Blavatsky and the Masters of
the Wisdom*
Hints on the Study of the Bhagavadgītā
Ideals in Education
The Ideals of Theosophy
The Immediate Future
In the Outer Court
Initiation, the Perfecting of Man
The Inner Government of the World
An Introduction to Yoga
Karma
The Laws of the Higher Life
Mahābhārata: The Story of the Great War
Man and His Bodies
Man's Life in Three Worlds
The Masters
Mysticism
The Nature of Memory
The Necessity for Reincarnation
The New Civilization
*Our Elder Brethren: The Great Ones
in the World's Service*
The Path of Discipleship
The Path to the Masters of Wisdom
The Pedigree of Man
Popular Lectures on Theosophy
The Real and the Unreal
Reincarnation
*The Riddle of Life and How Theosophy
Answers It*
The Self and Its Sheaths
Seven Great Religions
The Seven Principles of Man
Some Problems of Life
The Spiritual Life
A Study in Consciousness
A Study in Karma

Annie Besant as Instructor and Educator

Superhuman Men in History and in Religion
Talks with a Class
The Theosophical Society and the Occult Hierarchy
Theosophy and Life's Deeper Problems
Theosophy and the Theosophical Society
Theosophy as the Basic Unity of National Life
Theosophy in Relation to Human Life
Theosophy, Past and Future
Thought Power: Its Control and Culture
Thought-Forms
The Three Paths to Union with God
The Three World Movements
The Universal Law of Life
The Universal Textbook of Religion and Morals
Wake Up India
The Wisdom of the Upanishads
World Problems of Today

In addition to her impressive literary output, Annie Besant was actively engaged in other forms of instruction and education. She had succeeded Blavatsky as Outer Head of the Esoteric School, a

position of primary importance for esoteric education. She was initiated into Co-Freemasonry in Paris, and reformed its practice in keeping with traditional Masonic respect for spiritual values. In 1908, a year after she succeeded Henry Steel Olcott as President of the Theosophical Society, she founded the Theosophical Order of Service, with a mission that was both active and educational. When the Liberal Catholic Church was formed, she gave it her respectful support. Annie Besant aided the cause of learning and service in a wide variety of forms, because different forms are needed by different people.

Exoteric instruction and esoteric education are both essential to a well-rounded and fully developed mind. Annie Besant devoted her life to both. What can one say of a woman as open-minded, innovative, influential, productive, and talented as Annie Besant? Indeed, she had the strength and energy of Pārvati, the grace and creativity of Lakshmi, and the learning and harmony of Sarasvati. She was the three great energies united in one. ✧

Fresh and vivid as dawn itself is my recollection of the rapture that enhanced my lyric girlhood, when nearly thirty years ago I first set eyes on Annie Besant, and heard her speak in the Muslim City of Hyderabad in fervent praise of Ancient Hindu Culture. . . .

Today, pondering over her incomparable devotion and her incalculable service to the Indian cause, I can pay no finer tribute to her manifold greatness than to acclaim the sweet miracle wrought by her transcendent and transfiguring love for India, whereby she who came into our midst a stranger, has created for herself an honoured and legitimate place in the annals of the glorious and heroic women of our own race and tradition.

Sarojini Naidu

Religious Harmony: The Need of the 21st Century

(Finnish Section Centenary Lecture, Helsinki, 15 July 2007)

SAMDHONG RINPOCHE

AS we celebrate the Centenary of the Finnish Section of the Theosophical Society, it is also a significant day for the Theosophical Society as a parent institution which has existed for more than a century and a quarter, maintaining a fairly steady membership. The Society has indeed come a long way since it was established in 1875. Theosophical ideas have been widely subscribed to, reaching remote corners of the earth because of their universality. In encouraging the study of religious traditions, the Society has since provided much impetus to humanity in the search for Truth and the realization of the oneness of all beings — that all are interrelated.

Each major religious tradition has tried to show the path to the ultimate Truth, answering the question about the purpose of man's existence — a question that has pricked the mind of us humans since time immemorial, and will continue to do so. Religion, in a sense, is that vehicle or medium which facilitates realization of the

ultimate Truth — the ability to see things in their true nature, without any distortion.

In this regard, religions play an important role in advancing the spiritual growth of humanity. Just as there have been various types of people on this earth with varying needs and tastes, so also there are different religious traditions to cater to them. The different religions are to be seen simply as diverse paths leading to a common destination. But of course the decision to adhere to a particular faith is according to one's own discretion. This could be based on one's suitability or mental disposition or intellect to grasp any particular religious teaching. When they reach their destination, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and so on, all will realize that indeed they have been searching for the same reality.

Despite wondrous achievements, the last century witnessed much religion-based violence, oppression, civil unrest, and rifts, bringing instability, fear, suffering, anger, frustration, and violent behaviour into our lives. 'Religious hatred'

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and intolerance amongst faiths have plagued nations, communities, and individuals, keeping them from leading a purposeful existence. The problem of global religious hostility has since become so gravely aggravated that it may spiral out of control in the first half of this century.

Whenever people have faced difficulties and tribulations, it has been their tendency to look to religion and spirituality for solace. Religion is important, as we not only desire a materially prosperous world, but also need a world of harmony, morality, brotherhood, and compassion. The role of spirituality is to dispel inner conflict (the source of all conflict), and to inculcate love, empathy, tolerance, patience, and humility. Unfortunately, the most dangerous threat to the world today is the word 'religion' itself, which is becoming a most powerful means of social division and conflict. The phenomena of religious intolerance, fundamentalism, and fanaticism have made society almost immune to any remedy, secular or religious. The medicine itself is becoming a poison. It is therefore imperative to discuss this issue in all seriousness in the context of what harmony between religions can contribute.

I do not know any religious canon or creed that preaches violence, recommends hatred, and attempts to cause disharmony among people. Yet we find that many undesirable acts have been committed in the name of religion, culminating in forced conversions, elimination of rival faiths by dogmatic assertion, tall claims about the

truth of one religion in order to establish its superiority over another, and deprecation of the beliefs and teachings of other religions.

In order to understand why there is disharmony between religions, we have to understand the real meaning of religion in the first place. Prof. Raimon Pannikar has described how the meaning of 'religion' encompasses three aspects:

- “ *Religiousness*, or the human dimension concerning ultimacy, wherever we may believe this ultimacy to lie in;
- “ *Religiosity*, or the social institution (not necessarily an organization) in which the religious dimension of human life is embodied; and
- “ *Religionism*, or the more or less closed system of ultimate beliefs appertaining to one particular collectivity.

He says the three aspects should be distinguished but they are not separable. For the purpose of understanding, he would use the word mainly as connoting an 'organized re-linking with the sacred', but without forgetting that religion is transcendental to any of its expressions.

I am quite in agreement that this definition of religion is broadly acceptable to most of the religious traditions as they exist today, although it may not be an accurate definition of Dharma as understood by Buddhists. In any case, a religion must be instrumental in spiritualizing the nature of an individual into a boundless and holistic one. Leonard Swidler further strengthens this view:

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At the heart of each culture is what is traditionally called a Religion, that is: An explanation of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly. Normally all religions contain the four Cs' — Creed, Code, Cult, and Community structure — and are based on the notion of the Transcendent.

Creed refers to the cognitive aspects of a religion; it is everything that goes into the 'explanation' of the ultimate meaning of life.

Code of behaviour or ethics includes all the rules and customs of action that somehow follow from one aspect or another of the Creed.

Cult means all the ritual activities that relate the follower to one aspect or other of the Transcendent, either directly or indirectly, prayer being an example of the former and certain formal behavior towards representatives of the Transcendent, like priests, of the latter.

Community structure refers to the relationships among the followers; this can vary widely, from a very egalitarian relationship, as among Quakers, through a 'republican' structure like Presbyterians have, to a monarchial one, as with some Hasidic Jews vis-à-vis their rabbi.

The Transcendent, as the roots of the word indicates, means, 'that which goes beyond' the everyday, the ordinary, the surface experience of reality. It can refer to spirits, god, a Personal God, an Impersonal God, Emptiness, etc.

It is quite clear that there cannot be disharmony in religiousness or in a true creed or code. But it does appear in a cult or community. In other words, disharmony and conflict grow in the minds of people who are unmindful of the essence of a creed or code, and instead are carried away by intense community feelings and attachment. Such persons, guided by self and by vested interests, create conflict among themselves and use the name of religion for gaining political strength, or for other ulterior motives.

One common phenomenon which is the cause of the majority of religious conflicts today is that the so-called fundamentalists are creating a false sense of insecurity in the religious traditions in order to exploit the religious sentiments of innocent believers. These fundamentalists fail to understand the basic elements of their respective religion. By taking unfair advantage of the religious sensitivity of their community, they adopt certain policies that become fanatical in character. It is only by misusing the name of religion that disharmony is perpetuated.

One other problem is the basic tendency of thinking about one's religion as superior to others. Many times, due to ignorance and utter arrogance, conflict is fuelled when believers from different faiths come into contact with each other, each thinking that they alone have the complete 'truth', that there is something missing or wrong in all others, while their group represents the true 'Reality' on earth. Such concepts should be eradi-

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cated from our minds. This will be possible only when one genuinely practises one's own religion sincerely and has the determination to protect the doctrine in its purest form.

For example, some followers of Buddhism seem to have forsaken the Buddha's teachings due to the mind's instantaneous responses to verbal and physical stimuli. Still, they claim to be deeply devoted to their faith. We all know that the essence of the Buddha's teachings is compassion, loving kindness, tolerance, and so forth. But for these so-called Buddhists, the greatest cause for wrath and intolerance would be any kind of criticism of or show of disrespect towards their religion. If anyone speaks ill of Buddhism, they become so furious as to retaliate with every possible means of violence, disregarding the Buddha's teaching of non-violence. They do not realize that by such behaviour they harm their own faith. In their ignorance they may consider that they are protecting Buddhism by opposing the critics of their faith. But, in fact, critics can never damage the Buddha's doctrines. Buddhists themselves can damage it by using anger and hate in response to criticism. This principle is universal, as gross irreligious feelings are pervasive and very easily provoked in the minds of some of the followers of all the great religious traditions. Such a contradiction is the greatest inner ecological disaster of our time.

Religious teachings are meant for pacifying, purifying, and deconditioning the mind. If they become the main

source of agitation and violence, where are we to search for a remedy? How can a religion reduce racial 'segregation'? In fact, the expression 'religious intolerance' is a contradiction in terms. Unfortunately, such a despicable inability to practise forbearance is widely prevalent in our society. The consequences of religious tension, if left unattended, will be very hazardous to the entire human civilization.

To prevent further deterioration of this situation and to revive normalcy, peace, and harmony in the relations between various religious practitioners, the Theosophical Society, as an entity that respects and encourages the study of different religions, has a unique advantage and potential, as well as responsibility, to spearhead initiatives towards this end. The following are some humble thoughts on future actions that could be taken to reverse current trends:

1. It is very important to understand that each human being is unique. Each differs from the other in capacity, likes and dislikes, taste, temperament, and so on. Hence, any one religious doctrine will not be suitable for all people, just as one type of food or medicine is not suitable for every individual. We should therefore understand that all noble traditions are important and holy for their followers. This does not mean that any one religion is necessarily superior or inferior to the other. We should understand this simple fact. It is also useful to remember that religious beliefs are largely determined by where one was born.

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If born in the Vatican City, one would almost inevitably be a Roman Catholic. If raised in the Middle East, one would probably be a Muslim; if in India, a Hindu, and so forth.

2. Since religious diversity is inevitable and necessary because of human diversity, to bring about harmony between the religions, instead of searching for their similarities, we should respect the differences. The tendency of searching for similarities many a time leads to imposing one's own religious interpretations upon other religions in the process of trying to make them similar, thereby embracing various traditions in one, which does not suit any basic principle of the various traditions.

3. The concept of 'religious tolerance' must be replaced by genuine respect for all religions. The word 'tolerance' itself implies unacceptability of the other religion. To tolerate means, by and large, that something is not good or acceptable but one simply has to live with it, in tolerance. Yet, according to Mahatma Gandhi's words, 'Sarva Dharma Samabhāva', meaning having the same attitude towards all religions, one must accept and respect all religious traditions without discrimination. Only such an attitude can assimilate the concept of pluralism. Mere toleration of other religious faiths does not require one to accept other religions as true.

4. Every genuine religious practitioner should have the courage and willingness to speak out whenever there is disharmony or a threat to harmony among various communities. Particularly when

one's own coreligionists are being disharmonious, they should be effectively reprimanded, instead of blaming the other community. Religious propaganda should be discouraged; the focus should be on helping people to imbibe the true essence of their religion.

5. There should be a platform for religious leaders to interact as often as possible and develop a personal relationship in order to eradicate misunderstanding, cultivate genuine understanding, and set good examples for their followers. All the great religions have infinite wisdom and beauty to share. There should be religious exchanges in order to create opportunities to study other religions and appreciate their noble ideas. Apart from trying to expand their followers' base, the great religions should try to build an environment in which there is flexibility for one to wisely accept the noble ideals of any religion. We should look beyond religious conversion and root out narrow-mindedness and distance in our relationships.

6. Interfaith dialogues, inter-religious prayers, and group pilgrimages to various religious shrines and holy places should be encouraged. Basically, the goal of all religion is one — purification of the mind. To overcome our selfishness, to love and serve our fellow beings, to rise to the level of universal consciousness — these goals are common to all. The core of religion is to foster these human values and awaken one's inner light. I do not know how practical it would be, but we can think of a United Religions of the World as a

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model to bring the world's religions together for the welfare and betterment of all, and to promote religious harmony and peace in the world.

7. A compassionate mind is a key factor in bringing about equal respect for all religions. Having compassion for suffering people or weaker sections of society is easy. But feeling compassion for strong people, particularly our opponents or different groups, is not so easy. The basic requirement to develop compassion is the understanding of equality among all beings. Each living being is equal on the basis of its potential; every sentient being has the seed of enlightenment. Secondly, every sentient being equally likes happiness and dislikes suffering. Therefore, it is not rational to differentiate between sentient beings or between oneself and others. Once we understand this con-

cept of equality, we will have a compassionate mind that will respect each individual and his or her religious denomination.

8. Above all, there should be solidarity among genuine religious practitioners in order to safeguard their faith and conviction. They should effectively oppose misuse of or exploitation in the name of religion by politicians for the sake of 'dividing and ruling', creating supporters or votebanks by exploiting the religious sentiments of innocent people.

As one of the important objectives of the Theosophical Society is to promote universal brotherhood and harmony amongst the various religious traditions, a challenging period lies ahead. But I am hopeful that peace will ultimately prevail on this earth. It is a matter of clearing up the temporary problems blocking the path, so as to make way for lasting peace. ✧

Keep your own faith, but honour the faiths of your brothers; religious unity is no more to be found in the form of a single religion, but in the realization that all faiths are one, that all faiths have the same origin and lead to the same end. . . .

Is not the world fairer for the different faiths? Do we not know more truths, because so many have spoken differently? If a man has a truth to speak that others know not, let him speak it out. Let us listen. . . . There is no such thing as a heretic. There is only the eye that sees the truth in a little different way, that we may learn and make our truth the richer because our brother has told us something that before we did not know.

Annie Besant

Altruism's Inextinguishable Fire: Annie Besant's Testimony

PEDRO OLIVEIRA

ONE of the baffling aspects of the human condition is the fact that some people, in the face of mounting adversities and dangers, manage to forget themselves in the service of others. But 'Why bother?' is a well-known mantra for millions of people around the world. They can see what human greed and callousness is doing to the planet and its multifarious species; they are fed daily images of 'human' monstrosity against other humans; they see how selfishness eats up noble human aspirations and turns leaders, politicians and even idealists into slaves of the gods of profit and power. Seeing all this they say: 'Why bother? I am just an individual; I can't change the world.'

Yet, throughout history, there have been a few individuals who refused to be sedated by moral laziness and stupefied by self-concern in its many forms. Something in them responded to the suffering and crying need of those around them, and their response was mediated neither by convenience, nor by a sense of personal priorities nor by fear. Instead of taking refuge in their own sorrow or

self-interest, they embraced their fellow-human beings' plight in such a way that all personal considerations ceased to occupy centre stage and the only motivating force that guided their lives was altruism, the inextinguishable fire that relentlessly burns all the dross in the human psyche, leaving behind only the pure gold of a constant dedication which knows no centre.

One of the outstanding aspects of Annie Besant's life is that a number of those who wrote *about* her attributed to her character traits that were, in most cases, much more projections of their own minds than actual facts. But those who knew her and who came under her influence had their lives profoundly changed and saw in her a source of perennial inspiration. She was criticized, for example, for having 'changed' her ideology so many times before she finally embraced Theosophy. But when one reads what she wrote even during her atheist and materialist period, one cannot help seeing how the fire of altruism had touched her soul very deeply, so as to inform her every action and initiative.

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Selfless service and the search for Truth were for her core values in her daily life long before she encountered the Theosophical teaching.

What is altruism? There are some for whom the word is equated to an ideology, that is, a regimented thinking, a moral necessity. The problem of equating altruism to an ideology is that it may give rise to a mindset motivated by compulsion and not necessarily by a pure response to human suffering and needs. In other words, one should help because one naturally responds to the needs of others and not because of a concept that dictates that one *has* to help. It is an experience common to millions of people around the world that politicians don an altruistic persona in the months preceding an election only to resume their normal self after the electoral process is over. Self-interest and altruism can never meet.

Perhaps altruism is a realization, in some degree, that the limits that separate our lives from the lives of others are indeed artificial and mind-based. When one travels on a bus or a train, for example, one can see in the faces of one's fellow-passengers what afflicts them: fear, loneliness, anger, uncertainty about the future, indifference, etc. And even if one cannot say anything, if altruism is a reality in our lives, it naturally expresses itself as deep sympathy, compassion, and understanding, which may help others in many ways. Altruism is a response from that dimension of our heart which is free from the notion of separateness. Let us consider, for example, the following pas-

sage of Annie Besant's *Autobiography*:

But ah! How patient they were for the most part, how sadly, pathetically patient, this crucified Christ, Humanity; wrongs that would set my heart and my tongue afire would be accepted as a matter of course. O blind and mighty people, how my heart went out to you; trampled on, abused, derided, asking so little and needing so much; so pathetically grateful for the pettiest services; so loving and so loyal to those who offered you but their poor services and helpless love. Deeper and deeper into my innermost nature ate the growing desire to succour, to suffer for, to save. I had long given up my social reputation, I now gave up with ever-increasing surrender ease, comfort, time; the passion of pity grew stronger and stronger, fed by each new sacrifice, and each sacrifice led me nearer and nearer to the threshold of that gateway beyond which stretched a path of renunciation I had never dreamed of, which those might tread who were ready wholly to strip off self for Man's sake, who for Love's sake would surrender Love's return from those they served, and would go out into the darkness for themselves that they might, with their own souls as fuel, feed the Light of the World.¹

It would indeed be difficult to find a better testimonial affirmation of what altruism really is than the passage mentioned above. It implies a response from a nature in ourselves, so completely removed from the personal sense of self, that is complete, total, and unreserved.

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It is indeed a life-altering experience in which one becomes a real *witness* of the unbreakable and uncreated Ground which sustains all existence and all life. The energy of such ‘witnessing’ is of such an order that it reduces to ashes every form of self-concern, of self-preoccupation, and leads the one to whom such experience has come to a life of selfless service that has no end.

In 1888, the year before she joined the Theosophical Society, Annie Besant, together with W. T. Stead, decided to create the *Link*, ‘a halfpenny weekly, the spirit of which was described in its motto, taken from Victor Hugo: “The people are silent. I will be the advocate of this silence. I will speak for the dumb. I will speak of the small to the great and of the feeble to the strong. . . . I will speak for all the despairing silent ones. I will interpret this stammering; I will interpret the grumblings, the murmurs, the tumults of the crowds, the complaints ill-pronounced, and all the cries of beasts that, through ignorance and through suffering, man is forced to utter. . . . I will be the Word of the People. I will be the bleeding mouth whence the gag is snatched out. I will say everything.”’ Their altruism was evidently not a cosy and comfortable one. It was courageous, action-oriented, defiant, and fearless.

Many spiritual traditions point out that before one can even take the first steps on the Path one needs to understand, deeply and directly, that what is called the Path is indeed a movement towards *other-centredness*. There are many in the

world who believe that in order to tread the Path they do not need to shed anything, that they can continue to indulge in and nurture their many desires, and that somehow they can still experience the spiritual Reality. Perhaps it is this sort of mindset that has helped to create the plethora of ‘gurus’, ‘teachers’ and ‘masters’ that presently roam the world in their teaching circuits. As one economist once pointed out, when the need for a new product does not exist, it can be created!

But when an altruistic attitude of mind and heart has been sincerely nurtured, spiritual principles are assimilated much more readily. Consider, for example, Annie Besant’s response after reading *The Secret Doctrine*:

Home I carried my burden, and sat me down to read. As I turned over page after page the interest became absorbing; but how familiar it seemed; how my mind leapt forward to presage the conclusions, how natural it was, how coherent, how subtle, and yet how intelligible. I was dazzled, blinded by the light in which disjointed facts were seen as parts of a mighty whole, and all my puzzles, riddles, problems, seemed to disappear. The effect was partially illusory in one sense, in that they all had to be slowly unravelled later, the brain gradually assimilating that which the swift intuition had grasped as truth. But the light had been seen, and in that flash of illumination I knew that the weary search was over and the very Truth was found.²

One of the criticisms that was — and is — levelled against her was of her

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attempt to make the teachings in *The Secret Doctrine* more accessible to people at large. Once again the fire of altruism impelled her to present the Wisdom Teaching in a language that spoke directly to the hearts and minds of men and women throughout the world and which brought the light of Theosophy to tens of thousands of seekers in many countries. Besant wrote:

Some have complained that our literature is at once too abstruse, too technical, and too expensive for the ordinary reader, and it is our hope that the present series may succeed in supplying what is a very real want. Theosophy is not only for the learned; it is for all. It may be that among those who in these little books catch their first glimpse of its teachings, there may be a few who will be led by them to penetrate more deeply into its philosophy, its science, and its religion, facing its abstruser problems with the student's zeal and the neophyte's ardour. But these Manuals are not written for the eager student whom no initial difficulties can daunt; they are written for the busy men and women of the workaday world and seek to make plain some of the great truths that render life easier to bear and death easier to face.³

She again alluded to the universal applicability of Theosophical teachings in her book *The Ancient Wisdom* when she wrote in the Introduction:

It was once said of the Christian Scriptures by a devotee that they contained

shallows in which a child could wade and depths in which a giant must swim. A similar statement might be made of Theosophy, for some of its teachings are so simple and so practical that any person of average intelligence can understand and follow them, while others are so lofty, so profound, that the ablest strains his intellect to contain them and sinks exhausted in the effort.⁴

In 1913, Besant clearly and objectively defined her own views regarding opinion and belief in the Theosophical Society. One can easily see how important her contribution was in reaffirming essential principles that have guided the TS from its inception:

Some of our members echo the statements of one seer or another, and seem to consider that such a statement ought to preclude further discussion. But no one in the TS has any authority to lay down what people shall think, or not think, on any subject. We are not in the position of an orthodox Church, which has certain definite articles of faith, which imposes certain definite creeds in which all faithful members are bound to believe. The only point which we must accept is Universal Brotherhood, and even as to that we may differ in our definition of it. Outside that, we are at perfect liberty to form our own opinions on every subject; and the reason of that policy is clear and an exceedingly good one. No intellectual opinion is worth the holding unless it is obtained by the individual effort of the person who holds that opinion. It is far healthier to exercise

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our intelligence, even if we come to a wrong conclusion and form an inaccurate opinion, than simply, like parrots, to echo what other people say, and so put out of all possibility intellectual development. (*Adyar Pamphlets*, No. 36)

In 1907, at a time of great turmoil within the TS and before she had been elected, she wrote an article for *The Theosophist* ('The Basis of the Theosophical Society', Feb. 1907), in which, once again, her altruistic nature was openly expressed. In the above mentioned article she examined the question 'Does the Theosophical Society have a moral code?' She concluded it by saying:

I earnestly believe that we best do our share of purifying the nucleus by purifying ourselves, and not by expelling our brothers; that we can prevent wrong better by holding up lofty ideals, than by separating ourselves disdainfully from those we condemn; that the Society lives by the splendour of its ideals, not by rigidity of its lines of exclusion; that it will endure in proportion to the spirituality unfolded in its members and not according to the plaudits or censures of the world; that we strengthen it in proportion as we love and pardon, and weaken it as we condemn and ostracize. Thus believe I. I can no other.

She nurtured the young J. Krishnamurti like a son, sponsored his education and presented him to the world as the 'vehicle of the World Teacher'. But she was also capable of giving him strong and

direct advice in a letter written in 1915, when he was in England. He was going through a period of doubts and difficulties in his inner life. Her message to him was clear:

Your happiness lies in the work, and you will be restless and unhappy if you turn away from it. Nothing else will last, you will find. A man called to the highest service loses 'the lower life', and if he is brave enough to let it go, he finds a splendid and changeless happiness.⁵

Those who knew him say that Krishnamurti held a profound affection for Dr Besant till the end of his life.

Her love for India was complete, unreserved, and irreversible. Her contribution to the Indian renaissance is written with such dedication that it is now an indelible part of that great nation. She believed in the future of India with all her soul and all her spirit. The following is one of her testimonies about India as the spiritual mother of the world:

This is the India of which I have to speak — the India which, as I said, is to me the Holy Land. For those who, though born for this life in a Western land and clad in a Western body, can yet look back to earlier incarnations in which they drank the milk of spiritual wisdom from the breast of their true mother — they must feel ever the magic of her immemorial past, must dwell ever under the spell of her deathless fascination; for they are bound to India by all the sacred memories of their past; and with her, too, are bound up all the radiant hopes

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of their future, a future which they know they will share with her who is their true mother in the soul-life.⁶

Such was Annie Besant's testimony. Hers was a life of courage, of transformation, of fearless search, of ever-

ready help to those in need. Her life was indeed a witness of how the uncreated Spirit manifests its splendour through a soul in which the light of altruism always burned with a steady flame. May she return once more to help humanity in this perilous age. ✧

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6. Besant, Annie, *Essays and Addresses, Vol. IV — India*, London: TPS, 1913, p. 11.

Annie Besant was a veritable powerhouse of energy which flowed in many directions and into many fields of activity: education, welfare of women and children, social reforms, politics and religion. And yet there was a unity of purpose in all the work that she undertook. That purpose was the betterment of humanity and promotion of peace and goodwill in the larger life.

The will to serve arose from a deeper spring within her: the perception of the oneness of all life and the exuberant, utterly selfless love which welled up from that vibrant perception. Naturally, with this background, religion played an important role, that is, *true* religion, rightly understood and rightly lived. One therefore notices in the writings and speeches of Annie Besant great stress being laid on religion — pure, unadulterated religion. For, if the core teachings of religions are properly grasped and translated into everyday living, life tends to change for the better for all concerned. Time and again, she emphasized that the basic teachings of all religions are the same; that all the great leaders of religion had spoken of the oneness of God, or of the Divine Principle; of the unity or brotherhood of humanity; and of the moral and ethical values in life that naturally flow from that sense of unity.

Surendra Narayan

Understanding, Sharing, Loving

TEREZINHA KIND

ONE can describe the meaning of 'understanding' as a mental process. But it also means a state of cooperative or mutually tolerant relations between people. Understanding is not a mere process of the mind. It involves higher spheres of our constitution dealing with perception or intuition. In trying to understand the deeper meaning of life, for example, reason alone is not enough. Observing and contemplating Nature, in complete quietness and silence of the mind, another process of understanding can take place.

Likewise, each one must see with his spiritual eye in order to perceive his own imperfection and the goodness in all fellow beings. There is a peace which surpasses the understanding of the mind. Only those who live in the eternal can experience it. But what does it mean to live in the eternal? The basis for understanding is tolerance, compassion, and empathy. It implies mutual tolerance, mutual help in the search for truth, respecting all who differ from ourselves. Many different colours go to make the beautiful rainbow.

To SHARE means to use, participate in,

enjoy, receive, etc., JOINTLY; to join with others in some thought, feeling or, particularly, some action. From the very beginning, upon arrival in this physical world, Life teaches us the lesson of sharing, and only human beings are able to learn it. A hungry dog will not leave part of his food for his absent brother. We all depend on others in order to survive. Perhaps that is the reason why, out of all mammals, the newborn human being is the most dependent. How long will it take until we realize that we must give as we receive ?

We all share in the search for truth. Theosophy unites us, no matter in which country we were born or what language we speak. As a matter of fact, on a deeper level, there is a sort of communication for which no words are needed and which no words can explain. Before one may experience it, the mouth, the mind, and the emotions must be silent. Unselfishness and compassion are the basis for sharing. It might be easy to share a broad goal like the search for truth, but it is not so easy to share a small room with another person.

Some people may say: 'I love mankind

Mrs Terezinha Kind is President of the Inter-American Theosophical Federation. This symposium talk was given at the European Congress in Helsinki, Finland, on 18 July 2007.

Understanding, Sharing, Loving

but I cannot stand my neighbour.’ The understanding of loving and sharing is not exclusive. Therefore, if from our end there is the slightest shadow of the tendency to exclude anyone or anything from the whole, it is an indication that we have not understood what sharing really means.

‘Loving’ is described as feeling or expressing love. It is also said that true love is universal, encompassing all beings. In fact, love cannot be defined. Love *is* — loving thoughts, loving actions, and loving-kindness. The basis of Love is self-forgetfulness and a spirit of self-sacrifice. If one may compare, a mother’s love for her little child can be a good example of real love. Whilst loving, unconditionally, what can a mother expect to receive from a fully dependent creature like a baby?

Love has no limit or frontier; it is boundless and without reservations. One

cannot decide to be loving. But the constant cultivation of loving thoughts will undoubtedly lead to loving speech and loving actions. Now, more than ever, the world is in need of love. The emphasis on competition has slowly dried up many hearts.

Jesus said: ‘Love others as I have loved you.’ Yet after more than 2,000 years, looking at what is happening around the world, one might conclude that not much progress has been made. But we cannot lose hope and feel discouraged. On the contrary, we all need to take responsibility and do something through loving actions, living happily, serving with enthusiasm. It is only by giving ourselves to work for humanity that we will understand the deeper elements of Theosophy.

We were told that there is hope for man only in man. The moment is NOW. Let us at least TRY. ✧

Let none deny that which to another man is truth, for he may see a truth which others do not see; but let none try to impose his own vision on others, lest he should blind them in forcing them to see what is not in their field of view. There is but one sun, and every energy on our earth is but some form of solar force; as one sun feeds the whole earth, so one Self shines in every heart. . . .

We need for the redemption of the world more than altruism, noble as that is. We may learn unselfishness, sacrifice, self-surrender, but we do not stand established in the One, until we can say: ‘There are no others; it is my Self in all.’ When all men say this, the world will have its Golden Age.

Annie Besant

Practical Work for Theosophists

ANNIE BESANT

EVERY person who enters the Theosophical Society is bound to accept its first principle — the assertion of the Universal Brotherhood of Man; but it is to be feared that with large numbers of the Fellows the profession remains an empty phrase, too like the ‘dearly beloved brethren’ of the Churches, without bearing on life or effect on conduct. No antithesis can be discovered which is sharper than that between the principle of Brotherhood and the Class-and-Mammon-worship of modern society; no links of true fraternity bind together the dwellers in palaces and the dwellers in slums; no golden bands of sympathy unite the wealthy and the poor. Yet Altruism remains only a name so long as it is severed from personal service of Humanity, and Theosophy is merely a new form of glorified selfishness for those who ‘take it up’ from curiosity, or from the desire to know, merely that the knowledge may be a personal possession and powers be attained for the sake of wielding them. At the great gate of the Temple of Knowledge stands the Guardian, and if to his question: ‘Why

dost thou desire to know and to achieve?’ there comes any answer but : ‘That I may the better serve Humanity’, the candidate for admission should be sent back to his spelling book, until he has learned the alphabet of Altruism.

Let us suppose that all the latent powers of the Human Intellect and Will could suddenly be developed in the men and the women around us as by the touch of a magician’s wand, and that they could step forth into the world clothed with supersensual knowledge and power; what would it avail, save to make this world a worse hell of contending passions than it is today, in which would rage Titanic contests of selfishness and greed, rendered the more horrible by the mightier powers of those engaged in the fratricidal struggle? Not until the brute in us is starved out of life; not until the lower self is slain and only the voice of the Higher Self is heard; not until personal desire has been lost in the desire for humanity; not until all ambition is dead, save the ambition to serve; not until this point is reached can power be safely trusted in human hands. Those who lightly

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enter the Theosophical Society, imagining that thereby they will at once spring into the exercise of the higher human capabilities, have to learn that the capacity to lead the Higher Life must precede the capacity to wield the higher powers. Hence the long probation insisted on for every candidate; the deep study which ensures that knowledge shall precede Power; the tests which bar the way towards the higher planes of being. And since character grows out of habits, and habits out of acts often repeated, there is no better school for forming habits of unselfishness, no surer way of moulding the selfless character, than by doing personal acts of service to our brothers and sisters struggling in the sad environment made for them by our modern civilization.

First must come the real honest feeling of equality, not the verbal profession, but the inner conviction. Unless this exists, all work among the poor tends to become demoralizing both to helper and to helped, breeding self-complacency in the one and subserviency in the other. Every act must spring spontaneously from the brotherly relationship; so that aid, comfort, counsel, whenever given, shall be the free and loving gift of brother to brother, so that respect of the highest in the lowest shall breed self-respect, and charity, in re-becoming Love, shall purify and raise and not degrade. But, I repeat, the feeling of equality must be real, all social castes merging into the human brotherhood, so that there is no consciousness of difference whether

speaking to prince or pauper, the man and the woman becoming everything and the rank nothing.

Then comes the cleansing of one's own life in its relations to those by whose labour we are fed and clothed and housed. Every article that we use embodies so much human labour, and if we use it, we are bound to render back for it due equivalent of our own labour. If this be not done, we are robbing instead of exchanging, soiling our lives by theft. And here I speak to Theosophists belonging to the 'middle' and 'upper' classes, for the poor, already crushed by labour, are forced to buy what they need for subsistence at the lowest rate at which they can obtain it. This is not so among the richer, and they are bound to see that they do not vicariously sweat the workers by their purchases of 'cheap goods'. In this matter women are the worst sinners, buying gowns and other articles of clothing at prices which they know cannot cover the cost of material and a fair wage to the needlewoman. If they would personally employ the needlewoman instead of buying her work from the shop, they would not dare to pay her the starvation wage which they pay her through the hands of the middlemen; and they would not then be wearing garments soiled perhaps by the harlotry which has been fled to for a piece of bread. If they cannot manage this personal employment, they can easily ascertain who are fair and who are unfair employers by writing for information to Miss Clementina Black, 198, High Holborn,

The Theosophist

London, W. C., who has exerted herself to form a Consumers' League of persons ashamed to live by sweating their neighbours. It is hardly necessary to add that the personal life of the Theosophist should be frugal, simple, and free from luxury, both for the sake of his own inner development, and in order that he may live honestly, not taking more than he gives.

The personal life thus purified, there remains the active service due to our fellows. Each must here judge his own capacities and opportunities, but there are two or three lines of work in which painstaking and cultured men and women are much wanted at the present time. For instance, some might serve as managers of our Board Schools, attending to the remission of fees, supervising the tone and method of instruction, noting if the children are properly fed, organizing free meals for those in need, and giving to the teachers the sympathy and friendliness which they so sorely lack in their arduous and responsible labour. There are openings for useful and far-reaching service in this line of work second, perhaps, to none, bearing as it does on the training of the citizens of the future as well as on lightening the burdens that press so heavily today.

Women with leisure on their hands can find a way of using that leisure in the service of others by writing to Allen D. Graham, 18, Buckingham Street, Strand. Mr. Graham, some time ago, finding that invalided children were constantly being sent from the hospitals to poor, overcrowded, and often dirty homes, sug-

gested that kind-hearted folk might each take charge of two or three of such children, visiting them, playing with them, taking them out, and, in fact, generally 'mothering' them. These little ones, ailing and feeble, suffer terribly in this rough hurrying world, and much pain might be saved, much pleasure given, by a little sacrifice of time and trouble.

Another form of service, open to the wealthier, is buying shares in companies whose servants are notoriously overworked, and then attending the shareholders' meetings and insisting on shorter hours, higher wages, and better treatment all round. The dividends from the shares can be paid into the Union fund of the employees where a Trade Union exists; where there is no Trade Union, no more useful work can be done than urging the men or women to unite and aiding them in the first uphill steps of organization.

These suggestions may serve as examples of the kind of service which is crying aloud to be done, of practical profession of the Brotherhood of Man. I am not putting them forward as remedies for the evils inseparable from the present order of society. As a Socialist, I know but too well that all such work as this can only act as palliative, not as cure; nonetheless, it will lighten some of the darkness around us, and, in the absence of the sun, farthing dips are better than unbroken Cimmerian gloom.

It is obvious that, in addition to such dutious Service of Man as I have been glancing at, there are other duties incumbent on every member of the TS.

Practical Work for Theosophists

Those who can use their pens should answer objections or expose slanders made in the columns of our ordinary press; most editors will put in a tersely-written clear reply to attacks made in their papers. And all should study Theosophical teachings, both for their own culture and for the assistance of others. It is not enough to set our own feet on the Path; as soon as we are able we should guide thitherward the feet of others; and in order that we may be competent for the task, we must study, study, study. The subtle metaphysics of Theosophy will attract but the few; few, again, are likely

to feel the call to climb the rugged path to those heights on which the Masters sit serene. Neither its philosophy nor its possibilities of growth will avail much to recommend it to the superficial thinkers or to the luxurious livers of our day. But the sight of noble lives, strenuously and selflessly working for human good, battling against poverty and sorrow, the twin-daughters of Ignorance, these will justify Theosophy in the eyes of the world, proving that self-devotion can exist apart from superstition, that clear-eyed Intellect can walk hand-in-hand with the Love that saves. ✧

Let not the fruit of good Karma be your motive; for your Karma, good or bad, being one and the common property of all mankind, nothing good or bad can happen to you that is not shared by many others. Hence your motive, being selfish, can only generate a double effect, good and bad, and will either nullify your good action, or turn it to another man's profit. . . . There is no happiness for one who is ever thinking of Self and forgetting all other Selves.

The Universe groans under the weight of such action (Karma), and none other than self-sacrificial Karma relieves it. . . . How many of you have helped humanity to carry its smallest burden, that you should all regard yourselves as Theosophists. Oh, men of the West, who would play at being the Saviours of mankind before they even spare the life of a mosquito whose sting threatens them, would you be partakers of Divine Wisdom or true Theosophists? Then do as the gods when incarnated do. Feel yourselves the vehicles of the whole humanity, mankind as part of yourselves, and act accordingly.

A Master of the Wisdom

Theosophical Work around the World

Naarden Centre Retreat

From 26 to 29 July 2007, Miss Tran-Thi-Kim-Dieu, Chairman of the European Federation of the Theosophical Society, conducted a Retreat with the theme 'Foundations of Wisdom' at the International Theosophical Centre in Naarden, the Netherlands. About fifteen participants from France, Holland, Portugal, and Spain were in attendance.

The Retreat's aim was to understand the importance of the process of un-learning, enabling the flowering of a new quality of mind and consciousness, with awareness, attention, and meditation as the basis of the Retreat. After the morning talk, some important questions were examined. In the afternoon, after the guided meditation (sitting and walking), a meditative inquiry complemented the quiet work undertaken earlier. The four talks — 'Foundations of Wisdom', 'The Basis of Consciousness', 'Can Attention be Practised?', and 'Aspiration is Like a Flame' — were inspiring, with insights having practical application in daily life.

Germany

The German Section held its summer session at Lippstadt from 26 July to 1 August on the theme 'The Brotherhood of All Beings'. The international Vice-President, Dr John Algeo, brought greetings from the international President, Mrs Radha Burnier, the staff at Adyar, and Mrs Betty Bland, General Secretary

of the American Section, from whose summer meeting he and his wife, Adele Algeo, had just come. He gave a talk about Col. H. S. Olcott, whose life was 'stranger than fiction', showed pictures of Olcott in Sri Lanka, and gave an illustrated talk about the headquarters of the American Section, named 'Olcott' in memory of the Founder-President. Other talks were given by Mr Michael Stemmer, Mr Reiner Ullrich, Mr Siegfried Ebersbach, Mrs Cornelia Miskiewicz, Mrs Elisabeth Schmidt, and Mr Klaus Röder. The talks were varied with study groups, music and dance programmes, a DVD show, an outing, and a question and answer session. The meeting was conducted in harmonious brotherhood and active participation under the chairmanship of the General Secretary, Mrs Elisabeth Schmidt.

Passed to Peace

We deeply regret the recent demise of two stalwart Theosophists — Mr Paul Zwollo and Mr Dara Feroze Mirza.

Mr Paul Zwollo passed away, after a brief illness, on 28 August 2007, at the age of seventy-seven. A third-generation Theosophist, he was a trained agriculturalist and gold- and silversmith. In 1954 he joined the TS in Holland and was for some time the President of the Lodge at Arnhem, the General Secretary of the Dutch Section, and a national lecturer. He was a dedicated student of Theosophy,

Theosophical Work around the World

particularly the Mahatma Letters. Since 1992 he had lived at the International Theosophical Centre in Naarden, being the Presidential Representative on the Council of the Centre as well as a member of the European Federation Executive Committee since 1995 and of the General Council of the TS since 1998.

He also worked for several years at Adyar in the Garden Department and the Archives, and for many years organized archival exhibitions during the international Convention.

Mr Dara Feroze Mirza went missing on 14 September 2007 on his way to the office, and the next day his body was found shot through the heart. He was seventy years old. A fourth-generation Theosophist, he joined the TS in his early teens, becoming President of the Karachi TS and holding that post for over thirty-two years. For decades he conducted a weekly study class on spirituality, comparative religion, and the ethics of life. He was a member of the Council of

Management of the Theosophical Order of Service, and contributed generously to its educational sponsorship programme for students and for the poor. He was Presidential Representative for the TS in Pakistan, and was also Vice-President of the Indo-Pacific Theosophical Federation.

He extended financial help on a monthly basis to several destitute families. He also looked after dozens of stray cats and dogs, arranging to have them fed, and administered homeopathic medicines to them, as he was a keen student of homeopathy and had successfully treated hundreds of sick animals and birds.

Being a keen student of Theosophy, Philosophy and Comparative Religion, he was regularly invited to speak on these subjects. Although he never married, he was a much-loved uncle, brother, and friend.

Their gentle presence will be greatly missed by their relatives and their many friends and colleagues. ✧

Art means to put everything in life, in our daily life, in its right place. Then, when you have put everything in its right place, order comes. When there is order, the mind is free. And only a mind that is free knows, has that extraordinary quality, of love.

J. Krishnamurti

Erratum

The date given in Part II of the article on Sibelius on p. 456 of the September 2007 issue should be changed to 18 September 1957.

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