



# THE THEOSOPHIST

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Cover Picture: A view of the Headquarters building, Adyar – J. Suresh

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Official organ of the President, founded by H. P. Blavatsky, 1879. The Theosophical Society is responsible only for official notices appearing in this magazine.

# The Keynote of Human Life — Altruism

RADHA BURNIER

ALTRUISM should be the characteristic quality of every declared Theosophist. Many of us declare ourselves to be Theosophists, but we are only members of the Theosophical Society, not real Theosophists. The Theosophist is one who is different because he is characterized by this quality of altruism. Each one of us can examine, from time to time, whether we qualify to be a Theosophist or not, or whether we are merely members of the Theosophical Society.

Altruism, about which HPB has written in glowing terms, is the quality that we all need to display in our actions, words and life, if we want to be of use in this world. As long as we do not possess the correct tendencies, we are not truly useful. We have to pursue our slow way through many incarnations, until we realize the beauty and the grandeur of being altruistic. The world may regard various people as altruistic when they do a little bit of good, but the person who is truly altruistic lives, not for himself but for the sake of others, including birds, animals, insects and the earth itself.

In the present day, most people are engaged in some kind of competition,

whether they are conscious of it or not. They start to compete in examinations in school, for in order to get work of a particular kind they have to compete, and show they are excellent. Without that spirit of competition it is very difficult for the average human being; he remains at a level where he is merely passing time.

HPB said, motive and motive alone makes the action which a person performs good or bad. The altruist is not necessarily one who performs right action according to the notions of the world, but he who sees whether his actions are good or bad. HPB says: 'It is impossible to employ spiritual forces if there is the slightest tinge of selfishness remaining in the operator.' All of us, without exception, do have a tinge or two, or may be more, of selfishness as we perform our duties. We may be aware of them as duties, but we still think of them in terms of success, failure and so on which makes it selfish in the real sense of the term. HPB also said:

Meditation, abstinence, the observation of moral duties, gentle thoughts, good deeds and kind words, as goodwill to all and entire oblivion of Self are the most

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Talk given in December 2009 at the International Convention, Adyar.

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effective means of obtaining knowledge and preparing for the reception of higher wisdom.

These words appear to be easy to understand, but they are difficult to follow. Abstinence from what? Abstinence from the intention of connecting it with myself; there is a sense of 'myself' in our minds to which we connect everything we do. Altruism means not only avoiding connecting everything to oneself but to do a thing because it is the right thing to do. And if that is so all these words have great meaning: abstinence, meditation, observation of moral duties, observation of self and so on.

The principle of competition has become very important in modern life. Without competing, it is difficult for a person to live. I do not say it is impossible, but it becomes difficult for a person to do anything useful. Therefore children are taught this spirit of competition; they naturally like to compete, but they can compete without this consciousness that 'I am competing, I am winning'. They are taught this spirit of competition in the sports field. We can see how aggressive even the competition for world championship has become. But they can be taught to learn to play for the fun of it, the lessons that it brings to us, etc. In jobs also competition becomes very important. Everybody has started to compete and daily life becomes tainted because of the competitive spirit. It is one of the qualities of modern life which it is sad to see.

Many women are stimulated to appear beautiful even if they are not. They put

on what they think will make them appear well. To be neatly and nicely dressed is natural. But to dress in order to compete with others, to appear splendid, is very peculiar to human beings. No animal which is beautiful tries to be beautiful. It is beautiful by itself. But human beings try to be so, even if they are not really what they appear to be.

Very few people in this world are encouraged to be altruistic. They are so intent upon their own appearance, their own cleverness, their own progress and their own families, their nation, etc. So evolution is very slow and, contrary to what people say, evolution by nature is very slow in this age. It is called Kali Yuga because competition and all the things which go with it are so strong. It is very common for artists to be jealous of each other. I know something about this having been in this field myself. Even when they are brilliant they are still looking at other people to be sure that no one else reaches the same level. Ordinary people emulate this feeling and appear to be courteous, to be good when they are not really so. Our work in the Theosophical Society is to destroy such attitudes, to destroy the spirit of competition which says 'I shall go first'. You do what is necessary, what is beautiful, what is right, not because you want to be better than others but because it is the natural way for you.

HPB says that the key to each degree is the aspirant himself. Nobody else is responsible. But another characteristic of the present day is that we throw the

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responsibility on somebody else. We say, 'My parents should have brought me up in such and such way; if I were in different circumstances I would have behaved in a better way, etc.' But in life there are no 'ifs'. We are put in circumstances which we deserve, which we have chosen for ourselves. Our motto should be to know ourselves well. Then we can begin to bring changes into civilization which most people will accept. We must see that everything depends on ourselves, not on somebody else, on father or mother or brother or whatever it is.

Human welfare is very important because the human being is the only one that can understand himself. There are many people who think that human life in the present world is the highest. This is a fallacy. It is not the highest, it is the beginning. If we read *Light on the Path*, which has many valuable things to say, it suggests that when we really become human, not half-human, then we begin the Path to enlightenment and not until then. But most of us do not start in the beginning. We think the beginning is the end and that human life has reached the top of all life, which is not so. Human life must go beyond itself, beyond this stage at which it finds itself now. How many of us are ready to take this as the stage from which we will have to make progress and not regard this life as the height of achievement? Human life must go beyond itself and it can then enter the life of all creatures, it can become part of the earth itself, of Nature, of every higher form. And that would be the most glorious thing

a human being can achieve — not more money, more power over other people and things, and more of anything at all. Just this elevated place from where one can understand and know everything. This is the life of the Mahatmas.

The word Mahatma means 'great soul', not somebody who has been given the title of Mahatma by other people who do not know anything at all, but a person who really has a great soul. He is someone who knows everything, who knows how people shall improve themselves and leave behind all the past. Science, as it is, cannot help us in this way because it is used mostly for war purposes. Science, instead of being knowledge, becomes a way of destruction. It is a great pity because in its very nature science means to know. It is the opportunity to know everything, and is capable of becoming the ally of spiritual growth. This is possibly a future which we have to envisage — when science, religion and philosophy become one Truth.

Gupta-vidyā is a Sanskrit word which means sacred knowledge, wisdom or the hidden wisdom. It is now considered to be a special privilege which is given to some people only, because they are discreet and others are not. This knowledge of everything can be very dangerous as it is evident from people who know a little bit more than others. Many clairvoyants and people who have a little additional power are more dangerous than the ordinary man. It is really power to give to the world, when one becomes completely indifferent to what one is.

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Gupta-vidyā is the knowledge of the inner nature of life or the forces of Nature and how they work and is not suitable for present-day people. But we can all become aspirants to Gupta-vidyā. A difference has been made in the Indian tradition between Gupta-vidyā and Ātma-vidyā. Ātma-vidyā, the knowledge of the Soul, of what one can really be, is for people who wish to be wise, unselfish, before they obtain full knowledge.

Ātma-vidyā has to be acquired first and then only can enlightenment come. Ātma-vidyā means that one must become completely clean inwardly and all traces of self and selfishness have to be renounced for ever. It is available to persons who wish to have beneficent powers. You can have all the powers that you want, those you want and those you do not want, but every power will come to you when you are completely unselfish. HPB in her own style says that when people seek to obtain knowledge without renunciation they may take to sorcery. You will find this in her little essay on *Practical Occultism*. Because people who have knowledge but do not have the feeling for life can become vivisectionists, and can do very evil things. We have seen something of this during and after the last World War when experiments of a horrible nature were done on living human beings who were captured as prisoners. They were held in secret and then used in many experiments.

The real powers of the Spirit, the *siddhi-s*, are meant for those who follow the true Path of occultism which, in the

strictest sense, is pure Theosophy. What we know is the semblance of Theosophy, a little bit of it. But real Theosophy is known by those who have shed all the selfishness and therefore have come to knowledge. HPB says:

True Occultism or Theosophy is the 'Great Renunciation of SELF', unconditionally and absolutely . . . It is ALTRUISM and it throws him who practises it out of calculation of the ranks of the living altogether.

Competing makes no difference. We may be cleverer than other people and we may achieve more than other people, or we may think we are superior to them. But we are superior only by being nothing, when the personality disappears and a person becomes a beneficent force in Nature. And this is the only way to enter the presence of the higher Self, the Master within oneself. These are the people who will not allow fire to smoulder under a thin layer of ashes.

Annie Besant says: 'The higher Self is the Divine Consciousness inside ourselves.' All the good feelings and aspirations trickle down from this source. She says there has to be a subjugation of the animal desires and passions so that the Higher Self can begin to operate — all animal tendencies, all those traits which lurk within us, perhaps hidden from us, because we think we are superior to animals. They wait for their chance but when all these are dead the personal self is also dead. The personal self and the divine Self cannot function together. The

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divine Self alone is said to be the Master within, not just a Master outside. You can meet the Master outside, perhaps you do, but it will not change you or make you different. It will only make you feel that you have reached some good thing, which is another form of selfishness: 'I have reached this.' HPB says that even love of wife and family are part of the lower self. A mother will do things for her child at the expense of other children. Most of them will do something for their child which may hurt another child. So although the feelings of a mother are very good they are not the final feelings that we can expect of someone who wishes to find the higher Self.

Someone who really understands our first Object, the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, sex, creed and all that which is mentioned, can really lead because he discards egoism totally. True occultism is practised by him and this is Theosophy or the Wisdom of the gods, which is the meaning of the word Theosophy. We use the words Theosophy and Theosophical easily because we think we are good Theosophists, but it is not correct. We are only members of the Society trying, I hope, to become good Theosophists. If we try to become good Theosophists without bringing the self in, whatever we do we are doing something which is worthwhile.

The aspirant has to choose between leaving the worldly life or staying in it. It does not mean that you reject your wife and children, that you be without a job and expect other people to pay for your

expenses, which is another form of selfishness. But in spirit, in the heart, to be free of the worldly things of child, wife, job, of everything except the good of all creatures, is the life of a true Theosophist. Only the great cry of humanity will then find a voice within. And we all have to try to come to this, to a state which is one of love.

I hesitate to use the word 'love' because it means anything anybody wishes it to be. But it is really a state of real care for humanity as a whole. This is true altruism and this is what the Theosophical Society exists for. It exists not in order to do some petty little things which appear to be good. If the member of the Theosophical Society wishes to become a true Theosophist, *Ātma-vidyā* which causes beneficent influences to radiate on all must prevail over other things in life.

The Bible says 'strait is the gate, and narrow is the way' that leads to the Eternal. You cannot reach the Eternal, God, the Ultimate, whatever name you give to it by a little bit of good, a little bit of this or that. It can only come when everything that is selfish is disregarded, rejected. It is a very difficult Path to tread. To be a Theosophist is not easy. We all think we are Theosophists. We are not. We are members of the Theosophical Society. And if we are good members we hope to become Theosophists. We hope that the study of Theosophy which we can do with the help of good books and its practice in daily life will lead towards such altruism. This practice in daily life is very important in order to see whether in all the different

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situations in life we act in a way which is altruistic. This is what we have to learn.

In this way, Kali Yuga becomes a yuga of fast progress. As we said earlier, progress is very slow if we follow humanity in general. But it can become a very fast method, if we use the circumstances in the right way, though they may be difficult. The more difficult they are the better, because it can help us to bring out this quality of not caring for the self, not listening to the whispers of the self. There are people who go a long way on the Path of occultism and when they are tested they break down, they fall deep down. They will have to start all over again. This can happen to us. But if we

want to be free we have to be completely unselfish right from the beginning. From now on do all the little jobs of daily life in that spirit, whatever you are doing, unless it is wrong. If you do that then you can reach faster than at any other time. So altruism is what we have to hold up in our lives. We have to personify that and teach the world through our very being. The Great Ones of the world did not meet a lot of people as one can do in the present day. The Christs, the Buddhas and people of this kind can bring light to other human beings and other beings by what they are, not only by what they taught. Because they live in a different way, the altruistic way. ✧

People ought not to consider so much what they are to do as what they *are*; let them but *be* good and their ways and deeds will shine brightly. If you are just, your actions will be just too. Do not think that saintliness comes from occupation; it depends rather on what one is. The kind of work we do does not make us holy but we may make it holy. However 'sacred' a calling may be, as it is a calling, it has no power to sanctify; but rather as we *are* and have the divine being within, we bless each task we do, be it eating, or sleeping, or watching, or any other. Whatever they do, who have not much of (God's) nature, they work in vain.

Meister Eckhart

# The Art of Learning

P. KRISHNA

## Dialogue as a Mode of Learning

One must distinguish between two kinds of learning. There is the learning which is accumulation of knowledge, which is a matter of time and effort. This is essentially the cultivation of skills or of thought and memory. There is also a more important learning which is the capacity to discern what is true and discard what is false and thereby come upon a deeper meaning and significance of everything in life including love, religion, beauty and death. This learning is not accumulative, therefore it is not a matter of time. It has the nature of a holistic awareness, a deep understanding, a long vision, wisdom and compassion. With time one necessarily grows in knowledge and experience but not in wisdom. It is only when the mind has a deep insight or a direct perception of a truth that an illusion drops away and there is a greater wisdom or understanding of life. To keep one's mind in such a state of dialogue is the art of learning.

The dictionary defines 'dialogue' as a conversation between two or more people and also as an exchange of opinions or ideas. Krishnamurti gave to it a much

deeper meaning and pointed out its importance as a means of religious inquiry into Truth, which he posited as the unknown. He distinguished between the knowledge of the truth and the realization of the truth and used dialogue as a mode of enabling the latter. The sacred books of all religions contain descriptions of the truth that was realized by great religious seers but those descriptions do not reveal the truth to us when we read them. They may point to the truth, give us an idea about it and create an intellectual understanding of it but that is not the same as the realization of the truth. Krishnamurti attempted to bridge that gap through the mode of what he called a dialogue.

A dialogue is very different from what we normally call a discussion or debate. A discussion is usually between people who have adopted definite points of view and who wish to convince each other or compare their outlooks. They are usually committed to a certain opinion, ideology, religious belief, political system or nationality and argue from that particular point of view. Most of our university seminars and symposia as well as international diplomatic exchanges are of such a

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nature. So are the dialectical discussions between philosophers or religious heads of different persuasions. They begin with knowledge, encourage an exchange of ideas and end in more knowledge and more ideas. Since the whole exercise is confined to the field of ideas and knowledge it does not lead to the realization of a deeper truth. On the other hand, a dialogue as a mode of religious inquiry begins with not knowing. The participants know that they do not know the truth, posit it as the unknown and are eager to investigate together in order to discover it. In not knowing, not identifying themselves with any point of view, not trying to convince each other of anything, they are together and not pitted against each other. It is as if they are on the same side of the table and the truth is on the other side.

It is our knowledge, our beliefs, our points of view, that divide us. If we set them aside we can begin to explore like two friends deeply interested in examining any issue in life and coming to a deeper understanding of it. The truth may reveal itself in the very process of exploring the question, rather than trying to quickly answer it. An answer given by a mind that has not deeply examined and understood all that is involved in the issue is merely a superficial opinion and therefore of little value for a seeker of truth. Knowing this, the mind is not interested in forming opinions in a dialogue and coming to conclusions. Nor is it competing with others in arriving at the truth first since it is not ambitious and

not seeking satisfaction, fame or reputation. It is a mind that is inquiring for the love of understanding, not for a result or a conclusion.

A mind in dialogue doubts every opinion, is sceptical of every conclusion because it is not interested in a verbal answer. It is seeking to go beyond the word and have a deep insight into reality. It is looking for the perception of facts and for a holistic understanding of the issue, not merely a method for solving a problem. Since one is looking for a deep and direct perception of the truth and not merely the transference of knowledge, there is no hierarchy in a dialogue. There is no division of the teacher and the taught — the one who knows and the one who does not know. A dialogue begins with observation and aims at discerning what is true from what is false. Since the inquiry is not based on knowledge, it is not in the nature of a transfer of ideas from one who knows to another who does not know. It is rather a joint exploration into 'what is', conducted with utter humility, by friends who know that they do not know but wish to understand and come upon the truth.

Since there is no sense of competition, rivalry or debate in a dialogue, no desire to impress or be the first to point out something, it is not important in whose mind a particular thought arises. It is only important to explore what meaning that thought is trying to convey and whether that is true. Since one is not taking sides with any point of view, there is also no sense of division in a dialogue. When the

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mind is in the observing mode it does not matter if there are two people participating in the dialogue, or two hundred or even just one. A truly impartial mind can see all sides of an issue without attaching itself to any one side, just as a truly impartial player can play chess with himself, moving both the black and white pieces!

Krishnaji likened a dialogue to a game of tennis in which the question is like the ball tossed from one court to another, each player returning it with his comment or observation. This goes on till both the players disappear and the ball is suspended in midair! That means the observers (participants) with their particular knowledge, viewpoints, opinions, etc., disappear and there is only observation of the issue taking place. If the observers (or their personalities) are to disappear, it does not matter how many or who they were.

There is a lot of discussion these days about the best way to conduct a dialogue — whether there should be a coordinator directing it or not, whether it should start with a pre-formulated question or the question should come spontaneously in the dialogue, whether there should be only five people or fifty and so on. While these are useful organizational questions and it is nice to know the rules of the game before starting, they are really peripheral

to the issue. None of these can create a dialogue if the mind is not in the dialogue mode. Conversely, if our mind is in the dialogue mode, the form does not destroy or prevent a dialogue. What determines the quality of a dialogue is primarily the state of our own mind.

In that sense, one can live all one's life with the mind in a state of continuing dialogue — a dialogue with oneself, with others around us and with Nature. This means a mind in the state of dialogue is not different from a listening and observing mind, which is also essentially a learning mind, if we understand learning to mean not the accumulation of knowledge but the discernment of what is true from what is false. It is a mind that is not attached to any opinions or any religious beliefs, one that is not seeking satisfaction nor judging on the basis of its likes and dislikes. To such a mind every experience, every talk, every book is a source of deep questions. Self-knowledge and understanding are then by-products of the exploration of these questions for oneself. It is a mind that is a student of life, constantly inquiring, looking, learning, and growing in its understanding — never adhering to a conclusion, never holding to any fixed opinions. Only such a mind can transcend the limitations of knowledge and discover if there is something sacred that is beyond all human thoughts and beliefs. ✧

**He who is learned is not wise;  
He who is wise is not learned.**

*Tao Te Ching*

# The Work of the Theosophical Society

ANNIE BESANT

OUR revered teacher, H. P. Blavatsky, laid down very clearly and firmly the lines along which the Theosophical Society was intended to work, by Those who use it as one of Their channels of spiritual help to man. The Master known under the initials KH, wrote:

You can do immense good by helping to give the Western nations a secure basis upon which to reconstruct their crumbling faith. And what they need is the evidence that Asiatic psychology alone supplies. Give this, and you will confer happiness of mind on thousands. . . . This is the moment to give the recurrent impulse which must soon come, and which will push the age towards extreme atheism, or drag it back to extreme sacerdotalism, if it is not led to the primitive soul-satisfying philosophy of the Aryans. . . . You and your colleagues may help to furnish the materials for a needed universal religious philosophy; one impregnable to scientific assault, because itself the finality of absolute science; and a religion that is indeed worthy of the name, since it includes the

relations of man physical to man psychical, and of the two to all that is above and below them. . . . Its [The Society's] chief aim is to extirpate current superstitions and scepticism, and from long-seated ancient fountains to draw the proof that man may shape his own future destiny, and know for a certainty that he can live hereafter.

To give a firm foundation to crumbling religions, to destroy superstition on one side and unbelief on the other, such was the duty laid on the Theosophical Society by Those who sent H. P. Blavatsky as Their messenger to the modern world. Its proclamation of Brotherhood was based upon the fact that all men share in one spiritual nature and shall finally reach one spiritual goal; and its appeal to men of all faiths to unite on one platform of mutual respect and tolerance was substantiated by the proofs that all religions sprang from a common source. This idea that the evils of the world sprang from ignorance, whether that ignorance took the form of superstition or of unbelief, gave to the methods of the Society the distinguishing

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mark that they aimed at extirpating ignorance rather than at destroying one by one, as they appeared, the innumerable evils which grow on the surface of modern society. Instead of chopping off the heads of weeds, leaving the roots to send up perpetually new offshoots, Theosophy extirpates the roots themselves and thus prevents the growth of a new crop. Leaving to others who do not share in their knowledge of causes the perennial warfare against effects, the Theosophical worker concerns himself chiefly with eradicating the causes themselves. He teaches that all evil actions arise from evil thinking, that each life is linked by an inviolable law to the lives that precede and that follow it, that by understanding the principles underlying all phenomena character may be builded, destiny may be controlled, while present troubles, traced to their sources, may be faced with intelligence and fortitude, and may be used to subserve the purposes of the Soul.

This method differentiates the Theosophical worker from those who are devoted solely to the relief of the physical woes of man; both are actuated by a recognition of human brotherhood and are fellow-workers for humanity, and both are needed as helpers of humanity at the present time. Philanthropy, as it feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, shelters the homeless, is doing useful and noble work in meeting the effects of past causes; Theosophy, as it enlightens the minds of the thoughtful by unveiling to them the hidden causes of sorrow, as it preaches to all the simple and sublime doctrines of

brotherhood, rebirth and causation, is doing the harder and more thankless work of removing the causes of hunger and distress, thus stopping the spring whence rushes the stream of evils that afflict society.

Individual Theosophists, however, who have not yet sufficiently mastered the principles of their profound philosophy to help others to understand them — though all must surely know more than those who have not studied at all — may well take part in schemes of active physical beneficence, and none is exempt from the duty of personal charity and ready response to every appeal for aid he is able to give.

He who does not practise altruism, he who is not prepared to share his last morsel with a weaker or poorer than himself; he who neglects to help his brother man, of whatever race, nation or creed, whenever and wherever he meets suffering, and who turns a deaf ear to the cry of human misery; he who hears an innocent person slandered, whether a brother Theosophist or not, and dares not undertake his defence as he would undertake his own, is not a Theosophist.

Every individual Theosophist should be a 'brother', giving brotherly help to all who come in his way, according to his abilities, physical, astral, mental, spiritual. But the work of the Theosophical Society, as a Society, is not the feeding of bodies, but the feeding of souls with the bread of wisdom; it must carry the light of truth and knowledge which clears away the darkness of ignorance; it must, like the

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Apostles of Christ, refuse to leave the teaching of the Word of God in order to serve tables.

The method of the Theosophical worker is differentiated from that of the exoteric religionist by his power to justify to the intellect that which is taught by religions on authority. He shows the scientific basis on which all moral precepts are founded, and thus supplies the 'categorical imperative' which answers the question; 'Why should I do this when the promptings of my nature lead me to do the opposite?' He explains the constitution of man in both his higher and his lower natures, and gives the exact knowledge which enables man to purify the lower and develop the higher. Instead of merely repeating moral maxims, 'Be good, do good', he shows the steps by which each man may become good with certainty, and may do good with precision. Knowing that the masses of mankind will, for many a millennium yet to come, obey the authority to which their intuition responds, he teaches them authoritatively the doctrines of brotherhood, rebirth, and causation, easy to be understood; but he also brings philosophy and science to the aid of religion among the thoughtful and the educated who are slipping into scepticism because their intellects are left unsatisfied. He knows that men may gain first-hand knowledge of the invisible worlds, and that the teachings of sages and seers may be verified today as much as of old; that the life of the spiritual man may be full of wisdom and of power now as when Buddha trod the plains of India or as

when the Christ walked beside the Sea of Galilee. By thus placing within men's reach the verification of spiritual facts, the proofs of spiritual forces, the experimental nature of the spiritual life, he does the work given in charge to the Theosophical Society and shows it everywhere to be the friend of religion, the foe of materialism. Therefore Theosophists must be students, and must equip themselves for their glorious work by mastering the principles expounded in their philosophy, and by learning to apply them to the circumstances of individual, family, social, and national life. Every exoteric religion sends out young men by the hundred who can repeat more or less eloquently the commonplaces of morality, and who do a useful work among the ignorant by reiterating these impressively, and enforcing them on such minds with such promises and threats as their religions sanction. The Theosophical Society must train in its Branches, and send out into the world, teachers well grounded in the Divine Wisdom. The teachings which of old were given to the world by Kapila and Śankarāchārya, by Pythagoras and Plato, by Valentinus and Plotinus, by Bruno and Paracelsus, by Boehme and H. P. Blavatsky, must not be represented to the world in the last years of the nineteenth century by intellectual incompetency and irresponsible chatter. Something more is demanded of us if we venture to stand before the world as exponents of Theosophy.

H. P. Blavatsky herself shows us an example we may well try to follow. She

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gave herself wholly, without reserve, to the work of acquiring and spreading the knowledge of spiritual truths. She taught with indefatigable energy with pen and tongue; she reared the splendid monument of *The Secret Doctrine* as her best gift to the world; she opposed with all her strength the materialism of science and strove to revivify the ancient religions in the East. She would give her last shilling to a starving beggar if he came in her way, but took no part in organizing philanthropic work; and while she would encourage any one who came to her to carry out any charitable plan he had at heart, she steadily drew her pupils who showed any aptitude for acquiring knowledge, to devote themselves with single-minded energy to the study and teaching of Theosophy. She knew that the future depended on the success of this teaching, on the permeation of the modern mind with Theosophy, and she led them to give themselves wholly to this one work.

Those who can read the signs of the times will understand the vital importance to the future of Theosophy, of the direction now given to the work of the Theosophical Society. We are treading a cycle similar to that trodden by Christianity in its early centuries, and thousands of the souls that then engaged in conflict are reborn at the present time. There was then a struggle between the educated and the ignorant; the comparatively few who possessed the Gnosis and strove to preserve it in Christianity were overwhelmed by the ill-regulated

enthusiasm and fanaticism of the ignorant masses. The Eastern teachings were then thrown into Christian forms, and the learned Gnostics within Christianity and the learned Neoplatonists outside it, both endeavoured to keep alive the Ancient Wisdom and to hand it on, so that it might pass through the flood of social revolution and barbarian invasion and succeed in moulding the new Western civilization which was to follow. The wild fanaticism of the Egyptian monks played on the unthinking masses of the ignorant populace; ignorance was regarded as a sign of religion, knowledge was jeered at, decried, trampled under foot, learning and education were considered as carnal, while wild emotion was extolled as a sign of spiritual enlightenment. Nothing could be more agreeable to the unlearned and the idle than to regard their own disadvantages and vices as a mark of heavenly greatness and to look upon the learning and dignified culture, which they could not rival, as signs of unillumined intellect and mere wisdom of this world. Every ignorant lad could set himself up as a teacher when mere emotional platitudes passed as inspiration, and the repetition of moral axioms passed as teaching. Volleys of abuse served for arguments, and insults served for reasons. The better types of Christians were attracted by professions of brotherly love and charity and forgiveness of wrongdoers; the poor were allured by alms and by showy rites and ceremonies. Long the battle raged, and at length victory declared itself on the side of ignorance and numbers;

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Christianity passed into its Dark Ages, and the treasures of the Gnosis disappeared.

Now the time has come, in the slow revolution of the centuries, when the renewed effort of the great White Lodge to spread the Ancient Wisdom through all religious bodies is showing itself as Theosophy, and many of its old instruments are again being used for its promulgation. Thus far the work has prospered, despite the desperate efforts made to break it up, and the thoughtful classes that guide the intellectual progress of the world are being more largely and definitely influenced than has ever before been the case. Threats of social revolution loom darkly in the near future, and again the question arises whether the guardians of the Gnosis in the lower world are strong enough, numerous enough, to protect the treasure and hand it across the swirl of popular convulsions to mould the civilization which will spring from the ruins of the present. The same forces are rising against the spread of the Divine Wisdom, among those called 'Theosophists', as triumphed over it before among those called 'Christians' — the glorification of ignorance, the appeals to passion, the exaltation of fanaticism as

devotion, and of credulity as faith. Education is jeered at and attempts to reach the thoughtful and the cultured are decried. Appeals are also made to the nobler emotions of human love and brotherliness, and 'practical' philanthropy is exalted at the expense of wisdom. Rigid virtue and uprightness are considered as less valuable than blind enthusiasm, and calm judgement and balance are thought 'unspiritual'.

Are the members of the Theosophical Society strong enough to withstand the torrent, clear-sighted enough to discern the right, firm enough to remain unshaken, and thus make the Society the ark in which the treasures of the Ancient Wisdom shall be preserved and carried over to the world beyond the flood? I know not. But we do know that every effort is needed and that no effort is wasted; that we stand beside many an ancient comrade and are assailed by many an ancient antagonist; that on the results of the present struggle hangs the destiny of the next civilization. 'Happy the warriors, O Pārtha, who obtain such a fight, spontaneously offered as an open door to Svarga. . . . Therefore stand up, O Son of Kunti, resolute to fight.' ✧

**Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.**

*Hebrews, 13:1*

# Pythagoras and Orpheus — Greek Philosophers

BHUPENDRA R. VORA

THE secret truths of spiritual knowledge were taught in the mystery schools in many parts of the world from time immemorial. Their origin must certainly be assigned to the Fourth Root Race. The mysteries were imparted to the elect of that Race when the average Atlantean had begun to fall too deeply into sin to be trusted with the secrets of nature. Their establishment is attributed in the Secret Works to the King-Initiates of the divine dynasties.

The religious institutions called Mystery Schools functioned during antiquity in various parts of the globe. Many such spiritual centres were situated around the Mediterranean region, in ancient Chaldea, Syria, Palestine, Crete and elsewhere, the most renowned being those of Egypt and Greece. Many famous teachers taught the hidden mysteries of nature at these institutions in Egypt and Greece.

Amongst these the name of Pythagoras is very famous and he is credited with the basics of the Western philosophical system. This great initiate was born

about 586 BC on the island of Samos in Greece, in a reputable family. Pythagoras was first influenced by Orphic teachers. When he grew up, he travelled extensively. In Chaldea and Egypt he studied astrology and chemistry. He stayed in Egypt for about twenty-five years and it is said that he attended the mystery schools of that country and learnt their occult sciences on the mysteries of nature. He then travelled to Babylon, Persia and India and in each of these countries he spent time learning their systems of thought and attending their secret schools. In India he learnt the ancient wisdom of that country — through the Veda-s, Upanishad-s, etc., as well as the various yogic and philosophical systems. It is said that he became well known in that country as Yavanāchārya. He also studied with the Arab and Druid priests in Gaul. After initiation into some fourteen systems of world religions he recognized that they were all identical in principle, that all acknowledged One God, and that all practised similar esoteric disciplines.

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### **The Mystery School of Pythagoras**

On his return from his long travels, Pythagoras set up a school at Crotona in Italy. In this school students were admitted only after very careful examination. Women students were admitted on equal terms with their male compatriots. Before admission, new students were carefully questioned regarding their attitude to their elders, their friends and associates, their characters, their method of spending surplus leisure time, their feelings and views about happiness and unhappiness, their memory and inquisitiveness about life, etc. Only after satisfactory investigations were they given admission to the school. There is great similarity here with the types of tests that were given to the aspirants who wished to join the āshrama-s of the Vedic sages in India.

As a philosopher, Pythagoras taught that number was the essence of all things. He mystically associated numbers with virtues, colours, and many other ideas. He also taught that the human soul is immortal and that after death it moves into another body. The concept of reincarnation was thus accepted by him.

Pythagoras believed that the earth was spherical and that the sun, moon and planets have movements of their own. His successors developed the idea that the earth revolved around a central fire. This belief anticipated the Copernican theory of the Universe.

The daily routine of the students was regulated and subject to a discipline. Students were expected to rise early in the morning and before getting out of bed

they were expected to review the previous day's events in reverse order up to the morning. This process of reflection helped them in creating awareness of their actions and development of memory. After leaving the bed, students were expected to sit in isolation for a while to harmonize body, heart and mind. After a bath and exercises, they were given breakfast and sat in groups of ten. Thereafter studies commenced. At lunchtime they were served bread, honey, vegetables and fruits. Only vegetarian food was served as Pythagoras believed that non-vegetarian food was unsuitable for spiritual development. After the afternoon's rest, pupils were taught Economics, Politics, duties of hospitality towards guests and foreigners. In the evenings, pupils split up into groups of two or three and discussed the day's lessons and meditated on them. After prayers and certain religious ceremonials, dinner was served and this consisted of bread and vegetables. Before going to bed the pupils examined the day's work and especially considered whether they had discharged their duties to God, Spiritual Beings, Elders and Compatriots satisfactorily. Thereafter they went to sleep and at that moment music was played through a certain type of musical instrument, the purpose of which was to enable students to come out of their physical bodies and smoothly move into the astral world for astral experiences.

Pythagoras had three classes of pupils. The first was called the Akoustikoi or hearers. This means they were learners. But it was also true that they were expected

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to follow the rule of absolute silence for two years. Another meaning of this rule was that as long as the pupil remained a hearer or an Akoustikoi he merely listened, acquired knowledge but did not give out any teaching. There is much wisdom in this rule and something which we should be conversant with ourselves. Unless we are fully conversant ourselves about the ancient wisdom, we are likely to mislead others. They were expected to observe the discipline of the class and rules of health and ethics for five years. An Akoustikoi observed silence, and did not ask questions on the teachings given to him. He listened and meditated on the teachings with single-mindedness, thereby developing an intuitive quality. Therefore his development took place by self-effort, and he normally stayed for about five years in this preliminary class. Thereafter if he passed the requirements of this stage, promotion to the next stage of Mathematikoi was granted. Those who failed had to leave the school, having been found to be unsuitable for further teachings.

These Mathematikois passed their time in the study of geometry, numbers and music. They were the 'accepted pupils'. Over and above geometry, numbers and music, they were allowed to ask questions and discuss issues. Included in the study of sciences were chemistry, astrology, science of numbers, geometry, music, arithmetic, occult sciences and *yoga-vidyā* or the science of yoga. A holistic approach to the disciplines of science, philosophy and religion was evident in the school.

The third class was formed of the Physikoi (or Phusikoi) — those who studied physics, the inner connection between phenomena, world-building and metaphysics. They learned the truth about man and nature and, as far as they could learn it, about HIM who made both. This was the final teaching of the relationship between Man, God and the Universe.

It is perhaps not surprising that life in the Pythagorean School was divided into five periods, almost similar to the five steps of the preparatory path of the Hindus, as the great teacher Pythagoras had knowledge of the spiritual teachings in India.

The five steps were:

1. *Manodvāravajjana* (opening of the doors of the mind (*viveka*)).
2. *Parikamma* (preparation for action (*vairāgya*)).
3. *Upachāro* (*shatsampatti*).
4. *Anuloma* (*mumukshutva*).
5. *Gotrabhu* (condition of fitness for initiation).

Amongst those who were not admitted to the school was a wealthy man who had a grudge against Pythagoras and carried out a campaign of vilification, creating false ideas about the school and its teachings. As a result, orders were given for the closing down of the school and Pythagoras and his close pupils had to leave Crotona and go off to the island of Samoa where he taught until the last days of his life.

Bishop Leadbeater, in his book *How Theosophy Came To Me*, recalls the experience of his previous life and states that in 504 BC he met Pythagoras, whilst on a

trip in the Mediterranean with a relative. They visited several Greek islands and came to Samoa. On Samoa he met Pythagoras who by then had become quite old and it appeared as if his end was near. At this time his chief disciple Kleinias (Master Djual Kul) was with him. Bishop Leadbeater states how well they were received and with love the great Pythagoras explained to him his philosophy after which there was a strong desire in Leadbeater and his friends to join the School of Pythagoras. The great master stated that a school was going to be set up in Athens at which laws of ethics, reincarnation and numbers would be taught.

When CWL and his party took leave, Pythagoras said: 'We shall meet again'. After two years they heard that the great Master had passed away and were surprised as to why he had made that statement when his end was near and there was no hope of their meeting again. Kleinias, however, kept the Master's promise as regards the setting up of a school in Athens. Leadbeater, with his brother of that life, joined the school and they spent all their spare time learning philosophy and teaching others. On the passing away of Kleinias, he took over the running of the school. In his last life when the Master KH met Leadbeater He reminded him of their meeting in 504 BC and of His statement and promise.

The philosophy that was taught in the Pythagorean schools was based on the earlier teachings of Orpheus and his own teachings based on the wisdom that he acquired during his travels to many

lands. Some of these teachings are enumerated here.

### **Spiritual Teachings — Unity of God**

Pythagoras envisioned moderation in all things, 'Nothing in Excess'. This was an approach very similar to the Buddha's middle path. He taught that harmony is a prerequisite to beauty. He believed there are successive grades of good ascending from matter to spirit. Life, consciousness, and all things are at different degrees of goodness and harmony. He thought of the Universe as a great harmonic ratio between degrees of goodness, the graduations ascending from matter (the least degree) to spirit (the greatest degree) of harmony and beauty. He taught that the Monad, the all-inclusive One, is related to each of its manifested parts and that the essential growth of each part is towards the Great Monad or Vishvātmā, symbolized by the Sun or Central Fire. He considered ten to be the sacred number or the sum of all parts and to represent the completeness of all things.

Pythagoras taught that relationships are essentially mental rather than physical. He stressed the value of friendship as an important ingredient of relationship. He suggested that merging with the spirit of things is more valuable than knowing the forms. The accumulation of knowledge comes in many ways but wisdom is attained by lifting the intellect to a point of intuitive awareness of the invisible. The Monad was described by the Pythagoreans as the 'Mysterious Permanent Atom'.

The God of Pythagoras was the

Monad, or the One that is Everything. He described God as the Supreme Mind distributed throughout all parts of the Universe — the Cause of all things, the intelligence of all things, and the Power within all things. He further declared the motion of God to be circular, the body of God to be composed of the substance of birth.

### **The Trinity**

Pythagoras taught that ‘All things consist of three’. Everything in nature was divided into three parts. Every problem could be diagrammed as a triangle. The World was divided into the Supreme World, the Superior World and the Inferior World.

The Supreme World which interpenetrated all was the home of the Deity. This Deity, considered Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient, pervaded the two lower worlds. The Superior World was the home of superhuman men, the immortals. Also the archetypes, or the nature and plan of all beings and things, dwelt in this Superior World. Pythagoras indicated that each form was an imprint in physical substance of its archetype. The Greeks called these archetypes the ‘shadows’ which were cast into the lower material world of form. The third or inferior World was the home of all material entities, the mortal gods, the angels, mankind and the lower kingdoms.

### **Man’s Ascent to Higher Worlds**

Pythagoras believed man would eventually reach a state where he would

no longer function in a physical body but would ascend to the immortals. He discovered that the seven modes or keys of the Greek system of music influenced emotions and diseases of the nerves, and on that basis developed an elaborate system of music therapy.

### **Orphic and Greek Ideas of Changes**

The ancient system of cosmology used terms such as ‘earth’ and ‘world’ to mean invisible, superphysical spheres which are the archetypes of the earth and world as man knows them. Plato’s teachings, based upon the wisdom of the ancient Orphic and other traditions, described the perfect unity from which all diversity is projected.

The Pythagorean doctrine taught the relationship of lesser ‘wholes’ to greater unities. Man is similar in pattern to the Universe, and as a microcosm in a miniature of the world macrocosm.

### **Orphic Concepts of Universal Law**

The Orphic supreme law was that of harmony and equilibrium. It taught that all forms of consciousness exist in a state of harmony, but that if the harmony is changed to a state of disharmony, all phases affected have to adjust through reaction after reaction until harmony is reestablished. A chain of reactions continually follows each action, from the point where the cause of change starts until the cycles of adjustment brings a new state of balance or harmony. This just, impersonal law, continually brings harmony in every portion of life, in the world of matter and the world of spirit.

### Orphic Concepts of Unfolding Consciousness and Form

Orpheus whose origin is very, very ancient, was said to be the founder of Greek mythology. Orpheus was a former incarnation of that great being who eventually became the Lord Gautama Buddha. He used myths to express symbolically his great philosophic concepts. He derived some of his material from the Egyptians and no doubt some from the Brahmans of India. He was one of the many immortals who limited himself by descending to earth that mankind might have the wisdom of the gods.

The Orphic mysteries were concealed in the myth about Orpheus seeking Eurydice who was imprisoned in the underworld. The legend represented, of course, a soul seeking experience and understanding in the limited physical universe. The Orphic teachings brought an understanding of a divine plan for the benefit of man. Only the physical form died, not the soul, life returning periodically to the material world for experience. The Orphic mystery schools were established to purify man's nature that he may, during growth in many lives, eventually approach perfection.

The Orphic mysteries taught that man could liberate the forces within his own psyche by controlling and directing his dynamic energies. The Greeks believed that man had within himself a spark of

vitality from the eternal. The 'dávion' of Socrates has been translated in present psychological terms as part of the unconscious: 'the gods' in general as group consciousness. The Greeks recognized God in all manifestation, even in the lowest forms and acts of organic life. They wisely revered the One God beyond the reach of thought.

The Orphic and Platonic expressions of Unity are beautifully and poetically described in these verses:

Love is the eldest and noblest and mightiest of the gods and chiefest author and giver of virtue in life and happiness after death.

God being a luminous principle, residing in the midst of the most subtle fire, He remains for ever invisible to the eyes of those who do not elevate themselves above material life.

God geometrizes, and His Government of the World is no less mathematically exact than His Creation of it.

What God is, I know not:  
What He is not, I know.

The echo of the voices of the Vedic Sages can be felt in this last verse: *Neti, Neti, Neti*. Sages expressing the difficulty of putting into words that which was beyond words said similarly what He was not by a process of negation. ✧

**I went to the root of things, and found nothing but Him alone.**

Mira Bai

# The Dartboard of Truth — II

EDI D. BILIMORIA

THE Dartboard of Truth has shown us which paths are valid and which are not for the seeker of spiritual truth. But how shall we actually make the journey from where we are to the goal that we wish to attain? Let us alchemically transform our darts into cars and drive down a motorway, reminding ourselves that whereas we are alone in our individual car and have to drive by our own skill and effort, we are not alone on the journey as we shall overtake, and be overtaken by, our fellow travellers towards our common destination. We shall also stop to assist travellers stranded on the road.

## The Three Factors Needed for a Car Journey

Whichever of the three motorways is our preferred route, three factors are indispensable for a successful journey.

1. A clear destination in mind.
2. A car in mechanically sound working order.
3. Driving skills.

Factors 2 and 3 are seemingly obvious, but often get confused or mistaken, one for the other. The greatest racing driver can make no progress without a working

vehicle. Equally, we can have a gleaming Rolls-Royce at our disposal, but we shall get nowhere, or else crash it if we do not know how to drive it. So now, let us become spiritual motorists.

## The Three Factors Needed for Spiritual Evolution

Our spiritual journey also needs three components for enlightenment, namely:

1. A clear goal, meaning an earnest desire for Self-realization associated with some lofty attribute to aspire towards.
2. Understanding of the Occult Sciences otherwise known as Rāja Yoga or Brahma Vidyā.

The classical teachings (principally *The Mahatma Letters* and Blavatsky's works) provide wonderful instruction on the 'mechanics and dynamics' of our spiritual vehicle<sup>5</sup> but provide virtually no instruction (other than at a very high level),<sup>6</sup> on how to drive along the road. The supreme importance of a regenerating Brotherhood is of course emphasized, but how do we achieve such an attitude of care and consideration for our fellows on the spiritual road? For this we have almost no practical guidance on meditation and

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service — only the need for them is stressed.<sup>7</sup>

3. Practical instruction and application as Yoga, meditation, service, and constant self-improvement.

Active ‘driving instructions’ for the spiritual traveller are provided by the likes of Krishnamurti, Paul Brunton and also many of the post-Blavatsky Theosophists — but not, as noted above, by Blavatsky and the original teachings which assume as a *sine qua non* that the student has already done much of the hard work and mastered at least the rudiments of journeying on the difficult road towards enlightenment.

For example, take the familiar case of an earnest student who has grasped the teachings on the greater picture (such as cosmogenesis, seven principles of man), but whose efforts are beleaguered by the lesser (relatively speaking) problems of the daily life: health, family duties, earning a living, etc. There is an encouraging article by Jinarājadāsa<sup>8</sup> offering practical advice and instruction for such as these who would not profit from heavy tomes on occult metaphysics, but need some ‘spiritual driving lessons’. (But note that you can skilfully drive your car anywhere in total ignorance of its functioning — until it breaks down.)

### Some Help along the Way

Universal Truth And Relative Truths — Einstein’s Warning about the Difference

According to Einstein, science can tell us the truth, but not the Real Truth or Absolute Truth. In his own words: ‘I think

we [must] draw a distinction between what is true and what is really true. A statement which does not profess to deal with anything except appearances may be true, but a statement which is not only true but deals with the realities beneath the appearances is really true.’

The following illustration from physics<sup>9</sup> will clarify this distinction between ‘true’ and ‘really true’.

Imagine a stationary conductor charged with electricity placed anywhere upon the surface of the earth. Now it is a well-known fact of electromagnetism that there will be an electric field around such a conductor, but no magnetic field around it since it is stationary. However the earth is in motion around its axis and in orbit around the sun. So to an observer on a distant planet the conductor, which is stationary relative to earth, will appear to be in motion, hence will be surrounded by a magnetic field. This means that there is no magnetic field round the conductor for a terrestrial observer, but if a stellar observer were to make his measurements on the terrestrial conductor, he would detect a magnetic field.

We arrive at the strange conclusion that the charged conductor is giving rise, and is not giving rise to a magnetic field at one and the same time. So what is the absolute truth? Is there a magnetic field around the conductor, or is there none? *No answer* can be given to this question. Einstein says: ‘We can only know the relative truth, the Real Truth is known only to the Universal Observer.’ And who is this ‘Universal Observer’ of Einstein other

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than the Almighty — the Supreme Nameless Higher Power of infinite knowledge and bliss — that Inscrutable Intelligence of Sir Isaac Newton?

We conclude that the truth investigated by science is ALWAYS RELATIVE AND NOT ABSOLUTE. *Science is a series of approximations to the truth*; there is never any finality. So a Theosophist must be super-wary of those scientists who proclaim their discoveries and theories as gospel truths, which they patently are not.

The Absolute Truth, let us call it Brahma Vidyā is the province of the Kingly Science — Occult Science. And before such Truths are imparted the seeker must make some sort of a prayer or dedication to some aspect of the Divine. For example the Jains would supplicate:

*I bow to Lord Mahāvira, the great well-wisher of all living beings; the source of joy to the souls of the Universe; the one*

*who is worshipped by all celestials and the lord of gods.*

*I seek protection of Lord Śāntinātha, the incarnation of Peace on earth, for annihilating all lusts and desires of the flesh. He has obtained the highest equanimity of mind and confers peace on those who lie at His feet.*

This does not mean that we destroy our ego (indispensable for our terrestrial existence) but rather that we pay attention to how we use our ego. Is our ego our master or our servant?

### The Correct Use of the Ego

We take the example of Beethoven and Napoleon. They were contemporaries — no coincidence — and they both shaped the destinies of men. Obviously their individual paths were radically different, yet, as Figure 5 shows, they had much in common as regards character.

### **Kill out all ambition, but live like one ambitious — Beethoven and Napoleon contrasted —**

<b>Both men were born within months of one another —</b>	
Napoleon on 15 August 1769,	and Beethoven on 17 December 1770.
<b>Both were revolutionaries — and both loved Power</b>	
But whereas Napoleon's revolution was in the realm of the political,  Napoleon rearranged (or tried to rearrange) national boundaries,  Napoleon lost the ultimate battle (NOT at Waterloo). For in crowning himself Emperor, Napoleon exalted his strong Ego,  Whereas Napoleon failed to turn his Ego around,	Beethoven's revolution was in the realm of the psychological and the spiritual.  whereas Beethoven's music revolutionizes our consciousness — it can CHANGE us.  whereas Beethoven won the supreme victory. He submitted his powerful Ego to the Divine Will.  Beethoven triumphed in dedicating his personal Ego to his Art and the service of Humanity.

Figure 5



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The point here is that both these great men had powerful egos, but in Napoleon's case, ego was used to serve the lower self; whereas Beethoven was able to turn his ego round completely to serve the divine. In the former there was ultimately self-aggrandizement and ruination of what could have been a united Europe centuries before the idea of a Common Market of European countries was ever mooted; in the latter there was self-abnegation and all of humanity reaped the inestimable bounty of a man who, by the force of his will, dedicated his entire being to serve only the higher purpose.<sup>10</sup> And let us be in no doubt whatsoever that he who serves the Higher, must also serve humanity thereby. For did not Annie Besant declare: 'May all who feel themselves as one with Thee, Know they are therefore one with every other'?<sup>11</sup> See how beautifully this resonates with Beethoven's affirmation: 'There is no loftier mission than to approach the Godhead more nearly than other mortals and by means of that contact to spread the rays of the Godhead through the human race.'<sup>12</sup>

### **One Last Biting Truth with a Sweet Sting**

The Vedic scholar Jeanine Miller warned us about the dangers of parrot-like imitation of others. She states that: devotion to truth, not to any personalities or set of doctrines or concepts, sounded by Madame Blavatsky and taken up by our leaders is far too often overlooked; and that brain rehashing of what others

have said or written simply will not do. Most importantly: the fountainhead of spiritual truth is not contained in any one, single book. HPB herself told us that *The Secret Doctrine* lifts only a corner of the veil — that it must be drawn out and lived through the human soul.

This admonition conveys two factors of the utmost importance to serious students of Theosophy. Firstly, that we cannot hope to become enlightened by growing 'stem-cells' from *The Secret Doctrine*, meaning that we cannot take the doctrine as just a piece of literal information to be processed by the brain. Secondly, and related to this, that these lofty teachings must be digested by our wisdom faculty. For example, the sublime doctrine of the Mānasaputra-s and the teaching on the transference of the Life Wave from the Lunar Chain to the Earth Chain cannot be taken as data to be assessed against the latest astronomical measurements sent by space probes. Even scientists within the Theosophical Society have great difficulty about this, because it is not something that the physical sciences can ever verify. This kind of teaching cannot be assimilated by the ordinary lower *manas*, the brain-box that revels in dichotomies. It has got to be drawn through the human soul; and what is the human soul if not the *Higher Manas* (Higher Mind), illuminated by intuition or *Buddhi*?

So What About Blavatsky Then?

Harking back to our opening remarks about freedom of thought, we are of

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course free to ignore Blavatsky, but as practising Theosophists, we omit her at our peril. Might as well try to become a concert pianist and spurn the musical and technical training of Bach's Forty-Eight Preludes and Fugues. Why not aspire to being a great actor and omit Shakespeare. So even though Blavatsky may not resonate with all of us, and we are not obligated to study her (because we are free), yet if we decide to aspire to Theosophical knowledge and wisdom, we are obliged to study her works and practise the message she put across with such force, clarity and in a scientific spirit because backed up with several thousands of source references. Has anyone else done this? Has anyone else set forth the vast process of cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis, not as a pastiche of doctrine found in one form or another in the scriptures of the world, but as their

common source, showing man a Purpose, a Plan, a Conscious Process, and a Way?

### Seven Steps along Our Journey

Our journey towards enlightenment must clearly be undertaken in steps. Figure 6 depicts the principal steps we have to mount, meaning hurdles to be conquered, in order to claim our reward of spiritual enlightenment achieved through our own efforts. These steps (or journey milestones, so to say) are self-evident, but let us expand on the last one — applying the ultimate formula for truth.

### The Ultimate Formula — the Web Address of Truth

Let us summarize our case using the example of a physicist meditating on, say, the nature of light. This — the nature of light — is the truth that he wishes to discover; it represents the 'ME' at the

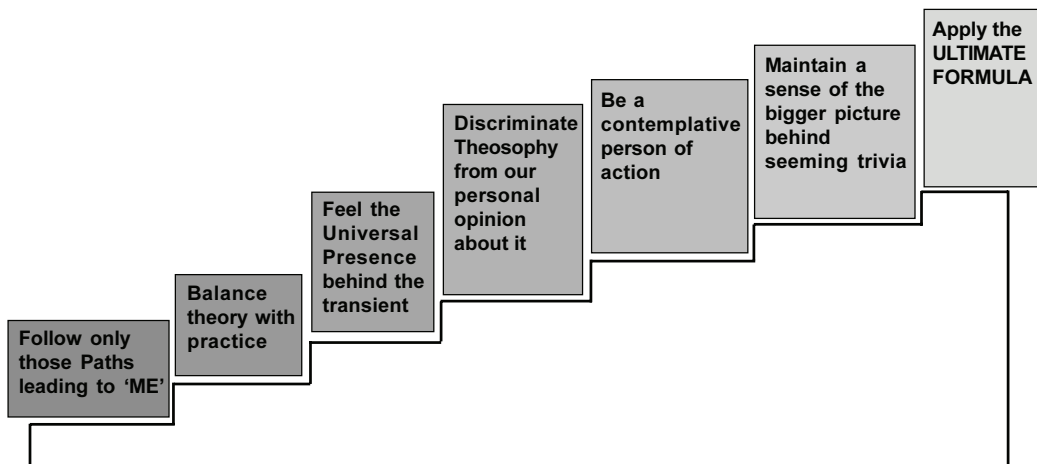


Figure 6 Seven Steps to Being Alive to the Truths of Theosophy

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bullseye centre of the dartboard-field of his inquiries. Our physicist now wishes to choose by which path, or paths he will approach the truth.

He does not start off his inquiries by asking who is the greater: Einstein or Newton? And then having arbitrarily opted for, let us say, Einstein, proceeds along this path (i.e. Einstein's theories) and rejects Newton's theories outright, or worse still, attacks Newton's ideas and vilifies his character. Rather, our humble physicist will ask himself: 'What is the property of the physical phenomena that I am investigating? Is it the optical nature of light as applied to microscopes and telescopes, or is it the photoelectric effect<sup>13</sup> where a stream of electrons is emitted from certain metals by shining a beam of light upon the latter?' Our physicist will realize that he must follow Newton's path for the former inquiry, but travel along Einstein's path for the latter. He will also see that there is far more that unites Newton and Einstein than divides them, actually nothing really divides them at all. In fact they both owe a large debt to Galileo and so on, for each great scientific mind apportions a certain aspect of Nature's universal laws to answer questions on specific manifestations of natural phenomena relevant to the age and culture in which he lives.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the truth about light, per se, subsumes any and all enquirers and theories upon it.

But alas, there are still some 'Theosophical fundamentalists' — if such an oxymoron be allowed in a Theosophical

context — who make a career out of extolling just one teacher and denouncing all others; in imagining differences where none really exist, except in terms of expression and idiom; and in opening up micro-fissure cracks between various doctrines into a grand canyon of conflict.

With renewed vigour we must again stress the need to discern the absolute from the relative, and to be aware of 'horses for courses'. So in conclusion, Truth cannot be force-fitted into a Blavatsky or a Besant or a Leadbeater or anyone else, for Truth always stands above, and transcends any and all of its greatest exponents.

To summarize the above rather fancifully in Internet terms, a physicist would not conduct his research on light using a web address: [www.Einstein.com/light](http://www.Einstein.com/light); but rather [www.Light.com/Einstein](http://www.Light.com/Einstein) or [www.Light.com/Newton](http://www.Light.com/Newton).<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Truth can never be discovered by adopting an attitude of [www.HPB.com/truth](http://www.HPB.com/truth), but always [Truth.com/HPB/](http://Truth.com/HPB/) . . .

So it is the primary contribution and dutiful service of Theosophists to demonstrate a Brotherhood promoting universality of mind and peace-making attitude, born not out of weak compromises, but out of a genuine understanding of the perennial wisdom that upholds a reconciling of opposites subsumed in Truth. Merely to disseminate theoretical occult knowhow on after-death states and paranormal phenomena, etc., is a secondary affair. ✧

## The Dartboard of Truth

### References and Notes

5. For example, the occult sevenfold constitution of Man.
6. For example in *The Voice of the Silence* dedicated by Blavatsky 'to the few', and what is affectionately known as HPB's Diagram of Meditation.
7. Hence core theosophy makes supreme demands on the student who is left very largely to his own devices as to which path he must follow to be in consonance with his temperament and his goal.
8. *The Life of the Ideal Pupil*, C. Jinarājādāsa, Theosophy in New Zealand, March 2006.
9. This example is taken from a classic book of Jain cosmology, *Cosmology Old and New*, Professor G. R. Jain, Bharatiya Jnanpith Publication, 1991.
10. In fact Beethoven once remarked that if he could command armies like he could compose music, he would teach Napoleon a thing or two!
11. The closing lines of the Universal Invocation 'O Hidden Life . . .' written in 1923.
12. Beethoven, in a letter of 1823.
13. Albert Einstein was awarded the Nobel prize for this discovery — not his renowned theories on relativity.
14. In fact Newton strongly alluded to, rather affirmed the photoelectric effect (but not in mathematical terms) in his celebrated *Opticks*, for which Einstein wrote the Foreword to the fourth edition. The writer proposes, but obviously cannot prove, that it was this reading of the *Opticks* by that supreme *mystic*-scientist — Newton — that gave Einstein the impulse to investigate photo-electricity and then to formulate the interconvertibility of matter and energy as the cornerstone of his relativity theory.
15. This is of course the correct web address to research what Newton or Einstein said about light.

**When your view is the same as your teacher's,  
you destroy half your teacher's merit; when  
your view surpasses your teacher's, you are  
worthy to succeed him.**

Zen Proverb

# Books of Interest

N. SRI RAM: A LIFE OF BENEFICENCE AND WISDOM by Pedro Oliveira, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai, 2008, pp.224.

A much needed, informative and inspiring book on the life and work of N. Sri Ram, the fifth President of the Theosophical Society from 1953 to 1973, has been produced by Pedro Oliveira.

As one goes through it, one is at once struck by the deep and determined research undertaken by the author — delving into the voluminous material available in the Archives at Adyar, handwritten notes and sometimes only slips of paper, contacting old members of the Theosophical Society who knew N. Sri Ram, also approaching several of his relatives who could provide valuable information about small and interesting anecdotes which throw light on his life and behaviour. A number of books compiled out of his lectures and talks and his monthly Watch-Tower notes appearing in *The Theosophist* during his term as President were gone through and utilized. The result is the publication of this beautiful book, delineating a life of beneficence and wisdom. The purpose of this book, as one sincerely feels, is not just to prepare a well-documented biography of a former President of the Theosophical Society, but to help and inspire us to live our lives as good

theosophists, as good human beings. N. Sri Ram once observed: ‘There is nothing more dynamic than life; if a person lives a beautiful life, the very mode of his living, his thoughts, emotions and inspiration will help others in ways we do not know.’

The first three chapters of the book relate to his ‘Early Life and Education’, ‘Working with Annie Besant’ and ‘Years of Preparation’, before he was elected President of the Theosophical Society in 1953.

Sri Ram studied in the Presidency College, Madras (now Chennai), and graduated in 1908. It is mentioned that his friends in the College hostel knew their ‘detached friend’ only too well. The ink used to be hardly dry on the monthly money-order receipt when they would surround him and relieve him of every penny of the extra money. Sri Ram would give it all away quite willingly. It is, however, mentioned, ‘let not this portrayal of Sri Ram’s life mislead the reader into painting him as a serious, saintly recluse. Far from it — he was fully alive to the good things of life and enjoyed them.’

Sri Ram was never a conformist, and he made that clear through his life. In 1908 he shaved off his orthodox Brahmanical tuft of hair. He was the first to employ a harijan (underprivileged) woman at home. Later on in 1920, he stood behind his sister Rukmini Devi in

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her marriage to George Arundale, at a time when Anglo-Indian marriage was severely frowned upon by society.

He joined the Theosophical Society in 1908, his diploma having been signed by Annie Besant who initiated him during the Convention at Adyar in December. His link with Annie Besant was one of the most enduring throughout his life. In December 1931, Annie Besant wrote him a card whose message speaks for itself :

Shri Rāma

with love and blessing for  
good service done and unwavering devotion  
December 21, 1931  
Annie Besant

Endure to the end

Sri Ram's life and work as President are referred to in Chapters 4 and 5 under the heads 'The Presidential Years' and 'Theosophy in a New Language'. The author mentions that his unique endeavour was to highlight the nature of Theosophy as a transformative Wisdom and not only as an explanation of the unfolding processes in the human being, in Nature and in the Universe. 'Sri Ram came to his own deep understanding of Theosophy, which, though thoroughly based on the core fundamental principles of the Wisdom Tradition, was nonetheless presented in a new language which was basically non-technical and yet profound, extraordinarily clear and simple, imbued with an original inspiration that touched at a deeper dimension.'

In the last chapter 'A True Theosophist Remembered', Joy Mills mentions that

'he brought us, I think, from a textbook Theosophy of structure . . . to a Theosophy of consciousness, of experience, of that 'living reality' to which HPB had pointed in her "Golden Stairs" and in *The Voice of the Silence*.' The author gives excerpts from Sri Ram's writings on different aspects of the Theosophical teachings and on the work of the Theosophical Society, which highlight his clear and deep understanding of Theosophy as a living wisdom. The important topics covered in these excerpts are 'The Nature of Theosophy', 'The Nature of the Mind', 'Universal Brotherhood', 'Understanding Death', 'Meditation' and 'The Path'.

About Sri Ram's dedication to his work as President, the author writes:

He worked tirelessly, dealing with a vast correspondence and his many administrative duties at Adyar, travelling and lecturing extensively in India and throughout the world many times, giving courses at the School of the Wisdom, of which he was the Principal from 1953 to 1973, writing books which presented the truths of Theosophy in a jargon-free idiom, revealing its great depth and also its profound relevance to the achievement of peace and understanding, both for the human mind and the world. . . . His was a truly consecrated life, utterly dedicated to the great spirit of altruism and selfless service that is the very heart of Theosophy.

It is remarkable that along with his great depth of wisdom, Sri Ram did also

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retain a beautiful sense of humour. Thus, while sending his Income Tax Return, in the forwarding letter he wrote at the end :

Yours truly,  
*not falsely*

(‘Yours truly’ was a common term in use for ending official or formal letters in those days).

On another occasion, in a meeting of the General Council of the Theosophical Society, when the Recording Secretary put up the Minutes of the 1955 meeting to vote for approval, Sri Ram said: ‘The Minutes — and the seconds are approved.’

One may place here a quotation from a letter to the Press from B. Shiva Rao, a former member of the Indian Parliament and closely associated with Annie Besant in her work, which appears towards the end of the chapter ‘The Presidential Years’:

Gentle and unassuming and never guilty of a harsh word or thought, however provocative the circumstances, he was an inspiring example to all who came into contact with him. Whenever I thought of the teachings of the Lord Buddha, in my mind’s eye was Mr Sri Ram as perhaps its nearest embodiment. Such men are rare.

The sixth chapter in this book is a very unusual one, its title being ‘Sri Ram on Himself’. It is, however, very relevant since it throws focused light on Sri Ram’s approach to life and his mature attitude towards events and problems. The contents of this chapter are based on a

series of interviews held with him in March 1973 on behalf of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, to gather as much first-hand material as possible on Annie Besant from one of her closest living associates. The interview runs into about fifteen pages. A few pieces are placed below:

Questioned on how he, for the first time, came into contact with Theosophy, Sri Ram replied:

My father was an ardent Theosophist, so, there used to be Theosophical books at home and even when I was a student I was interested in those books. I found them to be of absorbing interest, so much so, that, I am afraid, I neglected my college studies . . . as a lad I was deeply interested in Theosophical ideas.

In answer to a question, ‘What were your own political inclinations about this time, say after the start of the First World War’, he replied: ‘I was all in favour of India’s freedom, I was not in favour of any methods which would result in violence. I was much in favour of what was called at that time Constitutional Agitation.’

In answer to another question whether his opposition to violence and insistence on constitutional means was based on expediency — that violence was not a profitable thing or were there some other moral and ethical considerations against it, he replied: ‘Mainly moral and ethical . . . force never convinces people . . . it is my belief in the importance of peace and righteousness, right conduct, right means



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and so forth which lay at the back of my attitude to all those things that were happening then.’

The last and seventh chapter titled ‘A Theosophist Remembered’ contains tributes paid to N. Sri Ram largely reflecting what has been stated about him in the earlier chapters — a selfless nature and his approach to life and work for a Cause — as an awakened human being and as President of the Theosophical Society. One, therefore, feels urged to refer to a few of these tributes.

Joy Mills, former President of the American and Australian Sections and the International Vice-President of the Theosophical Society wrote, ‘Gentle and so wise, Brother Sri Ram touched the lives of so many of us. From the first encounter in 1948 to the last time I saw him . . . I knew that my own life, especially my Theosophical life, had been enriched and inspired in ways not easily defined.’ Geoffrey Hodson, a well-known writer and clairvoyant, highlighted in his tribute of Sri Ram’s personality: ‘Of himself, Brother Sri Ram, rarely, if ever, spoke or wrote, being an outstanding example of that complete impersonality

which, we are taught, is essential to right understanding.’

And lastly, let us see what his daughter, Radha Burnier, had to say about her father:

We all have a certain feeling about ourselves — our comfort, what is due to us, and so forth — and with an effort we may turn our thoughts to others. But he had no such feelings about himself. It was not so much a question of self-effacement, for there was so little of the self that had to be effaced. The self did not cast a shadow on his life; he lived in a kind of shadowless light-filled sphere that expressed the beauty of his existence. . . . In every circumstance, one could sense an extraordinary serenity, an absence of egoistic reaction, an absence of a feeling about the self. This added to the special beauty of the influence which he carried with him and which seemed to grow stronger as the years passed.

This book produced by Pedro Oliveira, is really a bouquet of fragrant spiritual wisdom presented by him with profound goodwill and good wishes, as we try to move on towards, what J. Krishnamurti called, ‘The Kingdom of Happiness’.

SURENDRA NARAYAN

**Is there not one true coin for which all things ought to be exchanged? — and that is wisdom.**

Plato, *Phaedo*



# Theosophical Work around the World

## World Congress

The General Secretary of the Italian Section, Mr Antonio Girardi, has sent a communication to all Sections, Regional Associations, Presidential Agencies, as well as Lodges directly attached to Adyar reminding them of the 10th World Congress of the Society which will be held in Rome, 10–15 July 2010. A leaflet containing detailed information was also sent to be made available to TS members worldwide, encouraging them to participate in that event.

In his communication Mr Girardi says that the theme of the Congress, ‘Universal Brotherhood without Distinction: a Road to Awareness’, will be a way to strengthen our understanding of the essence of the main Object of the TS — Universal Brotherhood without distinctions. The theme will also give all participants the great opportunity to renew their awareness of the unity of the Theosophical Society, its need for harmonic internal relationships, its positive dialectical work to serve Brotherhood and also the opportunity to rededicate ourselves to the significance of walking the path of Truth according to Plato’s aims of Beauty and Goodness, which is also reflected in many other Wisdom Teachings.

The Italian Section and its General Secretary hope many Theosophists from all over the world will gather in Rome to

be true witnesses to the aims of the Theosophical Society, to be at the service of the Masters and ready to work for the benefit of all humanity, thus strengthening future Theosophical work. Mr Girardi requests all members to keep in mind the deep unity of the Society, from the international President, Mrs Radha Burnier, to our latest members.

## Adyar

Many members from around the world who have visited the International Headquarters will be familiar with the beautiful Buddhist Shrine which was erected as a result of a request by one of the inner Founders of the Theosophical Society. Due to a generous offer by the Institute of South Indian Buddhist Studies, a Zen Memorial Stone was erected recently in the Buddhist Shrine area. This is of special significance because Bodhidharma, the great Buddhist monk who brought Zen to China in the sixth century, was born in Kanchi, South India. In China he was known as Tamo, and in Japan as Daruma. He was the twenty-eighth Indian patriarch and the first Patriarch of Chinese Zen. Bodhidharma has been described as the father of Zen Buddhism, although the teaching and technique of Zen were not consolidated until the eighth century, led by Hui-neng.

## Theosophical Work around the World

Christmas Humphreys has observed that the word Zen is the Japanese equivalent of the Chinese terms *Ch'an* or *Ch'an-na*, derived in turn from the Sanskrit word *Dhyāna* which is normally translated into English as 'meditation'. Although meditation forms part of Zen training, it is notable that Zen itself embraces every possible form of activity. In this way it is very practical in everyday life, based on the assertion that Enlightenment may be found as much by working in the world as by withdrawing from it. Zen literature takes the mind away from logical thought in order to jolt the consciousness into new understanding.

On 20 December 2009 a large group of members and friends gathered at the Buddhist Shrine area for the unveiling of the Zen Memorial Stone. After the opening address by Dr Shu Hikosaka, the Director of the Institute of South Indian Buddhist Studies, he chanted a Buddhist sutra. The Stone was then unveiled by the International President, Mrs Radha

Burnier, and Dr Hikosaka. An address by the President followed and after the close of the function those present were given an opportunity to quietly view the Zen Memorial Stone. We express gratitude for this special gift.

### Brazil

The twenty-ninth Summer School of the TS in Brazil was held near Curitiba, in the south of the country, with a record attendance of 170 participants. The theme was 'The Secret of Self-Realization' and the programme explored the Portuguese edition of Dr I. K. Taimni's translation of *Pratyabhijñā Hṛdayam* of Ksemarāja. Activities included early morning yoga, meditation, talks and symposia. Talks included 'Universal Consciousness and its Manifestation', 'Individual Consciousness is a Contraction of the Universal Consciousness', 'The Divine Functions of the Soul', 'Bondage and the Means of Liberation of the Soul' and 'Self-Knowledge and Self-Realization'. ✧

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### THE THEOSOPHIST

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I, S. Harihara Raghavan hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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