

## Freedom of Thought

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

## Freedom of the Society

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

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



# THE THEOSOPHIST

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Cover: At the ghats in Varanasi, oldest city in India, which is on the banks of the Ganga, the most sacred Indian river --- Photographer unknown

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The Theosophical Society is responsible only for official notices appearing in this journal.

# THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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

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

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

# Presidential Address

To the 142nd Annual Convention of the Theosophical Society (TS)  
Adyar, 31 December 2017

I am very happy to warmly welcome all of you to this 142nd International Convention at our Adyar international headquarters, and I wish you a very pleasant and inspiring time while you are here. Let us rise to invoke the blessing of our elder Brethren, who are ever ready to guide and help those who are unselfishly dedicated to the good of other living beings:

**May those who are the embodiments of Love Immortal  
bless with their help and guidance this Society,  
founded to be a channel for their work.  
May They inspire it with their Wisdom, strengthen it  
with their Power, and energize it with their activity.**

The year 2017 marks the 142nd anniversary of the Theosophical Society's founding. Longevity is universally regarded as a good thing because it indicates a connection to some vitalizing principle that extends the lifespan beyond the normal range. Whether it is the person who reaches 100 years of age, or the organization that outlasts its contemporaries, what is the "secret" for long life is always a question.

There are countless examples of great people and movements who appeared on the scene for a moment, did their work, and departed, whose only lasting mark is on the hearts and minds of the people they touched. There are also examples of long life where people, institutions, or organizations have limped their way into the future, mimicking vitality, but forgetful of their reason for being — cut off from the life force that gives meaning to the years. There is an expression that a parrot

can live to 100 years of age but, in the end, he is still a parrot.

While longevity is potentially a great blessing, its value is determined solely by how that time has been used. From the perspective of the Theosophical Society (TS) and the movement that came into being with its founding, it is not enough to merely endure. The purpose of this movement is transformation, at a deep level, described by the poet D. H. Lawrence as "freeing oneself from the endless repetition of the mistake which mankind at large has chosen to sanctify" — the mistake of separation, imagined independence, and isolation that has been the hallmark of human behavior and the wellspring of the array of problems we have come to regard as normal to the human condition.

Every year we come together as an international body to remember our roots, our invisible / hidden connection to a shared vitalizing source, and to draw

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strength from that remembrance. If approached as a mere reminiscence, or a fond looking backwards to the “good old days”, our time together is wasted. Not only is our time squandered, but the enormous sacrifices of those who preceded us and who have made this moment possible are diminished by our failure to properly understand.

The TS has its Three Objects which have given direction from the outset. However, the reason for its existence is stated in a manner different from its Objects. In *The Key to Theosophy* H. P. Blavatsky, the Society’s principal founder, makes the statement that the TS was founded for two main reasons: 1) “to assist in showing to people that such a thing as Theosophy exists”, and 2) “to help them to ascend towards it by studying and assimilating its eternal verities”. During the lifetime of the TS these goals have been approached along different lines. Initially there was a focused resistance to the limitations of the science and religion of the day. The outline of an alternative,

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The highlight of the year’s activities was the 38th **European Congress**, held in Barcelona, **Spain**, from 21 to 26 August on “Theosophy: a Way toward Universal Consciousness”. The Congress was organized by the European Federation and the Spanish Section of the TS, with more than 200 attending from 18 countries. I gave the opening lecture on the theme, and other lectures were given by several General Secretaries, officers of the TS, and President of Point Loma

a Divine Wisdom, a Theosophy, capable of spiritualizing and humanizing both individuals and their institutions, had to be presented in a manner that could be grasped by those rare high and open minds. Wisdom needed to be reduced to knowledge in order to gain access to popular thought.

Having succeeded in the initial goal of showing that such a thing as Theosophy exists and having established a globally shared language for the consideration of the Ageless Wisdom, the focus of our work has fully entered into the realm of “studying and assimilating its eternal verities”. The progression from teachings to insight and from student to exemplar justifies the existence of the TS. No new fact or increment of knowledge is required to address the mounting issues of our time. The outline of the wisdom teachings that we have been given exceeds our capacity to comprehend. In the words of Albert Schweitzer: “Example is not the main thing in influencing others; it is the *only* thing.”

Theosophical Society in The Hague, the Netherlands, Herman Vermeulen. A session of questions and answers preceded the closing. The whole program is available on the websites of both the Federation and the Section. Earlier on 25 June the General Secretary of Spain, Mrs Angels Torra, gave a lecture during the French Convention on “What is Spirituality?” During the year, several silent meditation retreats were organized, which were well attended and highly motivating.

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From this point onward, we proceed in alphabetical order within each region.

In the **Austrian** Regional Association three new members joined during the year, for a total membership of 58. All three Lodges offer weekly lectures during the study year, and study subjects are based on classical Theosophical teachings and related subjects. Offered lectures are regularly placed on the TS Austria website, and their members receive the periodical magazine, *Adyar*, from the German Section three times per year.

The TS in **Belgium** has 78 members in 8 active Lodges. The Section's activities continued throughout the country, mostly centered in the North and the capital of Brussels. During the year they welcomed Ms Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu in Brussels for a well-attended and appreciated two-day seminar on the Indian epic, the Mahabharata, which dealt with the Ageless Wisdom approach to self-development. Another highlight was their New Year's reception featuring a video of Vicente Hao Chin, Jr's lecture during the International Convention on "The Religions of the Future". During the same event, the long-expected website of the Belgian TS <[www.ts-belgium.be](http://www.ts-belgium.be)> was launched, along with the launch of a new general brochure to help them increase their presence in Belgium.

The National President of the TS in **England**, Jenny Baker, reports that in October 2016 David Nieuwejaers led an introductory course on the ancient theosophy of Plotinus on "The Return of the Soul to the One", which was one of the year's highlights. Also in September the

History and Archives Group of their Section organized a successful International Conference exploring the life and works of Annie Besant, with guest speakers from many countries, including the USA, France, Italy, The Netherlands, and England. Leslie Price and Janet Lee and others continue to catalogue and conserve the extensive archives. Mrs Baker spoke at several Lodges throughout the year and attended the 38th European Congress in Barcelona. At the closing ceremony she was presented with the EFTS Banner, as the English Section will be hosting the 39th European Congress in 2020.

The **Finnish** Section's Annual Convention was held in Tampere on 8 April. The Summer School in June was at Kreivilä, with Mr Hao Chin, Jr as their guest speaker, who had a real success with his "Self-Transformation" (ST) seminar. Nine persons expressed their wish to become ST facilitators. For the first time they used simultaneous translation equipment, and it was much appreciated. A new study group called the "Self-Transformation Study Group" was started in October 2016 in Helsinki. It based its studies on Mr Hao Chin, Jr's book *The Process of Self-Transformation*. A revised Finnish translation of *The Secret Doctrine* (SD) was published in June jointly by Kalevala and Minerva Lodges. In Estonia the Lodges arranged Summer School in June with the theme "Possibilities of Human Life". They also had a winter seminar in Tallinn in January, SD study days in Tartu in May, and an autumn study camp in August. The Section has 379 members.

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The **French** Section reports that they reached the targets for the year of (1) training workers to participate in administrative tasks; and (2) continuing training students to be speakers. Courses were offered free of charge every fortnight. Video projections of J. Krishnamurti's talks took place quarterly. Public lectures were given quarterly with minimal or no charge. The work of Lodges continued steadily with meetings taking place once a month and stress given to basic theosophical subjects. There was a revival of the Lodges in the Congo, Africa, and the French Adyar Editions sent them several introductory theosophical books. All programmes of the Section were published on its website and in the Section's magazine, *Le Lotus Bleu*.

The Northern **German** meeting in May was very well attended in Travemünde, near Lübeck, with Gabrièle Franklin, Assistant General Secretary, as the organizer. Manuela Kaulich, gave a lecture on "The Power of Thoughts and Thought Forms". They held elections this year and Mrs Kaulich, the only candidate, was re-elected for another 3-year term as General Secretary, a post she has held since 2008. The theme of this year's Summer School was "Is humankind steering into a blind alley? What does Divine Wisdom / Theosophy have to counteract this?" It was very successful, with 29 average attendees. Their magazine, *Adyar*, continued to be published three times a year and is well received. Membership increased from 119 to 126.

In the **Greek Section** their translation of *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* was published recently and they will send

a copy of the book to the Adyar Library soon. Also the series by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater on *Talks on the Path of Occultism* are also being translated into Greek and will be published in three volumes. Their membership stands at 147. Their quarterly magazine, *Ilisos*, is posted to about 250 subscribers in Greece and abroad, and is given free to all members.

The TS in **Hungary** held their General Meeting on 1 October 2016, when the new Presidential Representative, Mr János Szabari, and the Executive Committee were elected. They have 33 members in three Lodges, one in the countryside and two in Budapest, but only one of them is active. They organized one public lecture monthly from September to June on weekdays with 15–25 participants. The main subjects applied theosophical teachings to deal with daily problems.

The annual **Icelandic** Summer School was a success in every way for the fourth year in a row, held in the NLFÍ Spa and Medical Clinic, with excellent meeting and health-related facilities. The theme this year was "Together to the Same Goal". Their lecturers are often members of the TS, but various scholars, writers, university professors, and so on, are also invited. The titles included: "A Date with the Universe", "Self-image, Life, and Happiness", "J. Krishnamurti and Music", and "*The Voice of the Silence*". At their Annual General Meeting last May Halldór Haraldsson withdrew as GS and Kristinn Ágúst Fridfinnsson was elected as the next General Secretary. Their membership has risen to 283 from 262.

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On 27 May the All-**Ireland** Convention was held in centrally-located Dublin, which was very well supported by members from the Belfast and Phoenix Lodges. They had Gerard Brennan as their guest speaker, a visiting Australian member, also affiliated to TS Ireland. The theme was “The Journey of the Wild Swans”, and his talk was profound, inspiring, and very well received and appreciated by those present. The Organizing Secretary, Mrs Marie Harkness, had frequent contact with all Irish members during the year through her circulars with TS news and quarterly study notes. They have had a successful year with growing membership.

The 27 groups and 27 study centers of the TS in **Italy** carried out “members only” meetings and public conferences. Being the largest Section in the European Federation, it owns open-to-public seats and libraries in many cities, including Milan, Vicenza, Florence, and Rome. Their website <<http://www.teosofica.org>> attracts over 4,000 visits per month. A dedicated section contains videos of theosophical conferences taken during congresses and seminars, and another is fully dedicated to the Theosophical Order of Service (TOS). They publish their monthly magazine, *Rivista Italiana di Teosofia*, with 1,150 printed copies and over 1,000 subscriptions. They have 925 members, a slight decrease from last year.

**The Netherlands** reports there were 7 national activities in the International Theosophical Center (ITC) in Naarden during the year, including two in English: one with Fernando de Torrijos (USA) from 23

to 28 June on “Mindfulness”; and the other on 3 September, where I held a lecture in the morning for members, and another in the afternoon for the general public. Their quarterly magazine, *Theosofia*, is also published on the internet: <[www.theosofie.nl](http://www.theosofie.nl)>. Many different activities were presented in the Lodges and centers with lectures, meditation, and study. Films of J. Krishnamurti were also shown on a regular basis. They have 323 members in 9 Lodges and 6 study centers.

The post of Organizing Secretary for the **Norwegian** Regional Association was transferred from Mr Saleh Noshie to Mr Andreas Mikael Isberg last April. Until August of this year there was only one active Lodge in Norway, which had had programs every month of lecture and dialogue. This year they welcomed 5 new members. In February a new Lodge was formed and they now have a program of guided mindfulness meditation, lecture, and dialogue. Their website <[www.teosofisksamfunn.no](http://www.teosofisksamfunn.no)> has been regularly updated.

The **Portuguese Section** reports that the highlight of their year was my visit to Lisbon and Porto in August, right after the 38th European Congress held in Barcelona. In Lisbon, I had a private meeting with members and then gave a public lecture there and also in Porto. Although it was a short visit, it was a pleasant experience for all involved. The Section keeps busy every fortnight with a public session in different formats, all of them well attended. Four members, including the General Secretary, Ana



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Maria C. de Sousa, attended the European Congress. They continue publishing regularly their magazine *Osiris*, either on paper or online. The Lodges in Lisbon, Porto, and Évora, and also the Study Group in Azores and Setúbal go on working with enthusiasm, some of them attracting new sympathizers. The Section has 114 members, a slight increase from the previous year.

The TS in **Russia** reports that this year a theosophical publishing house was created, Russian-Ukrainian relations were strengthened, and construction of the Siberian Theosophical Center in the Altai continued. Their website <<http://ts-russia.org>> is administered by the former and current Presidential Representatives, Pavel Malakhov and Alexey Besputin. They now have 133 members, a drop of 37 from last year, with 8 very active Lodges and one study center.

The Regional Association in **Slovenia** has 55 members in 4 Lodges. Their quarterly newsletter, *Theosophical Thought*, was published regularly, and all memorial days of the TS were celebrated.

The **Swedish** Section has 151 members in 6 Lodges and one study center, and their magazine is issued 4 times per year. They have arranged minischools at the headquarters in Stockholm twice a year with about 20 participants each. Their Summer School featured Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, from the Philippines, on the theme: “Transform Yourself— Transform Your Life — Modern Insight”. The Finnish Section members helping them at Kreivila were very good organizers. Their website

is at: <[www.teosofiskasamfundet.se](http://www.teosofiskasamfundet.se)>.

On 17 June the TS in **Switzerland** had a new Presidential Representative, Mr Andrea Biasca-Caroni, in the place of Mrs Eliane Gaillard, who did valuable work for 12 years. The Agency has 27 members (an increase of 4 from last year) in 2 Lodges and 2 study centers. Its activities are as follows: One Lodge had meetings in Ascona and, the other, courses on Theosophy in Geneva; the Lugano study group met fortnightly, and the new study group met in Zurich.

In September, Svitlana Gavrylenko was re-elected as Organizing Secretary of the TS in **Ukraine** for another 3-year term. The 100 members in 6 Lodges and 3 study centers met regularly to study classic Theosophical literature. Their annual Convention was held in Kiev in November on the theme “Compassion and Universal Responsibility”, with more than 40 participants from 8 cities including Moscow. Their Summer School was held in Odessa in July on “Creativity as a Spiritual Path”, with more than 30 participants from 6 cities. Their electronic magazine, *Svitoch*, was issued 6 times during the year.

The **Welsh** Regional Association membership now stands at 68 in 4 Lodges and one study center. The Lodges have been holding monthly study meetings for their members. They have been discussing the basic Wisdom Teachings as presented in Tim Wyatt’s *Cycles of Eternity*, said to be a simple and practical 100-page application of the Ancient Wisdom. Every member in Wales received a free copy

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of the book paid for by the TS in Wales.

The highlight of this year for the **East and Central African** Section was the visit of Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, from the Philippines, who was the guest speaker at their 48th Convention, held at Kampala, Uganda, from 12 to 14 April, on “The Art and Science of Happiness”. He delivered three public lectures during the 3-day Convention. He also toured all the Regions in East & Central Africa during his 19-day trip, giving 6 public talks in different cities. In Nairobi he conducted a very successful Self-Transformation Seminar. Their membership is now 136 in 5 Lodges.

The **South African** Section has gone through difficult times over recent months. It has 6 Lodges, but membership has been affected by the large number of emigrations to the USA, Canada, Australia and Europe. It has 135 members, a drop of 16 from last year. The crime wave is another factor affecting attendance at Lodge meetings. They are also having difficulty attracting and keeping younger members. The Deputy General Secretary, Desmond Douglas Chapman, visited Durban twice, Cape Town, and Germiston. He has spoken to Lodge Presidents about implementing a diploma course, and because many tutorials are involved, he will train the Presidents and one other member from each Lodge on how to present the course for local classes.

The **West African** Section annual Convention was held on 8 and 9 July with three lectures on “Technology, Theosophy, and Science”. After each lecture there were questions and contributions, which enriched their deliberations. Topics taken up

at the Council Meeting held during the Convention were: (1) establishment of a bookshop, (2) starting a journal of the TS in West Africa, (3) study programs, and (4) publicity activities and public lectures. They decided to work on these 4 items during the coming year. Their membership is steady at 242 in 11 Lodges.

The **East and Southeast Asia** Presidential Agency, is present in 4 countries (Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, and Myanmar) with an active Lodge in each. The **Singapore** Lodge, formed in 1889, is the largest, with a membership of 358. The team that develops the Chinese website is based in this Lodge. The Selangor Lodge, formed in 1929, is the sole Lodge in **Malaysia** and has 94 members. **Japan’s** 45-year old Nippon Lodge in Tokyo has 45 members. The Yangon Theosophical Society in **Myanmar** has the Olcott Lodge, with 46 members. There was quite a large turnover with 61 incoming and 69 outgoing members during the year. The total number of members for the Presidential Agency is 543, a decrease of 8 from last year.

The **Australian** Section membership is reported at 812 in 11 Lodges and 6 study centers. Notable highlights of their activities during the year included: (1) The January National Convention in Hobart, on the theme “Eastern Spirituality, Psyche, and the Human Journey”, featuring a fine public talk by Dr Bruno Cayoun on “The Core Mechanisms of Buddhist Spirituality”. (2) The very successful tour by Dr Pablo Sender, from the USA, which included the School of Theosophy as well as his professionally recorded weekend

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seminar in Launceston. He also spoke at several Lodges. (3) The offer of an annual prize at the University of Western Australia for a third year undergraduate course on “Philosophy East and West”; an official response is awaited. Interestingly, their book depot of some fifty specially selected books at the National Headquarters continued to attract sales during the year at cost recovery prices.

The Presidential Representative of **Bangladesh**, Mr B. L. Bhattacharyya, reports that two new Lodges were chartered and three more are in the process. He kept close contact with all the Lodges and sent them study materials, including *At the Feet of the Master* and I. K. Taimni’s *Principles of Theosophical Work*. Their membership is now 300, an increase of 27 from last year, working in 11 Lodges.

The annual Convention of the **Indian** Section, with 11,394 members in 408 Lodges under 16 Federations, was inaugurated by me and chaired by international Vice-President Dr Chittaranjan Satapathy at Adyar in January. The largest Section of the TS Adyar had a change of General Secretary with Mr Pradeep H. Gohil assuming the post, succeeding Mr S. Sundaram. Mr Pradip Mahapatra was nominated as Joint General Secretary. Short talks by Mr O. P. Aneja, Mrs Nandita Kuldip, and Dr P. S. P. Sarangi on “Self-preparation: An Important Aspect of Theosophical Work” were well received by the delegates. “Theosophy — Defining the Indefinable” was the theme for the three-day 94th South India Conference at Adyar in April,

inaugurated by Marja Artamaa, international Secretary, welcomed by Mr Gohil, and attended by around 100 delegates. There were talks by four speakers, followed by workshops. The Section headquarters at Varanasi hosted the North India study camp held over three days in October 2016 on N. Sri Ram’s *An Approach to Reality*, directed by Prof. R. C. Tampi. A series of over five study camps were conducted from April to June at the Himalayan Centre for Theosophical Studies in Bhowali, on topics such as *Self Realization through Love* by I. K. Taimni, teachings of J. Krishnamurti, the Upanishads from a Theosophical perspective, and so on.

Visits and talks were conducted at various locations during the year by the National Lecturers. The Central Property Committee set up last year at Varanasi to manage the properties of the Society started work on reconstruction of facilities, obtaining legal title for properties, and so on. The TOS South Zone conference was held over two days in July at Kakinada with Nancy Secrest, international Secretary, as the chief guest, and the North Zone conference was held in Varanasi in August with the General Secretary officiating as chief guest. *The Indian Theosophist*, mouthpiece of the Indian Section, had a special issue commemorating the 100th anniversary of Annie Besant’s elevation to the presidency of the Indian National Congress, the organization that eventually secured independence for India.

The **Indonesian** Section reports an

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increase of 15 members and one more Lodge, totalling 209 members in 15 Lodges and one study center.

The President of the Covenant Lodge, Abraham Oron, in Tel Aviv, **Israel**, had weekly study sessions for members on a variety of subjects. They also held three seminars during the year, ranging from 28 to 34 participants. The last one, in June, was led by Tr n-Thi-Kim-Di u, Chairman of the European Federation, which was well received. Their YouTube channel now has more than 40 films, some of them full-length lectures on various Theosophical topics. They have 67 members and 5 study groups.

The **New Zealand** Section hosted the Indo-Pacific Federation conference in Auckland from 14 to 19 October 2016 with 110 delegates from around the Indo-Pacific region, and several guests from Europe and Brazil. They were pleased to have Lily and me present. Their Science Seminar followed from 19 to 21 October with speakers having professional scientific backgrounds from Australia, France, India, and New Zealand. Their annual convention was held in Dunedin in January 2017, with guest speakers Tr n-Thi-Kim-Di u from France and Elena Dovalsantos from the USA, on “Theosophy — Science, Spirituality, and Consciousness”. A School of Theosophy was held in May with director of studies Dorothy Bell, exploring the theme: “A Theosophical Worldview — the Power Revealed”, which was a well-presented program. The Section sent 7 national speakers to the 13 branches around the country to support their work.

They have 619 members in 4 study centers.

The TS in the **Philippines** (TSP) annual Convention was held at their National Headquarters with Leni Robredo, Vice-President of the Philippine Republic, as the guest speaker. During the convention, a new set of national board of trustees was elected, including the re-election of Roselmo Doval-Santos as National President. The Section Headquarters continues to publish *The Theosophical Digest*, among other periodicals. The Section sponsored a 3-hour Zazen Meditation session conducted by Sister Sonia Punzalan, a Catholic nun. They have 235 members in 20 Lodges and 10 study centers.

The General Secretary of the **Argentinian** Section, Esteban Langlois, tells us that national events took place in San Lorenzo in November 2016 on “Genealogy of Man” by Annie Besant, with 3 speakers and 50 members from the Section. Another event was held in Buenos Aires in the spring on “Reincarnation and Life after Death”. It was attended by over 70 members and visitors from Argentina and Uruguay. Both their Summer Schools took place in the San Rafael Theosophical Center. Mr Langlois visited 7 Lodges across the country. In February a new Section website was opened: <[www.sociedadteosofica.org.ar](http://www.sociedadteosofica.org.ar)>, and also a YouTube channel including my video blog with Spanish subtitles. The Section has 303 members in 17 Lodges and 8 study centers.

The **Bolivian** General Secretary, Mrs Guillermina R os de Sandoval, participated in the Inter-American Federation

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Congress that took place in Brasilia on “The Masters’ Letters” and the Section sent José Luis Rojas to participate in the International Gathering of Young Theosophists in February in the same city. Their National Meeting was held in La Paz with the theme: “The TS: Why and for what purpose was it founded?” Their 124 members are spread over 11 Lodges and 6 study centers.

The **Brazilian** Section continues to be the largest in Latin America with 676 members in 33 Lodges and 20 study centers. They have a new General Secretary, Sergio Carvalho de Moraes, Jr, succeeding Marcos de Resende. Their Winter School was held at the Theosophical Institute in Brasilia. Their International Theosophical School, held in the same venue in Brasilia, had Esteban Langlois, as its Visiting Lecturer, who spoke on “Applied Theosophy: Abstract Teachings for a Concrete Life”. The International Youth Group met in February on “Diversity as a Way to Universal Brotherhood”. *Sophia* magazine has entered its 15th year with 636 subscribers. It sells at newsstands all over the country.

The **Canadian** Regional Association (CRA) reports a membership of 124, an increase of 6 from last year, working in 5 Lodges and 2 study groups. All Lodges have been active, holding at least monthly meetings. In late August York Lodge hosted the CRA’s Annual Convention with Michael Gomes, from New York City, as the speaker for a conference on “HPB, Her Life and Work”. On 26 and 27 August Les Montagnes Bleues Lodge had its 3rd

Summer School with guest speaker Jacques Mahnich, from France, who spoke on “Science and Theosophy”.

The TS in **Chile** membership stands at 47 working in 3 Lodges. Their Convention was held in March on the theme, “Live Spiritually”. Pamphlets were distributed in subways and on electronic pages. Both *The Chilean Theosophical Magazine*, a hardcopy printed version, and the electronic “Theosophical Brochure” are sent monthly to different Spanish-speaking countries. They have an Online Radio <stradiochile.caster.fm>, transmitting lectures and classes. For more information see Blog: <sociedadteosofica chile.blogspot.com>.

The **Colombian** Presidential Agency has a membership of 28 working in 4 Lodges and 4 study centers that keep active studying a variety of theosophical teachings and authors. In the TS in **Costa Rica** there are 52 members in 5 Lodges. Although the Lodges meet at least weekly, and one meets twice per week, the attendance is low overall and most of them did not submit their reports to the Presidential Representative.

The **Cuban** Section Annual Convention was celebrated on 14 and 15 January with the theme “Seven Levels of Divine Love”. Drs Isaac Jauli and Enrique Reig, from Mexico, presented a series of programs at the national headquarters in Havana from 15 to 22 March, which was appreciated. They gave a public conference about “The Inner Child” and two meetings for members: “How to Live Theosophy in the Modern World” and

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“The Philosophy of Impermanence”. The Section’s 2-day Summer School was organized as a workshop for members by the Lodges in Havana on *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, First series, compiled by C. Jinarājādāsa. Their magazine, *Revista Teosófica Cubana*, continues as an electronic quarterly. The Section, with 572 members in 12 Lodges, is the second largest in Latin America.

The TS in the **Dominican Republic** has 34 members in 2 Lodges and one study center. The major events of Atma Lodge in Santo Domingo were several lectures given in late March by Drs Isaac Jauli and Enrique Reig on keys to overcome suffering. Also in Santo Domingo a group of members inaugurated the H. P. Blavatsky weekly study group in August under the guidance of Felipe de Castro. Theosophical topics are discussed and presented weekly by Nueva Aurora members in Rio Plata for the general public.

The **Mexican Section** welcomed Drs Isaac Jauli and Enrique Reig last December, who conducted the Section's School of Wisdom program. The Section also supported the Inter-American Theosophical Federation program in realizing the lectures given by Professor P. Krishna. In September the new Guadalajara study center was certified.

The **Peruvian** Presidential Agency has 33 members in 2 active Lodges, holding 16 public talks between them during the year. They also offered a free internet Course of Theosophy for the public and had their usual studies and meetings for members. Their highlight of the year was

that they could finally raise enough funds to buy land in December to build their own hall for public lectures, to hold around 50 or more people, and to possibly house their two Lodges.

The TS in **Puerto Rico** presented public conferences on a wide range of theological subjects almost every Sunday to reach out to interested walk-in persons. Some examples are “The Seven Bodies of Man”, “Interior Harmony”, and “The Path of Occultism”, delivered by members from their Presidential Agency. They received the visit of Drs Isaac Jauli and Enrique Reig, who offered public conferences attended by 40 to 50 persons. The Agency has 40 members in 3 Lodges.

The Regional Association in **Uruguay** gained 2 members, now standing at 58 in 5 Lodges. They hold weekly meetings and studies based on Theosophical literature, including J. Krishnamurti and E. Tolle. They also study articles published in *Sophia*, the official magazine of the TS in Spain and from the Internet, seeking the convergence of modern science and the Ancient Wisdom. Videos of seminars in Spain and lectures of Juan Viñas in Brasilia were also shown. A course was given by the Organizing Secretary, Ema de Souza Leal, on “An Approach to Theosophy”.

The **TS in the USA (TSA)** has 3,323 members in 35 Lodges and 46 study centers. During the year, Tim Boyd, international President, ended his second 3-year term of service as President of the TSA, and Barbara Hebert, former Vice-President under his presidency, assumed Mr Boyd’s role as of 1 July. David Bruce

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remains the National Secretary and Floyd Kettering continues as the National Treasurer. Mr Bruce reports that two new study centers were certified during the year. He organized 42 lectures or workshops at Lodges, study centers, camps, and Federations. The Henry S. Olcott Memorial **Library and Archives** is central to a growing Theosophical community worldwide. Their archivist, Janet Kerschner, and Pablo Sender continue to coordinate construction of their Theosophy Wiki encyclopedia online, available in English, Spanish, Russian, French, and now in Italian. Boris de Zirkoff's annotated copy of Blavatsky's *Theosophical Glossary* is accessible through this online service. By **webcasting** their Thursday night lectures and other programs, they reach a larger national and international audience. Also they have continued to increase their number of online interactive webinar programs. Pablo Sender's course on *The Secret Doctrine* and Ravi Ravindra's course "Freedom from the Self: A Study of the Yoga-sutras" were very popular. Taken as a whole, these programs advance the mission of the Society and benefit the entire world community. The **IT department**, managed by Chris Bolger, has supported the Quest Book Shop in migrating to a new inventory and point-of-sale system. A complete redesign of the main TSA website, <[www.theosophical.org](http://www.theosophical.org)>, is underway. They are also starting a new project with Quest Books to produce audio versions of some of their more popular paperback titles. These can be sold via download from Amazon.com. The **Quest Book Shop** in Wheaton has

an average of 1,000 sales per month, and over 3,000 customers receive a monthly e-newsletter announcing special sales. Theosophical books are their bestselling book category, but books on all major religious traditions, esoteric studies, philosophy, science, mysticism, and contemporary teachings.

The Presidential Agency in **Venezuela** has 15 members in 2 Lodges that meet to study together every Sunday for two hours and then they have lunch together. Their studies include Annie Besant's *A Study in Consciousness*, and *Talks on the Path of Occultism*, vol. I (based on *At the Feet of the Master*) by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater.

In addition to the Lodge in **Israel**, with 67 members, there are 7 more Lodges attached to Adyar: 2 in France, and one each in Croatia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Qatar, and USA, totaling 172 members, including Israel. There are also 29 Fellows at Large (members attached to Adyar).

At Adyar, the **Archives and Museum** has completed the huge work of digitizing H. P. Blavatsky's scrapbooks, primarily due to the great service rendered by volunteers. But their availability has shrunk a lot lately, and the Society looks forward to more people volunteering to help soon. Over 20 researchers from around 12 countries used our archives.

The **Adyar Library and Research Centre** completed digitizing manuscripts initiated two years ago. Two pamphlets were published and twelve books have been selected for new publication and the work is in progress. The affiliation with the American Institute of Indian

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Studies for research continued this year.

The administrative office of the **Theosophical Order of Service** (TOS) shifted to Adyar in India along with the move of its international Secretary, Ms Nancy Secrest, to take up the position of international Treasurer of the TS. This year the TOS continued its relief efforts to communities in India, Nepal, Italy, US, and Puerto Rico that were affected by cyclones, hurricanes, and earthquakes. Facilitating funds for the education of underprivileged youth, especially girls, in Asia and Africa, continued to be a major focus of the TOS. Medical camps were also organized. More than 1,000 patron members of 120 groups organized into 22 regions work in India. There was a change of guard at the top, with the retirement of Dr T. K. Nair after 6 years as National Secretary, who was replaced by Mr K. Sivaprasad.

The **Theosophical Publishing House** has undertaken new initiatives like online catalogues instead of printed ones, Amazon and Facebook stores for selling books, Twitter and WhatsApp channels for customer communication, multicurrency invoicing for foreign buyers, web-based operations in areas such as invoicing, inventory tracking, CRM, delivery management, and so on. New payment methods based on online gateways and mobile apps were adopted to discourage the use of cash, postal money orders, and old-fashioned cheques.

The **School of the Wisdom** conducted courses in Adyar from November 2016 to January 2017. The four two-week ses-

sions consisted of “The Neuro-science of Meditation” by Drs Bhaskar and Rajni Vyas, “Self-Transformation and the Spiritual Life” by Mr Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, Dr Chittaranjan Satapathy’s “Theosophy and the Upanishads”, and Dr Amit Goswami’s “Live Quantum, Be Happy”.

The **Olcott Education Society** continued its stellar performance in providing free schooling, vocational training, and social welfare to socially and economically underprivileged children and youth. This year, the Olcott School catered to 378 children of primary and high school classes, the Social Welfare Centre took care of 58 young children, and the Vocational Training Centre imparted free training to 26 young women in tailoring and clothes design, and 87 unemployed youngsters in soft skills.

Concerning the **international officers’ travels**, in February I led the Board meetings at “Olcott”, the **TSA** headquarters. On 2 March I gave a Thursday Night Lecture also at “Olcott” on “Theosophy: A Spiritual Legacy for Humanity”, and another one on 27 April about “The History of Our Future”. In the **Netherlands**, I codirected, with Mr Hao Chin, Jr, planning meetings held at the International Theosophical Centre (ITC) in Naarden from 4 to 8 March. Back in the **USA**, in April I gave a talk at the Detroit Lodge and at the Summer National Convention at “Olcott” in July titled “Adyar News”. I also gave talks in Chicago and a couple of other places in Illinois. From the European Congress held in **Spain**, mentioned at the start of this address, I arrived



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at the TS in **Portugal** on 27 August to give talks in Lisbon and Porto. Then on to the **Netherlands**, where on 3 September, I held a lecture in the morning for members, and another in the afternoon for the general public, again at the ITC Naarden.

The international **Vice-President**, Dr Deepa Padhi, was requested in June to speak to Indian ladies in Houston, **Texas**, on “Women Empowerment Projects in TOS Odisha”. They were inspired and are planning to support one of the projects in the coming year. Two of them wished to become members of the TOS India, and she gave them the forms for joining. Another lady donated \$300 for the Women Empowerment Project of the Mahabharat Group, Odisha Region, India. In July Dr Padhi discussed with the Sr Manager, Human Resources, of Google in Sunnyvale, **California**, about pledging a matching grant with TOS India for educational projects. Google pledged to give 50% through their Sr Manager. She then contacted “Asha Princeton”, an NGO which gives grants for educational projects in India, and she obtained the grant application forms. While still in California in July, she also gave an introductory short talk to a group of Junior Girl Scouts at their parents’ request on “Meditation through Visualization”. She not only talked about it, but *taught* them how to do it.

The international **Secretary**, Ms Marja Artamaa, was Chief Guest at the 107th annual conference of the **Karnataka** Theosophical Federation, held at Huliyaar in mid-

October, along with the golden jubilee of the Sanmarga Theosophical Lodge. She gave a talk on ‘Inner and Outer Aspects of Universal Brotherhood’, and gave a message at the valedictory programme. In February she gave a lecture for the Madras Theosophical Federation at **Adyar** on ‘Dialogue — More than Discussion’. She attended the GC Planning meeting at ITC **Naarden** in early March and inaugurated the South India Conference in **Adyar** in mid-April. Ms Artamaa attended the 38th European Congress in Barcelona, **Spain**, in late August, giving a talk on ‘From Definitions to Insight’.

Ms Nancy Secrest, TOS International Secretary, moved to Adyar in June to take up her new additional role as international **Treasurer**. In the earlier months, she fulfilled lecture and workshop commitments to TS and TOS groups in the USA, visiting Oregon, California, Washington State, and New York. After her arrival in India, she traveled to Kakinada to participate as chief guest in TOS India’s South Zonal Conference. She spoke about compassion, was honored to launch the Indian TOS website and enjoyed meeting many Indian members. At the end of July she gave a presentation at the Adyar Lodge, on the work of the TOS around the world. In August she made presentations at the summer school of the TS in England and the European Congress held in Barcelona, Spain, where she gave a talk with the title “Grow as the Flower Grows”.

TIM BOYD

# Yoga for Mental Health: Neurobiological Evidence

B. N. GANGADHAR

## INTRODUCTION

The United Nations accorded a formal status to Yoga in November 2014 by declaring 21 June as the International Day of Yoga, which was celebrated world over for the first time on that historic day in 2015. Nearly all countries in the world responded by performing mass yoga drills at 7.00 am on that day. These yoga sessions created records in the number of people doing yoga in open fields. Hitherto looked upon as a religious ritual by many, if not all, yoga became a household lifestyle. What was a means for spiritual transcendence became a worldly practice for a better life and health. This transition occurred through several milestones. The first was Swami Vivekananda, credited for having introduced the concept to the West in the late 1800s. By the mid-1900s, Transcendental Meditation, with some seminal reports in top-rated scientific journals, provided a rationale for yoga in the modern world. More recently, contemporary yoga gurus from different schools have popularized yoga, which has drawn the attention of

the common public. Yoga has evolved as a health culture in addition to being a spiritual practice.

Formal yoga curricula have emerged in universities at graduate and postgraduate levels. Some exclusive yoga universities have come to life. Sub-specialties such as yoga therapy have been created, with one university offering a postgraduate degree (MD). Doctoral research in yoga too is now possible. Journals that publish scientific research on yoga have been introduced, societies of professionals in the yoga field have been formed, and periodic conferences are conducted. Funding opportunities to support yoga research have been separately allocated / created at national and international levels. For example, the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, has launched a scheme called SATYAM for funding research on yoga and meditation. The Indian Government created the separate Ministry of AYUSH for yoga and the Indian systems of medicine. A central council too has been set up to further yoga research. The

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National Institutes that hitherto were primarily allopathic, have created yoga sections as part of integrated medicine.

### The Experience of Yoga

What is yoga? It stems from a word that means “to yoke”, “to blend”, or “to unite”. It unites one’s personal consciousness to the cosmic consciousness (*samyoga yoga ityukto jivātma paramātmanah*). For achieving this, yoga prescribes several procedures to be made part of one’s lifestyle. Dedicated efforts (*sādhana*) assist in culminating the journey towards unification. In this journey the practitioner (*sādhaka*) would obtain several benefits, including better physical and mental health. The person experiences this “better health” in varying ways, the ultimate being spiritual transcendence. Only a few succeed here and sustain this experience for the desired length of time. For many, the experience falls short of transcendence, yet is very reassuring. Feeling relaxed and connected are the most common ones. Others report physical benefits such as being agile, flexible, able to sleep well, more energetic, and so on.

An adolescent girl studying engineering was a regular practitioner of yoga. I asked her what attracted her to yoga and why things like malls, movies, and parties did not attract her. Her answer was that she felt “connected”. “Connected to what?” I asked her. “To the yoga teacher, yoga mates”, she said. She also said that she feels “connected” to her classmates, her family, and the world at large, and that she felt relaxed with the practice of yoga.

The “connected mind” also becomes more firmly grounded, and that explains the *chittavṛtti nirodhah* (reduced oscillations of the mind) as stated in the very second aphorism of Patañjali in his *Yoga-sutras*. For that matter, mastery over one’s mind is the main outcome of yoga (*manah praśamopāyah iti yogah*). It is hence not surprising that mental health professionals have consistently exploited this effect to help their clients with depression/anxiety. Lord Krishna is called *yogāchārya*, as he used this to help the despairing Arjuna to come out of it.

We investigated into the biological mechanisms or correlates of these effects — “being relaxed” and “being connected”.

### Yoga, Relaxation, and Biology

Being relaxed is a mental state that is free of anxiety and worries, of recurrent thoughts that are unpleasant, a state that helps one think clearly, with better ability to concentrate and solve concerns. The body too is in tune with this feeling in that the muscles are relaxed, the body conserves energy, at the same time is ready to spring to action more efficiently. What are the biological correlates one can demonstrate as effects of yoga? Here are some experimental data.

Anxiety and stress contribute to depression. This is associated with physiological changes. Prominent and consistent among them is increase in the circulating levels of cortisol (also called stress hormone). This has several cascading events, including neuronal loss. The Sanskrit scholars hence very appropri-

ately said: “the pyre burns the dead, while worry burns the living” (*chitā dahati nirjeevam, chintā dahati jeevanam*). Several researchers, including our team, found that cortisol levels drop after yoga intervention. We found this in patients with depression and those with alcohol dependence. The extent of drop in cortisol correlated with the drop in depression ratings in these patients. With the lifting of depression following yoga, these patients performed a cognitive task better, as further indicated by an increase in the cognitive event-related potential amplitude as recorded over the scalp. While depressed, the amplitude was lower than in healthy subjects.

Stress relief and feeling relaxed/better following yoga may be hypothesized to be mediated by the neurotransmitter gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA). This transmitter inhibits the neurons in the brain. Medicines with similar properties have been used to treat excitement, emotional disturbance, and even sleeplessness. For example, benzodiazepines facilitate GABA function. Direct measurement of brain GABA levels has now been possible by magnetic resonance spectroscopy (MRS), a sophisticated procedure. Brain levels of GABA increased following a session of yoga in healthy subjects. We investigated this using a different approach.

When we apply a brief pulse of magnetic energy across the scalp, the underlying brain region is activated, which in turn stimulates a distant but correspondingly connected muscle (for example, thrums muscle). This is manifested by

electrical signals in the muscle, measured using electromyography (EMG). Reacting to this magnetic stimulation, the brain also compensates by generating inhibitory effects on the muscle, leading to electromyographic silence. This is a short-lived effect (about 100 milliseconds) mediated by GABA. This short inhibition is called cortical silent period (CSP) (though the silence is in the electrical activity of the corresponding muscle that the brain is linked to). In stressed or depressed individuals the CSP is shorter, suggesting lowered GABA activity. After four days of yoga practice, the patients with depression reported about 25% improvement. Interestingly, a significant prolongation of CSP (inching closer to that in healthy subjects) was observed. Even in healthy subjects, a 4-week yoga course (about 20 sessions of training) produced a significant lengthening of CSP. These effects indicate enhanced GABA transmission related to the relaxation / stress-reduction that yoga causes.

Where in the brain is this effect relevant? We all have a brain centre called amygdala, one in each hemisphere of the brain. These are a pair of tiny structures, each not bigger than a few millimetres in diameter. They are responsible for our emotions. Aggression, anxiety, or depression are the result of increased activity of the amygdalas. What does yoga do to this? We checked if any yoga procedure influenced this. Chanting OM was associated with “deactivation” of this structure, in addition to deactivating a few more structures as well. This

“deactivation” of “limbic” structures in the brain, and hence dampening of “emotional” centres, results therefore in feelings of quietude and calmness. It is known that OM chanting is an integral part of most yoga practices. It is likely that facilitation of GABA transmission may also be related to this limbic deactivation.

### **Yoga, Connectedness & Mirror Neurons**

Other than this feeling of being “relaxed”, yoga produces an experience of “feeling connected”. Different descriptions are given to this sense of “connectedness”: to the teacher, yoga mates, family, colleagues, and so on. Some yoga gurus use the term *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, meaning “the world is a family”, to describe the feeling when yoga is performed. No doubt this experience has a validity, as many yoga performers concur on this. Is there a biological mechanism that explains this? Yoga has been found useful in the treatment of schizophrenia. In this condition, patients are less emotive, they tend to withdraw from people and responsibilities. These are called “negative” symptoms. Yoga distinctly improves these.

Schizophrenia patients also have deficits in social cognition. These patients are less capable of understanding others, their emotions, their interests. They are less accurate in recognizing the emotions on the faces of others. Patients, hence are “disconnected” from others, and tend to live in their own world. Scientists have noted similar behaviour in children who are affected with autism. In both condi-

tions the deficiency of a hormone, oxytocin, is implicated. Administration of this hormone by way of a nasal spray or nebulization has shown some promise in correcting these social cognition deficits.

In our laboratory we found yoga to elevate oxytocin levels and also improve social cognition. Patients were more accurate in recognizing facial emotions if they had practised yoga compared to those who were waitlisted. Is yoga an autogenous oxytocin therapy?

What does this oxytocin do? It is hypothesized that it enhances mirror neuron activity in the brain. Mirror neurons are reputed to prime other centres to respond to social stimuli more spontaneously and appropriately. This can happen only if the individual is sensitive to appreciate the social stimulus. Again, such sensitivity comes only if there is an emotional bond, “connectedness” with the source of stimulus. We conducted experiments to study if yoga facilitates this by increasing mirror neuron activity.

When an emotionally meaningful stimulus is presented, a muscular preparedness for response is facilitated by mirror neurons. This is demonstrated by a larger EMG response to a magnetic pulse applied transcranially. We examined if this response is greater after a period of yoga practice. Indeed we observed this is so in healthy as well as schizophrenia subjects. We also measured this brain activation using a sensitive technique — functional near infrared spectroscopy. This can detect if the brain region containing mirror neurons becomes perfused with more

## Yoga for Mental Health: Neurobiological Evidence

blood supply in response to activation. Such higher blood supply, and hence activation, was demonstrable in response to a socially relevant stimulus, and the activation was more after yoga practice as compared to baseline. These experimental data support the hypothesis that yoga facilitates mirror neurons and paves the way for social connectedness. Interestingly, yoga comes from the root word, *yuj*, which means to yoke or unite, as stated earlier. It connects and blends one's personal consciousness (*ātma*) with the cosmic one (*paramātmā*). While this is the ultimate transcendence, the initial experience of connectedness may be indicative

of the unfolding of this transcendence. Does yoga connect other “*ātmas*” locally before expanding to the cosmic connectedness? This has been experienced, and the same has concurrent validity. Our experiments with mirror neurons and oxytocin provide an external validation by explaining the mechanism (albeit preliminarily).

Providing a biological basis of yoga is expected to “convince” those mental health professionals who go by the evidence-based approach. More such research data has to be collected, preferably by conducting multicentre studies of a longitudinal nature. ✧

**In the space which thought creates around itself there is no love. This space divides man from man, and in it is all the becoming, the battle of life, the agony, and fear.**

**Meditation is the ending of this space, the ending of the me. Then relationship has quite a different meaning, for in that space which is not made by thought, the other does not exist, for you do not exist. Meditation then is not the pursuit of some vision, however sanctified by tradition. Rather it is the endless space where thought cannot enter. To us, the little space made by thought around itself, which is the me, is extremely important, for this is all the mind knows, identifying itself with everything that is in that space. And the fear of "not being" is born in that space. But in meditation, when this is understood, the mind can enter into a dimension of space where action is inaction.**

**We do not know what love is, for in the space by thought around itself as the me, love is the conflict of the me and the not-me. This conflict, this torture is not love. Thought is the very denial of love, and it cannot enter into that space where the me is not. In that space is the benediction which man seeks and cannot find. He seeks it within the frontiers of thought, and thought destroys the ecstasy of this benediction.**

J. Krishnamurti

# The Brothers' Help for the West

NICHOLAS C. WEEKS

SOME theosophists believe that the Masters' cyclic help in the last twenty-five years of each century only began in the time of Je Tsongkhapa. They consider H. P. Blavatsky's mission as only the fifth mission to the West.

Yet, long before Tsongkhapa's time, circa 1400, the West had been receiving messengers from the Occult Brotherhood for well over one thousand years.

In HPB's article "The Cycle Moveth" (*Collected Writings* 12:120) she wrote:

. . . messengers [were] sent out westward periodically in the last quarter of every century — ever since the mysteries, which alone had the key to the secrets of Nature, had been crushed out of existence in Europe by heathen and Christian conquerors . . .

In *CW* 14:294–95, "The Last of the Mysteries in Europe" HPB said:

The first strokes of its [the Mysteries'] last hour sounded in the year 47 BC. . . . It was during the first century before our era, that the last and supreme hour of the Mysteries had struck.

First Alesia and then Bibractis in Gaul

were "plundered and razed". Bibractis "was the last city in Gaul wherein died for Europe the secrets of the Initiations of the Great Mysteries . . ." She also mentioned that the beginning of the end of the European Mysteries began with the conquests of Alexander the Great around 320 BC.

Therefore Messengers to the West have been sent from the Eastern Lodge since at least the beginning of the Christian era, perhaps longer. Jehoshua ben Pandira, Apollonius of Tyana and Ammonius Saccas may have been among the earliest Messengers.

Perhaps our Western egotism has once again blinded us to the reason for this recurrent grace from the Brotherhood. It was not because the Adepts saw us as so spiritually advanced as to have earned this assistance, nor because they were taking advantage of a cycle, but because we had blindly destroyed our own original sources of truth and inspiration. We in the West were, and are, being helped primarily because of the vast Compassion of the Eastern Brothers, not because we deserve it. ✧

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**Mr Nicholas Weeks**, theosophical scholar, collaborated with his late wife, Dara Eklund, in assisting Boris de Zirkoff to compile and edit a few of the *Collected Writings* of H. P. Blavatsky.

# The Role of Free Will in Light of the Higher Spiritual Path

WILLIAM WILSON QUINN

*No man is free who is not master of himself.*

Epictetus

SERIOUS students of the immemorial wisdom tradition, the philosophia perennis, will be familiar with the issue of terminological complexity, if not outright confusion, in the study and comparison of certain core words and terms in express treatises of this philosophy in all venues and throughout all ages. Such sacred literature is written in Pāli and Tibetan, in Greek and Latin, and in French and English, to name but a few languages. The immutable truths of this philosophy were recorded by the earliest Taoist and Vedic scribes of the ancient world in Chinese and Sanskrit, and restated in modern English by H. P. Blavatsky and those for whom she served as agent. The causes of this terminological complexity — and/or confusion — are multiple, and include inter alia the variables of insight of the original scribe, idiomatic and cultural metaphors used to explain subtle principles, and the linguistic

abilities and esoteric insight of translators of the written treatises and scriptures, all notwithstanding that the first principles of the philosophia perennis are ever the same and unchanged, regardless of spatial or temporal considerations.

This terminological complexity/confusion has been and continues to be a challenge for many serious seekers — wayfarers — on the path of higher spiritual development. However, this problem is largely remediable with the knowledge that the first principles themselves do not differ, but rather what differs are the terms and descriptions used in the fluidic oral and written languages in which these principles appear. Because a proper understanding of the term “free will” and its relation to the traditional doctrine of the “two selves” are key to ascending this steep path, this brief discussion attempts to provide further clarity and understanding for those who seek.

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## The Role of Free Will in Light of the Higher Spiritual Path

### Clear Meaning of Words and Terms

Within the continuum of ancient and modern theosophic literature, one has only to think of the wide variety of uses and meanings of the English word “soul”, for example, and the rendering in other languages of the term that is translated into English as “soul” — the Greek “psyche”, for example — to find ambiguities in, and discrepancies between, both its definitions and translations from those other languages. Even where each of the original writers of esoteric texts was referring to *exactly* the same principle or phenomenon as other such writers, the terms chosen by those writers in their own languages, and the varying synonyms and metaphors they used to define these principles, remain subject to recurring terminological complexity and confusion for today’s students regarding core terms and words to describe such principles.

These problems are further compounded if not exacerbated by translations of these terms and descriptions into the mutable forms of communication we call language — from one language to another. This became highly apparent in the 19th and 20th centuries, when a deluge of esoteric doctrines first written in early Asian and Indo-European languages was translated into modern European languages, including English. One has only to refer to various translations of the Sanskrit term *dharma* (Pāli *dhamma*) to encounter a plethora of meanings for the same term.

Given these factual predicates, before

entering into a formal discussion of “free will” — a principle that has perplexed both students of esotericism and analytical philosophers alike — it is essential to clarify as well as possible related terms that are necessarily incorporated into this discussion. A discussion of free will requires, at the least, some description, if not definition, of the terms “will”, “choice”, and “fate” (Latin *fatum*, from which *fatalis* is derived). It further requires familiarity with the principle of the two selves — “Outer Man/Woman” (lower self) and “Inner Man/Woman” (higher Self) — and the seven modalities from which they are formed, known in Sanskrit as *kośa-s*, translated variously as “subtle bodies”, “vehicles”, or “sheaths”, that correspond to the multiple states of being. If we adopt the classic Vedantic formulation of *kośa-s*, we may say that the first (or highest) of them is the *ānandamaya-kośa*, which may also be termed the *ātmā*, the second is the *vijñānamaya-kośa*, which may also be termed the *buddhi*, and that below these is the mind, or the *manomaya-kośa*, often termed the *manas*.

Together these three highest of the *kośa-s* (*ātmā*, *buddhi*, *manas*) comprise what we refer to, for the purposes of this discussion, as the Inner Person or higher Self. The remainder of the lower *kośa-s* — not enumerated here, but including the physical and vital bodies, together with the subtle modalities where exist a person’s “personality” with its desires, appetites, and self-image — comprise the lower self or Outer Person. This

## The Role of Free Will in Light of the Higher Spiritual Path

summary overview of the concept of the “two selves” (Outer-Lower / Inner-Higher) must for now omit any treatment of the crucial bifurcation of the *manas* into (i) ordinary versus (ii) truly spiritual thought, in order to better focus on a proper understanding of free will as understood in the traditional or perennial philosophy.

### Will and Free Will

In order to understand what “free will” is, it is obvious that one must first understand what is meant by and understood as will. The term will, like “free will”, is also subject to a multiplicity of meanings by modern, secular philosophers as well as by scientists of the mind/brain complex, from psychiatrists to neurologists. Without intending to be dismissive, we may refer to these modern analytical inquirers into will and free will collectively as secularists, and so compare them to esotericists, being the light-bringers and sages of sacred spiritual truths, variously recorded in known texts and treatises of the ancient — and modern — wisdom tradition.

A principal difference between secularists and esotericists is the methods they use. The secularist typically relies on the faculty of reason alone, and allows as support fundamentally that which is quantitative and can be adduced empirically — and so rejects any notion of the Inner Person or spiritual component within human beings. Thus the rejection, or at least the omission, of any reference to one’s higher Self (*ātma-buddhi-manas*)

in the discourse and deliberations of the secularists necessarily means that their conclusions pertain solely to one’s Outer Person.

Conversely the esotericist, while accepting the reality of the higher Self, also relies on the reason of the higher mind, but further synthesizes this intellect with the intuition operating through the *buddhi* in order to fully understand something, including its qualitative (inner) nature. Though it may be worthwhile for one to familiarize oneself with any conclusions of secularists that may be cogent, it is important to keep in mind that where the initial premises used by secularists are empirical, and the analyses of their subjects of inquiry are exclusively logical and rational, so their conclusions must share in that process and thus be imbued with the same limitations. This being the case, the modern secularist would ipso facto not be able to accept — nor perhaps understand — the idea of free will as perceived by great expositors of the wisdom tradition.

In the context of these dual categories, as an esotericist, H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) formulated a precise definition of “will”. She wrote,

Will is that which governs the manifested universes in eternity. *Will* is the one and sole principle of abstract eternal MOTION, or its ensouling essence . . . Emanating from the one, eternal, abstract, and purely quiescent Will (*Ātmā* in Layam), it becomes *Buddhi* in its *Alaya* state, descends lower as *Mahat* (*Manas*) . . . Will,

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as an eternal principle, is neither spirit nor substance but everlasting ideation.<sup>1</sup>

The question this definition prompts for the purposes of our discussion is, what does it mean for this “will” as it exists in the human being to be “free” when HPB asserts the prime characteristics of will are that it governs the manifested universes, it is the ensouling essence of eternal motion, it emanates and descends through *ātma-buddhi-manas* and further “down the ladder of degrees”, and as an “eternal” principle it is neither spirit nor substance but ideation? Certainly part of what it means is that will bears an inseparable relation to *ātma-buddhi-manas* or the Inner Person, a principle not to be found as part of any discussion by modern secularists about free will, but which forms the basis of its definition and understanding according to the ancient wisdom tradition, or *sophia perennis*.

### Choice

Much complexity, confusion and “white noise” can be productively eliminated from the inquiry into free will in light of the higher spiritual path by understanding the attributes and role of *choice*. In the literature on the question of free will among modern secularists, one is often confronted by choice and free will as interchangeable terms. It should be acknowledged that this interchangeability can make sense within a narrow secular-rational context, where one is confined to quantitative and empirical strata of human activity that are navigable by reason, and where reference to the higher

Self (*ātma-buddhi-manas*) has been precluded from the discussion.

However, where the inquiry into free will is comprehensive — where it includes the traditional doctrine of the two selves — the discussion necessarily requires inclusion of a spectrum of the *significance* of choices one makes, as it were, from daily and ordinary “micro-choices” to life-altering or “macro-choices”. This latter includes *the* choice ultimately faced by the wayfarer on the higher spiritual journey to abandon fully the ways of the Outer Person in favor of following an initiatic path by centering his or her consciousness primarily within and through the Inner Person, regardless of whether he or she is currently under the tutelage of a qualified guru.

There is a level of choice, which we have referred to as “micro-choices”, that is an inextricable part of human life, whether we speak of the incarnate life of a monad at the very beginning of its journey through human existence, or whether we speak of the incarnate life of an Adept such as Morya or Koot Hoomi effectively at the end of that journey. Micro-choices are those with little if any significance as that pertains to the law of compensation, or mediate causes, commonly referred to as karma. Should I, on my way to my destination, walk in the sun or in the shade of the trees? Should I bypass the fallen branch ahead, or step over it? Should I take my meal on the hour, or the half-hour? And so on with a myriad of such micro-choices, *ad infinitum*.

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Micro-choices remain with us throughout our spiritual journeys through human existence to the highest levels, as reflected in the statement by Koot Hoomi that “an adept is an ordinary mortal at all moments of his daily life but those — when the *inner* man is acting.”<sup>2</sup> Here is a good example of a spiritual model who acknowledges the truth of the doctrine of the two selves, where one is his “ordinary” or Outer Man who acts as a “jailor” to his other Inner Man. This realization points directly to the need of every Outer Person, even at the level of Koot Hoomi, to make a series of micro-choices just to live through the ordinary days of a human being with all the material and subtle needs of existing in a physical body, and moves us closer to the traditional understanding of choice and free will in the context of the Inner Person (*ātma-buddhi-manas*).

Summarizing our discussion of choice, we may say that wherever in modern, secularist discourse choice and free will are generally used interchangeably, it is predictable in that context to conclude that because human beings have choice at *any* level of significance, they must therefore have free will. And while in that context this conclusion may cover everything from mundane and insignificant micro-choices to life-altering macro-choices that may even include forfeiture of one’s own life, for example, this conclusion can be *reasoned* no further and halts at the portal of intuition (*buddhi*). Intuition, being an indispensable faculty for perceiving the nature of the higher Self,

allows the wayfarer to make the choice through the *manas* to be ever guided by the emanating will of that higher spiritual state — a choice beyond the reach of secularists.

### Secularists, Esotericists and Free Will

If one were to research the written philosophic legacy of free will in Latin and several European languages beginning just before the time of the “Enlightenment” in Europe (circa mid-17th century) to the present, one would find a sizeable volume of material identifiable as secular and based solely in reason. There are, in fact, contemporary academic specialists in free will who have both gathered past sources and presented original contributions on the topic, a growing area of interest in philosophy within academia. One such was the late Professor Michael Frede of Oxford University, who published *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought*.<sup>3</sup>

In the classrooms and literature of modern, secularist academia where contributions are made to this inquiry in the books of its publishing houses and papers appearing in pedagogical journals of philosophy, one finds the precepts of free will and “fate” — in the form of fatalism, or alternatively causal determinism, and their derivatives — juxtaposed as opposing propositions. Ironically, there is also a juxtaposition of free will and fate in the esotericist perspective, though it bears no resemblance to its secularist counterpart. In this perennial philosophy, which contains the doctrine of the two selves, fate

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may be said to govern only the Outer Person, whose mortal existence must suffer a “fatal” end, while free will governs the Inner, and immortal, Person.

In stark opposition to this perspective is that of the secularist, whose analyses are typically limited to the Outer Person, and whose competing ideas are that the mortal person either has (i) free will — is able to make true choices — or (ii) does not, all such putative “choices” having been predetermined by cumulative prior actions of the person, or alternatively by a divine Creator. While in the secularist perspective fatalism and determinism — and their derivative “isms” — may differ in significant ways, they share in common the characteristic that they are both set in opposition to free will, and pertain exclusively to the Outer Person. And within secularist philosophical discourse, this opposition invariably devolves into polemical disputes whose proffered premises and arguments — and fallacies — grow ever more impenetrable and, at least for the esotericist, unsatisfying as it relates to a clear understanding of free will.

One should not conclude from this that the esotericist perspective of free will is simple to understand — it is not. It is, however, at least simpler to understand than the various competing secularist philosophical views of free will, and that because there is only one way — rather than multiple ways — of perceiving it within the context of the *philosophia perennis*. And that one way is predicated on the ability that he or she — the wayfarer — who seeks to understand has

developed his or her higher reason and intuition so that they operate, and apprehend, together.

The esotericist view of free will rests in the acknowledgment and understanding of the principle of the two selves, and was skillfully articulated by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, who wrote:

Our sense of free will is as valid in itself as our sense of being, and as invalid as our sense of being So-and-so [Outer Person]. There *is* a free will, a will, that is, unconstrained by anything external to its own nature; but it is only “ours” to the extent that we have abandoned all that we mean in common sense by “ourselves” and our “own” willing. Only *His* service is perfect freedom.<sup>4</sup>

This traditional conception of free will does not, to repeat, mean that those who act by and through the Inner Person are exempt from having any choices at all, or exempt from making decisions. Where micro-choices and decisions are linked to the contingent and material needs of living incarnate in a body, whether an ordinary individual or an initiated *jivanmukta* (one who while incarnate has achieved release from the wheel of death and rebirth), one will yet have choices.

Earlier we addressed micro- and macro-choices, and this precept denotes the critical difference between the type of choices referred to just above as those that are inescapable while existing in a physical body, and the type of choice — momentous — that involves which of the two selves shall predominate in one’s

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incarnate existence. In the content of classic treatises and scriptures of the ancient wisdom tradition, Coomaraswamy noted that

the natures and character of the two selves are treated at great length, and the importance of the resolution of their inner conflict emphasized; no man being at peace with himself until an agreement has been reached as to *which shall rule*. (emphasis added)<sup>5</sup>

Which self shall rule thus becomes *the* macro-choice.

This “inner conflict” between the two selves to which Coomaraswamy refers is nothing less than that which *must* at some point generate the life-altering choice, the decision, of which direction one seeks to take as between a normal, ordinary existence or ascending a higher spiritual path. One alternative is to remain subject to the vicissitudes of the Outer Person, even where one generally lives a “good” life. Because it is controlled by Fate and the corresponding forces of appetite, desire, and attachment, the alternative of choosing the Outer Person is that of continued death and rebirth, and so is always fatal. Not only is this alternative fatal, but it is often described in the perennial philosophy as the way of bondage, where the Outer Person has imprisoned the Inner and acts as its jailor, and therefore where true free will does not apply.

The other alternative is living and being within the Inner Person, the way of everlasting liberation from that fatal cycle, and in ever greater degrees synchronizing or

joining one’s will to the Universal or cosmic will, whose end result is *complete* free will. This momentous decision — choosing between these two directions — is memorialized in the sacred treatises and scriptures of time. Where this choice is rightly made, it is fundamentally baptismic if not initiatic — from corruptible mortality to incorruptible immortality. It is the same macro-choice between “glory or gloom” once expressed by Mabel Collins: “Each man is his own absolute lawgiver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself; the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment.”<sup>6</sup>

A renowned illustration of such a choice is the parable of Hiram Abiff, in the Masonic tradition, the “widow’s son” who chose to face death rather than to divulge Masonic secrets, and after being murdered in the Temple by three demanding ruffians, was resurrected to a new and wholly spiritual life by his Master. This sacrificial motif is repeated in a number of the world’s mythologies and scriptures in the form of heroic rebirth, or resurrection, as ably described by Mircea Eliade in *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth*.<sup>7</sup>

This macro-choice motif can be represented in corresponding principle as choosing between chaos and cosmos, between darkness and light, and between the profane and the sacred, among others. But it can also be expressed, as we have written elsewhere, as a choice between (i) *preserving* the status quo of one’s familiar spiritual path and continuing to

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make gradual progress in terms of selflessness and other related qualities needed for eventual admission to probation as a prospective *chela* of an Adept or “Mahatma” in the Order whose members form the spiritual hierarchy of humanity; or (ii) *acting* on the conviction that one is ready and leaving behind everything familiar and comfortable, plunging headlong without equivocation into the quest for probation and chelaship under an Adept to whom one perceives a connection.

Accordingly, in the philosophia perennis free will occurs, without further terminological complexity or confusion, where the successful wayfarer chooses the latter course and is thereafter able to synchronize his or her individual

will operating through the Inner Person (*ātma-buddhi-manas*) to the Universal or cosmic will. When this finally occurs, the wayfarer is no longer faced with any *significant* or macro-“choices” between “two or more alternative courses of action; at that point one knows that there is only one right thing to do and it becomes a question of whether one has the requisite ability [that is, will] to do it.”<sup>8</sup> This is the condition to which Coomaraswamy referred when he wrote:

In this [perennial] philosophy we are unfree to the extent that our willing is determined by the desires of the outer man, and free to the extent that the outer man has learnt to act, not for himself, but as the agent of the inner man, our real Self.<sup>9</sup> ✧

### Endnotes

1. Blavatsky, H. P., *Theosophical Glossary*. London: Theosophical Publishing Co., 1892, p. 370.
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3. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011.
4. Coomaraswamy, Ananda K., *Selected Papers: Metaphysics*. Bollingen Series LXXXIX. Roger Lipsey, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, p. 91.
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6. Collins, Mabel, *The Idyll of the White Lotus*. London: Reeves and Turner, 1884, p. 141.
7. New York: Harper & Row, 1975. Eliade’s many published works are replete with this theme. See also, Coomaraswamy’s “Ātmayajña: Self-Sacrifice” (p. 107) and “The Meaning of Death” (p. 426) in *Selected Papers: Metaphysics*.
8. Brooks, Richard W., “Free Will.” *Theosophedia* (Internet site). Manila: TPH, n.d.
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# The “Now” Moment

PRADEEP TALWALKER

INNUMERABLE life forms so far have made the earth their home; but, except man, their ways of living have not changed much. Minerals, plants and animals behave and live basically as they did ages ago. The only exception is the “human animal” — the “modern” man has very different lifestyles from the ancient hunter-gatherer. (But only *lifestyles*; in behaviour man is still as savage as ever!) Instead of caves, he now lives in built houses, which protect him from heat or cold, rain or wind, predators, and so on; instead of wild fruits, roots or raw meat he now has a wide range of foods at his disposal; buildings, roads, dams, canals, lakes that he constructed gave the land a new look; bright lamps deal with darkness; transport is no longer limited to leg power . . . the list is unending.

Such temporal advances signify the inventive genius acquired by the soul while graduating from the animal kingdom to the human kingdom. The progress has been attributed by many to our “opposable thumb”: it supposedly enables us to do big jobs by helping us to grasp objects properly. The thought is manifestly specious and does not even warrant cognizance, but

for the wide support it has. Many “thinkers” endorse it. They do not pause to see that some animals have opposable thumbs, too: giant pandas, opossums, lemurs, koalas, most birds, and so on. *Even some dinosaurs had them.* But no animal ever even attempted such advancement. Also, man, a physical weakling, by his *wits* tames and employs much stronger animals like elephants, horses, camels or oxen. Even ferocious beasts like lions, tigers or killer whales are trained by man to perform acts. Evidently, we owe our progress to something else, not to our thumb.

The thumb is a part of the *physical* body. For holding things it is fine; but it simply cannot be the source of man’s *inventive* ability. That involves *thinking*, a faculty of the mind. It is man’s mind that makes him desire a comfortable and pleasant life, and also helps him gain it. He owes the progress to his mind.

Indeed, the mind has a tremendous capacity to think — analytically, as well as creatively. The problem is: it *keeps* thinking. It flits from thought to thought. Like some hyperactive monkey jumping from tree to tree for no real reason, our mind keeps juggling thoughts very fast —

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for no real reason except that *that* is its innate habit. Nature has *built* it that way. (The Sanskrit word for “thought” is *vichāra*, “wandering about” — describing the mind’s activity very aptly. Wandering is precisely what the mind keeps doing.)

The mind can be put to really meaningful work when we are able to harness its full capacity. If we tame a wild beast, we can get work from it far beyond the human capacity. The wilder an unbroken horse, the more useful he will be after he is trained. The same rule applies to the mind. We must *tame* our unruly mind. It is an awesome task, but we know that great teachers like the Buddha have done it. They have also described to us how it can be done. We can gather courage from their accomplishments and learn from their teaching.

Uninvolved, dispassionate observation of the movement of the mind has been recommended. We only monitor, *not judge*, mental activity. A pattern emerges on regular monitoring: the mind either dwells on events that have already happened (like chewing the cud), or runs after events that have *not* happened. We are asked to keep to the present, but the mind either delves into the past, or jumps to the future. Even the joys of the present are wasted on the mind.

What *is* this present tense, anyway? Does it mean the current year? The current month? *All* of today, even? If the time is 12 noon, then the entire morning has gone in the past, while the rest of the day is still in the future . . . and how long is the day going to *stay* at 12 noon? Not

even a *second* . . . this present tense is slippery! Basically time is a continuous flow, and dividing it into parts is unnatural. Even the milli-, micro-, or picoseconds have specific durations. (Advanced students of Theosophy tell us that “time” is an illusion, not real. It must be so, but at our earthbound stage time is an everyday reality.)

In its continuous flow each coming moment keeps sliding rapidly into the past. So, aside of the *grammatical* present tense (‘I rise early’; ‘I have a house’; ‘I am writing’; and so forth), there are really only *two* tenses: an ever-increasing past, and a diminishing future (notionally, in the context of a lifetime).

And yet, the *present* tense has been accorded SUPREME importance. Doctors and philosophers speak about it with one voice. Both tell us to live life one moment at a time. However, this is fraught with problems.

Our defensive, self-centred, reactive mind keeps sprinting back and forth. It goes to the past fretting over old mistakes or failures, and imagines correcting them *now!* It goes to the future worrying about what lies ahead, or dreaming of better times. Whether the trip is into the past or the future, there is no escape from the current realities. It all happens unconsciously, absentmindedly. We need to stay “aware”. No amount of wishful thinking is going to bring back and repair the past, or ease the future ahead of us. It will only worsen, not simplify the current realities. The mind’s vagrancy only brings misery. Anxieties build up; it tells upon mental and

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physical health. The symptoms may be varied, but the root cause is the same. It is quite simple really, but few people are able to see the obvious. Overcrowded hospitals and “mental homes” the world over bear ample testimony. Good doctors tell us the futility of fretting and worrying. They stress the importance of living in the present moment. Philosophers agree. To progress on the Path, staying in the present is *basic*. For all reasons, physical *or* spiritual, we should live in the present moment. Then there will not *arise* any anxiety.

But, what does it mean in *practical* terms? How *do* we catch the slipping moment? The answer has been given by the Masters: if we try and stay focused on whatever we do, automatically we remain in the current moment. Doing it with full attention also gives us best results for our work. If we also add love to our action and do it as the *Master’s* work, the effect is even greater. No work then remains drudgery. It becomes an act of worship. For the first time in life we feel *joie de vivre*. Even more importantly, once we learn to control the mind, we can use it for *anything we wish*. As ordinary light becomes far more penetrative in a laser, so an untrained mind becomes far keener when in control.

Even passions like jealousy, greed, carnal lust, evil ambition can lend us concentration. Obsessed with a passion, the mind has no room for other thoughts. But we lose mental balance and stop caring about “good” or “bad”. The result will be mental agitation and shame, *even if we succeed* in our aim. Such effort will spell

physical, moral and spiritual disaster — a costly affair.

The wandering of the mind has been going on for many lives. Breaking the cons-old habit is, of course, hard. But we *have* to deal with it. We *all* make mistakes, *have* seen failures, *have* unfulfilled desires. We have to *learn* from our failures, not feel mortified by them. About desires: desirelessness is one of the *four basic qualifications*. God, in his omniscience, has already given to us what is best for us. If we realize this, we will have gratitude, not self-pity or dissatisfaction, in our heart. The mind’s analytical ability comes in handy here. Only a trained healthy mind can cure a morbid mind!

One reason for the mind chasing the future is we feel the need to be *prepared* for possible mishaps. It happens out of past failures. That is not unnatural, but if we look back, we see that few of our anticipated fears really came true. The load we carried for the *rest* of them was futile. It only brought us fatigue. The *actual* adversities that we *had* to deal with were never foreseen by us. Let us face it: some undesired events *are* going to take place. Everyone has had them. It is not possible to be prepared for *every* turn of events. We sap our energies by carrying vague fears of unknown things to come. If we save these energies and keep our wits about us, we will be able to handle even calamities much better. Life *has* testing times; but if we hold out, we emerge stronger — a part of our training; if we remember those occasions, we can see how *all this* is in our best interests.

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It is silly to put “good” or “bad” labels on *any* event, with our limited vision. Instead, if we train our mind *outwards* to the needy whom *we* should be helping, we will take a step in the right direction. Let us spread love. We help ourselves far more by climbing out of self-engrossment.

Remaining in the present moment does not mean we should totally shun thoughts about the past and the future. Remembering past successes gives us confidence for the present. Past failures guide us for a better future. Successes and failures are a *part* of our learning needs, and we *have* to keep them in mind. This way we use them positively. But even as we remember them, we have to be *anchored* in the present moment so as not to lose our bearing in life.

Proper concentration can come only from a mind at peace. A peaceful mind is a result of a clean conscience. Our relations with everyone are important. We have to take care to keep all relationships full of mutual love. The initiative for this has to come from us. We have no control over how others behave, but we must at least have control over our own behaviour. If we are kind and loving with everyone, we will get similar response from them — if not immediately, at least in the long run — if we keep patience and faith. We may not *control* their behaviour, yet we can *influence* it positively — *by example*. We spread goodwill. The keyword in relationships is dignity: our own and *theirs*, too. This includes *all beings* — human, animal, vegetable, mineral (*all*

have dignity; keeping it also helps *us*). Universal brotherhood has to be the foundation of all relationships. This is *no* charity; they *are* our brothers (all have the same Divine Essence, even if they are not aware of it) — *and* it improves our grade, to boot!

Having arrived on the Path of Theosophy, we are expected to be free of coarse ways of life. We are *at least in principle* sure about the direction our life should take. Our minds are not subject to violent swings any more. Still, there is much headway to be made for most of us. The progress so far may have been owing to evolutionary forces. But it is now time to make *conscious effort* in the direction prescribed by the Masters: Discrimination, Desirelessness, Good Conduct and Love should guide our step. Higher powers lead us on unerringly. Calming our turbulent mind, however, is something *we* have to do ourselves.

Various ways are prescribed for calming the mind. *Whatever* works for us is good. We have a fair idea of where to go. We may be plodding now, but once the mind is brought under control we can stride on masterfully. The torrents and tempests of life will worry us no more. We will no doubt be tempted and tested rigorously on the Path; but with dogged fortitude — and higher help at crucial moments — we *will* make our way ahead.

Keeping in full possession the “NOW” moment — *every moment* — will be our rudder for this adventurous voyage. ✧

# Freedom from Labels

WAYNE GATFIELD

TO survive in this modern materialistic world we have created countless labels to define who we are in a false society. When you are asked who you are, you will give a name and when asked what you do for a living, you will give an occupation. We are defined as mother, father, son, or daughter, man or woman and so on. We cling to these conceptualised views and even in the world of astrology we are eager to discover what the future holds for us as personalities.

People will even organize their lives around an astrological reading, believing that they must avoid individuals with conflicting “star signs”. This is a long way from true astrology which is known only to a few. A lot of New Age philosophy revolves around “self-development” and even how to amass wealth, attract partners and become popular. There are very complex divination systems that dissect the personal self and give an extremely detailed analysis of it. As Śankarāchārya puts it: “In a labyrinth of words the mind is lost like a man in a thick forest.”

All the above has to do with the personality, although often being portrayed

as spirituality. We are always labelling others and creating “the great dire heresy of separateness that weans [us] from the rest” (*The Voice of the Silence*). This labelling creates dissensions and conflicts and wars as people try to reinforce their categorizations of each other and hold on to their separatist views — “I am Hindu, I am Muslim, I am Christian, I am Buddhist.” The Sufi poet Rumi says:

Why think thus O men of piety  
I have returned to sobriety  
I am neither a Moslem nor a Hindu  
I am not Christian, Zoroastrian, nor Jew

I am neither of the West nor the East  
Not of the ocean, nor an earthly beast  
I am neither a natural wonder  
Nor from the stars yonder

Neither flesh of dust, nor wind inspire  
Nor water in veins, nor made of fire  
I am neither an earthly carpet, nor gems  
terrestrial  
Nor am I confined to Creation, nor the  
Throne Celestial

Not of ancient promises, nor of future  
prophecy

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## Freedom from Labels

Not of hellish anguish, nor of paradisaal  
ecstasy

Neither the progeny of Adam, nor Eve  
Nor of the world of heavenly make-believe

My place is the no-place  
My image is without face  
Neither of body nor the soul  
I am of the Divine Whole.

It is only when we shake off attachment to these labels that we can finally begin to really live. Many will argue that we have to exist in this material world so we need names to function in society, without them there would be utter chaos. The keyword to this is “attachment”. We must not base our thoughts and actions totally on what the world has labelled us and waste all our time pandering to the needs of the personality. These needs must be addressed, but there is a greater Self that must be cultivated and given expression. Our obsession with our lower self blocks out the light of the Spirit, as the clouds obscure the sunlight. Depression arises because we do not find total satisfaction with being defined; we seek “the peace and bliss known only in the land of Silence and non-being.” (*The Voice of the Silence*). Some people are comfortable for a while in the material world, some enjoy the drama and others have earned an easy life and feel no need to change their conditions. They are happy being defined and there is no impetus to change for the moment. Others have reached a stage where they feel the need to break their “mind-forged manacles” and find the stability lacking in their life up to now.

The “Diamond Sutra” in Buddhism teaches us that anyone who thinks of themselves as an Adept or a Bodhisattva is not really one in fullness because they are still clinging to concepts whereas a true Adept or Bodhisattva has gone beyond concepts. To retain conceptual views for the sake of helping humanity is a skill developed by the aspirant on such a path. H. P. Blavatsky in her article on “Our Three Objects” states:

Though but a minority of our members are mystically inclined, yet, in point of fact, the key to all our successes . . . is in our recognition of the fact of the Higher Self — colourless, cosmopolitan, unsectarian, sexless, unworldly, altruistic — and the doing of our work on that basis.

For the majority of people the idea of a Higher Self never enters their consciousness and for many others it remains an intellectual concept. To actually take the stance of the Higher Self is a rarity in modern society. Yet all of us have the opportunity to become what we are beyond the labelling — to realize our true potential and to realize that we are not creatures of a day, but immortal beings and denizens of eternity. There is a process of awakening, a “divine discontent” with the status quo and a desire to seek permanence in the midst of the inner and outer changes that we all go through. Change is often accompanied by suffering. Once we become aware of our impermanence and before we have realized our immortality there may be a period when we go through a “dark night of the

## Freedom from Labels

soul” when we become downcast as a result of all our material goods and our earthly thoughts not providing the sustenance that we need. Our physical mortality becomes very apparent and we cry out to our Higher Self to reveal to us our true nature. The cry may be conscious or unconscious at first but in time we are given the option to take our progress in hand and forge our own destiny, to proceed by “self-induced and self-devised efforts”.

We think too little of ourselves and our thoughts and actions are mainly second-hand. The majority of people in society are content to allow others to think for them and are willing to believe whatever the education system and the media tell them. Both of these are based on a materialistic view of what life is. To the few who see beyond these illusions, or are at least trying to, life takes on a very different meaning and their horizons are considerably widened. They have fully realized the divisive nature of labels and see through them to the oneness that unites and helps us to understand our fellow pilgrims on this journey to the heart of all things. This realization is a definite step towards achieving a lasting peace in the world which political systems have failed to do up to now. It helps us to live as brothers and sisters, because in essence we are all the same and all of us have the same potential to become truly divine and guided and inspired by our Higher Self.

This is perhaps simpler than we tend

to think because we create the barriers that prevent its manifestation in our lives. We listen to and absorb misleading views and convince ourselves that we could never live a spiritual life. Within us we have the powers attributed to Brahma, Vishnu and Śiva, the ability to create, to maintain what we have created as long as it is of use to us, and then to “destroy” what we have created and regenerate ourselves on a higher level of being. “As above, so below.” The first step to realizing this is through our studies and meditations. The purpose of true theosophical teachings is to educate us into what this true potential is, so that we can “take the kingdom of heaven by violence” as the bible states and by “violence” we should take it to mean by the force of our determination and perseverance through the many and varied trials of life.

It is then essential for us to understand that, although we may need these labels to survive in the material world, we must focus our attention on the Higher Self and whenever we stray from concentration on it bring it back to that point, so that it becomes an ever-increasing presence in our lives and we receive a completely different kind of education under its guidance. We should then learn to live more and more in the light of our true nature and learn to see that light in others, no matter how dim, and discover ways that can help to increase that illumination not just in ourselves, but more importantly in our brothers and sisters on the same pilgrimage as ourselves. ✧

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