

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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Editor: *Mr Tim Boyd*

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THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

Founded 17 November 1875

President: Mr Tim Boyd

Vice-President: Dr Deepa Padhi

Secretary: Ms Marja Artamaa

Treasurer: Ms Nancy Secrest

Headquarters: ADYAR, CHENNAI (MADRAS) 600 020, INDIA

Vice-President: ivp.hq@ts-adyar.org

Secretary: secy.hq@ts-adyar.org

Treasurer: treasury.hq@ts-adyar.org

Adyar Library and Research Centre: alrc.hq@ts-adyar.org

Theosophical Publishing House: tphindia@gmail.com // www.adyarbooks.com

Editorial Office: editorialoffice@gmail.com, Website: <http://www.ts-adyar.org>

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.

The Divine Seed

TIM BOYD

I would like to consider some questions about the spiritual life, and life in general. One of the things that characterizes the life and direction of anyone who takes on a genuine spiritual practice, is that it necessarily puts one in touch with big questions. The smaller things never do go away, but somehow it seems that the larger ones include the smaller details of life. The kind of big issues that we keep coming back to again and again, are those such as the injunction of the Oracle at Delphi: “Know Thyself.”

In our theosophical approach we think in terms of self-knowledge, self-transformation, or self-awareness, but in some sense it all comes back to the seminal question of “Who am I?” In part, the reintroduction of Theosophy was to provide deeper avenues to explore these kinds of questions.

In *The Maha Chohan’s Letter* we find that the two debilitating states of mind that had come to characterize human consciousness were aptly described. In one case, it was “brutal materialism”, and the force that was in the vanguard of rooting that approach in the minds of humanity was science, or more correctly, scientism. The other condition of human thinking that Theosophy was intended to address was what was described as “degrading

superstition”, or the rein over the minds of humanity of a dead-letter religiosity. These are the two trends that Theosophy has had to address.

Generally we all have a clear sense of who we are; from moment to moment we require it just to operate. When anybody is asked the question “Who are you?” our response generally begins with pointing to the most familiar component of self — the body. Even at this most fundamental level we know, at least intellectually, that there is no such thing as an individual self, a unit of consciousness that could be called “me”. The human body, by virtue of its physical composition, is a group effort, a collective project that takes place on many different levels.

Just at the level of pure biology, we know we are composed of trillions of cells, each with its own individual consciousness. They form into larger organs within the body, with a more expanded consciousness, and on and on. At a certain point, these different wholes of consciousness become imbued with the soul, or the spiritual dimension, and then we have a “complete package”, an “I”, but it is a collective process.

H. P. Blavatsky (HPB), in the *Secret Doctrine* makes more explicit the nature

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of the cooperative basis of who we are. She describes the human being as a three-fold endeavor. She says that we are composed of three different evolutionary streams: spiritual, intellectual, and physical. The way she describes them is that each of these is composed of, directed, and guided by the highest Dhyanis, or spiritual intelligences, each of these streams with different laws and different directions. But somehow, where these three streams meet, the cooperative endeavor of these three evolutions is what becomes humanity, and the human being. On a profound level, we are not a unit, but more of the nature of a project.

What do we know about the spiritual dimension of our being? When we think in terms of our constitution: spirit, soul, and mind (*ātmā*, *buddhi*, *manas*), and so on. But what do we know about that spiritual component? HPB describes the *ātmā* as no principle at all in the human constitution. It is a universal presence which irradiates the human being, but it is not a participant.

Often when we talk about spiritual things, we use the analogy of Light. Although it probably does not coincide with what we normally think, light, by its very nature, is invisible. For example, if someone is in space, even though it seems dark, light is continually shining everywhere. Interplanetary space is filled with light, but we do not become aware of the light until there is some object upon which it can strike, something that can reflect it. Until this happens, we cannot perceive it even though it is all around us.

Theosophical teachings speak about the vehicle (*upādhi*) for *ātmā*. The vehicle for spirit is of a nature that permits the capacity to perceive the light of spirit shining upon it. In our parlance we talk about *buddhi*. We can only become aware of the ever-invisible and ever-present spirit as it interacts with those principles that are capable of reflecting its presence. In reality we know nothing of spirit. What we *do* know are its reflections.

The physical realm is where we feel we have our strongest foothold because, for the past 400 or so years, we have had a very developed science that has focused exclusively on the realm of physical reality. Because of this we would expect that we would have our strongest understanding of the nature of the physical evolutionary stream. It should not surprise us that our understanding of even this most intensely studied aspect of reality is exceedingly limited.

I ask you to explore for yourselves what contemporary science today tells us about a concept that has become fundamental to scientific understanding. It is arrived at because, in observing the way the universe behaves, from a scientific perspective it seems that the universe is in a state of continuous expansion. This cannot be explained by the energy and matter of which we are aware. So scientists have posited something they are now calling “dark energy/dark matter” — dark because they cannot fully find it but, according to their calculations, it *has* to be there, otherwise the universe would *not* behave in the way that it does. They have

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yet to find its nature or to identify its qualities, but it behaves as matter, also as energy, and it is somehow invisible.

In the scientists' calculations, in order for our universe to behave as it does, this "dark energy/dark matter" would constitute ninety-five percent of the makeup of the universe. So what we think of as the physical realm, what we explore so deeply and believe that we understand so thoroughly, is at most five percent of the *physical* realm! These are not the musings of a theosophist, these are the statements of the most advanced people in contemporary science. So in terms of our physical and spiritual dimensions there is little that we know. We find ourselves chiefly centered in this linking ground between matter and spirit, the intellectual, or *mānasic*, evolutionary stream.

What do we do with all this? One of the things that this condition of multiple streams engenders is that the coming together and constant intermingling of these various evolutions and their intelligences is what makes the human being the complex being that he/she is. We find this expressed in various ways. St Paul expressed it very well. His simple statement reflecting the complexity of the human constitution was: "The things I would do, I do not do; the things I would not do, *that* I do." This complexity of voices, of intelligences, and the shifting ground where we find our consciousness centered, is constantly affecting our behaviors.

There are things that we know quite well would advance the unfoldment of a deeper dimension of our being, but in our

day-to-day life we behave in the opposite manner. The things that we know we should not do, foods we should not eat, the habits of mind we should not cultivate, the behaviors of unkindness that somehow sweep across us, those are the things we do. This is not only the experience of St Paul. This complexity is what we have to constantly address. The way we are advised to address it is to "know thyself", to move ever-more-deeply into a knowledge of what these components are, so that we can intelligently participate in their expression or non-expression.

There are many different ways to describe the mind according to different traditions. The "pristine mind" is a wonderful term that comes out of Dzogchen (Tibetan) Buddhism. In the Stanzas of Dzyan there is this statement that as the human project was being assembled, various components spoke and said: "I will give him feelings", and "I will give him the soul". And when it came to the aspect of the mind, it was a mind described as "a mind to embrace the Universe". That component is the seed that is planted in the consciousness of every human being. By virtue of it being planted in the greater whole within which we participate, which is called humanity, all of its units partake of it.

"The mind to embrace the Universe" is a Divine Seed that is for *us* to unfold. As with any seed, it is a very specific thing. In the case of vegetation a seed is an embryonic form of a plant, covered by a shell as a protective sheath. When the conditions are proper that seed will grow. All of

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the patterns of its future growth, the complete pattern for the end state that it will eventually reach, the phases through which it will pass, are fully present in the seed itself. What determines whether those stages occur is completely a matter of whether the conditions are provided for them. A human being begins as two reproductive cells joining to become a new cell which divides, comes out into the world as a functioning unit, an infant of a certain weight, goes through life, grows, passes through phases, matures, stands upright, and it all begins with the seed. As with any seed, it is affected by the conditions that are provided.

In the deserts of the world there are areas where it may not rain for a number of years; it is just that dry. The desert seems lifeless, barren, without hope of ever expressing the life force. When after several years the rain comes and soaks the ground, we find that within days the seemingly lifeless desert is in full bloom with flowers. The seeds that were lying dormant, spring to life when the conditions for that life to appear are provided. In our life as spiritual practitioners sometimes we would like to feel that in our study and meditation it is somehow possible to know the Life itself, to know Spirit directly, but perhaps that is not yet within the capacity of our current unfoldment. So what is our role in that case? It is very much like that of any gardener.

A wise gardener will not claim that she can explain the life force contained within a seed. What she *can* explain, and has come to know deeply through extended

practice and study, are the conditions of the soil required for the seed to express itself: the necessary amount of moisture, how to adjust the composition of the soil, and what is needed to protect the newly appearing seedling. All of this so that the seed can have the fullest possibility to express the hidden potentials that lie within it — *that*, the gardener, cannot explain.

Similarly, our role is to provide conditions which *necessarily* will produce a result. If the seed is present, and the conditions are provided, the life appears. Through a lesser knowledge, the appearance of a greater life is enabled. Perhaps part of the role for us is to remove some of our own arrogance — the idea that we *must* know, that we must control something which lies beyond our potential to understand, but not beyond our potential to participate in.

Genuine spiritual practice speaks about how we go about this participation. We talk about study, meditation, and the catalyst of service. These are ideas with which we are familiar. Our current consideration is intended to point our attention in the direction of this too often forgotten seed, and to allow ourselves to revisit how we approach it. There is a certain tenderness, gentleness, required in trying to usher in a new life. Our role is not to use the will, the expression of the spirit, to control or command, but to allow — to create the conditions for its own flowering. It is a process demanding both skill and wisdom, and an ever-deepening awareness of “Who am I?” ✧

Tamil Nadu Governor's Address to the Convention

BANWARILAL PUROHIT

TO begin with, I would like to share a little bit of history about the connection between Dr Annie Besant and myself through an important national figure in India, Sri Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the mentor of Mahatma Gandhi. While a few of you may know a part of this history, others may not.

I have had the fortune of having been associated with a Nagpur daily newspaper called *The Hitavada* since 1979, which was originally launched in 1911 by Sri Gokhale. It was because of his leadership that the journal has become a leading newspaper of Central India, with its voice being heard across the country. He had become a member of the Indian National Congress in 1889, and along with other contemporary leaders, including Dr Annie Besant, fought for decades to obtain greater political representation and power over public affairs for common Indian citizens.

In 1912, when Gokhale visited South Africa, Gandhiji received personal guidance from him, which gave him a better understanding of the issues confronting

the common people of India. In his autobiography Gandhiji recognizes him as an admirable leader who was pure as crystal, gentle as a lamb, brave as a lion, chivalrous to a fault, and the most perfect man in the political field.

When Annie Besant joined the Indian independence struggle in 1914, she was drawn towards Gokhale. She constructed a public hall in George Town, Chennai, in 1915, the year in which he died, and named it "Gokhale Hall" to honour his memory. The Hall became the seat of operations for the Young Men's Indian Association (YMIA), which was also founded by her.

The YMIA was created by Besant to provide a political gymnasium to equip the youth with a strong body, an informed mind, and a noble character, to inherit and imbibe the country's glorious traditions, and to take their rightful place as leaders of the future. The fact that she named the public hall where the YMIA was headquartered as she did, speaks volumes of her admiration for Gokhale's great soul.

It was in that same Hall that Besant

Honorable Banwarilal Purohit is the Governor of Tamil Nadu, India. Address delivered at the international Convention on 1 January 2018.

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delivered her famous lecture series, "Wake Up, India", and invited leaders to join her to win freedom for India. For this purpose she also started two journals: *The Commonweal*, a weekly dealing with issues of national reform, and *New India* (previously *The Madras Standard*), a daily newspaper which for 15 years was a powerful instrument to promote Home Rule and revolutionized Indian journalism, inspiring Indians with a dynamic vision of India's future.

In 1917 Besant was arrested and interned because of her increasingly agitative work for India's home rule. But this arrest lasted only three months, because the Home Rule movement spread from the cities to the countryside throughout India in protest, and the British government had to commit to a policy of gradual movement towards Indian home rule. That same year she was elected as the first woman President of the Indian National Congress. She made that office hum with activity for the entire year, instead of just for the few days of the Congress annual gathering, as had been the earlier practice.

Annie Besant also became the President of the TS, Adyar, in 1907 and continued to hold that position until 1933. Her personality had always revealed the spiritual dimension of a quest for the transformation of the person within. She had moved towards the spiritual Theosophy in the late 1880s and distanced herself from Marxism, as she found mindless pursuit of the economic side of life lacking in spiritual dimension.

In the TS under the leadership of Annie

Besant there was emphasis on Buddhist philosophy, esoteric Christianity, and the tenets of Hindu philosophy of Central India. Hence it was no surprise that she worked with Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya for creating the Hindu University at Banaras, which started functioning since 1917. In an inspiring lecture delivered at Adyar, she said:

What is the ideal for a nation? It must have spirituality, expressed in many-graded religions, suitable for every class in the nation: and if there are several religions, they must be friends, not rivals, acknowledging their common origin, Divine Wisdom, and their common aim, the uplifting of the nation. . . . It must have healthy conditions of life, a robust and vigorous manhood, a strong and refined womanhood. These are the things which make up the ideal; education is to bring them into realization.

I am happy to note that the ideals for which Annie Besant lived and worked for, are being pursued with vigour and enthusiasm even now. In fact, the TS, which ushered in a new strain of philosophical thought, is growing from strength to strength, laying emphasis on unity and the universality of life, universal consciousness, and the noblest ideal to form a nucleus of universal brotherhood, transcending all kinds of artificially imposed barriers on the ongoing evolution of humanity. This ideal was beautifully expressed by Annie Besant:

The India that I would give my life to help in building is an India learned in the ancient

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philosophy, . . . an India to which all other lands should look for spiritual life — where the life of all should be materially simple, but intellectually noble, and spiritually sublime.

Swami Vivekananda, who in the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893 first pronounced the concept of India being the spiritual guru of the world, was, it appears, in consonance with Annie Besant and the TS.

The Society's Convention theme for this year is most appropriate: "From Teach-

ings to Insight: The Altruistic Heart". In a sense, this theme means to me that we have to go beyond the intellectual and analytical level to the feeling of oneness and compassion which can spring only from the altruistic heart.

Let us take the pledge this year that we will expand our heart with altruism, fellow-feeling, kindness, and uphold service above self, which in essence will bring in *one world*. Only then the import of the Sanskrit saying, *vasudhaiva-kutumbakam* (the entire world is one family), will be truly realized. ✧

The condition of the low castes — it is painful to call them low castes — is not only unsatisfactory as this resolution says — it is so deeply deplorable that it constitutes a grave blot on our social arrangements . . . I think all fair-minded persons will have to admit that it is absolutely monstrous that a class of human beings, with bodies similar to our own, with brains that can think and with hearts that can feel, should be perpetually condemned to a low life of utter wretchedness, servitude, and mental and moral degradation, and that permanent barriers should be placed in their way so that it should be impossible for them ever to overcome them and improve their lot. This is deeply revolting to our sense of justice . . . How can we possibly realize our national aspirations, how can our country ever hope to take her place among the nations of the world, if we allow large numbers of our countrymen to remain sunk in ignorance, barbarism, and degradation?

Gopal Krishna Gokhale on Caste
Georgetown University,
Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs
<berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/quotes/gopal-krishna-gokhale-on-caste>

The “Heart of Theosophy”

BARBARA HEBERT

THE “Heart of Theosophy” — what an overwhelming topic and how presumptuous of me to even consider the possibility of understanding what that means, much less talking about it! As we often hear, Theosophy is everything (even though everything is not Theosophy!). How can anyone discuss the heart of everything?

May I begin by saying that I do not know what the Heart of Theosophy is, but as a seeker, it is a topic that seems valuable to explore. When I think of Theosophy, I think of Life in its many aspects: the Ultimate Source of all being that pervades everything, the eternal cycle of spiritual growth and evolution, the Oneness that binds us together. Then I begin to wonder “what is at the core” of Life? What do all of these different aspects of life have in common?

The Ancient Wisdom as expressed through Theosophy is complex and multifaceted. Conversations about the Ancient Wisdom range from the Unmanifest through spiritual evolution to the lives we live on this physical plane. What, one might ask, is at the center of this great teaching? Is there one important component upon which we could focus? Possibly the an-

swers to these questions is quite simply: Love. Can we even imagine a world filled with love? Can we imagine a world in which individuals care for one another with compassion and understanding? Can we imagine a world in which everyone works together for peace and harmony? Yet, we know that love, compassion, understanding, peace, and harmony are hallmarks of the inner realms of existence. Love beyond all measure for humanity may be the one thing that is at the center of the Ancient Wisdom, the one important component upon which we can focus.

Together, we will explore what may be called the Heart of Theosophy and some of the ways in which we can incorporate it into our daily lives. Beauty? Compassion? Peace? Harmony? Is not love somehow interwoven into all of these various concepts? To recognize beauty, to feel compassion for another, to experience peace and harmony, don't we need to feel Love on some level?

Many people tend to use the word “love” so casually. We may use the word to indicate things that we like or dislike: I love this beautiful flower. I love the colorful saris. I love french fries! At other

Ms Barbara Hebert is President of the Theosophical Society in America. Talk delivered at the international Convention, Adyar, on 4 January 2018.

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times, we use the word in a more personal way: I love my children! Interesting, isn't it? I do not love french fries the same way I love my children. These are quite different feelings. Yet we use the same word. From my perspective, there is nothing wrong with the casual or personal use of the word “love”; rather, it makes me happy to think of the vibrations of the word rippling across the world. However, these casual uses — even love for family, which is more of a personal type — are not what we are discussing here.

In *Golden Precepts of Esotericism* G. de Purucker writes:

Love is the cement of the universe; it holds all things in place and in eternal keeping; its very nature is celestial peace, its very characteristic is cosmic harmony, permeating all things, boundless, deathless, infinite, eternal. It is everywhere, and is the very heart of the heart of all that is.

This statement sounds as if this type of love is a synonym for the Ultimate Reality — permeating all things, everywhere, and the very heart of the heart of all that is.

This love — “the very heart of the heart of all that is” — has no personal implications; rather, it is a universal and impersonal type of love. It is a love that goes beyond anything we can imagine except possibly in those few moments of meditation or intuitive leaps toward the Divine. Purucker also says that “the more impersonal it is, the higher it is and the more powerful”. Impartial love is love that has no attachment. Once we have attachment, love of family, for instance, while it is a form of love, it is not universal love.

May I say here that, once again from my perspective, there is nothing wrong with personal love. It is an essential component of our daily lives in this physical world. Whenever I hear the word “impersonal”, I think of coldness and separateness; but after much consideration, it seems to me that it means “deepening beyond the physical”. Therefore, when I use the word “impersonal”, my own interpretation is that of love that is even deeper than the love felt on this physical plane of existence.

N. Sri Ram, former International President of the TS, said:

The love which deserves that name is impartial, non-possessive, wholly beneficent; in that love alone is to be discovered the force which will ultimately bring man to his freedom. Love is the only force which does not create or add to the complications of karma.

That last sentence should probably be repeated — this type of love is the only force which does not create or add to the complications of karma.

I am reminded of the incredible love of the Elder Brothers and Sisters of Humanity who work to raise the consciousness of all beings. Their love for humanity, we may assume, surpasses our understanding both in its universality and in its impersonal nature. Love deepened beyond what we generally understand to be Love. It's hard to imagine, isn't it, a love so great and so intense yet so impersonal.

We must strive toward this type of love. We are told in *At the Feet of the Master*: “Of all the qualifications, Love is the most

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important for if it is strong enough in a man, it forces him to acquire all the rest, and all the rest without it would never be sufficient.” And Sri Ram said: “Without love there is no unfoldment, because love belongs to the life of the Spirit, to the real Self; without love all search is in vain.” So, on our spiritual paths, how do we move toward feeling that type of love?

When we look at the beauty around us and feel that swelling of gratitude and love for Nature in her boundless glory, we are experiencing a tiny sliver of impersonal love. When we love without expectation, we are moving in the direction of universal love. In the words of Purucker:

“Impersonal love asks no reward, it gives all and therefore gives itself. Love is an illumination. Love is inspiring; it opens the doors of the mind because it cracks the bonds of the lower selfhood hemming in the god within. When [we] love impersonally then the divine fires flow out . . .”

For this moment, we become truly human, moving from personal love toward universal love.

On our spiritual journeys, as we begin to realize that all others are a part of the Universal, as we begin to recognize that we are all One at the core of our being, as we begin to discern that what happens to others also happens to us, we are moving toward an understanding of Universality. Sri Ram told us: “Love is, ideally, the state in which the distinction between self and another has vanished. This does not mean that we abolish individuality, but we learn to regard the happiness, the progress, the

interests of another as our own.” Or more succinctly, he said: “In a state of spiritual or universal Love, all other persons are but one person — the object of love.”

These beautiful words, so easy to say, so difficult to accomplish — on a daily basis, again, how do we reach this state of universal love? Perhaps it might be easier to consider this question from the opposite side — what is the opposite of impersonal love? Is it hate? Maybe. Why would we hate another person? There is a great deal of anger and hatred in our world right now. Is it because there is no understanding of another? Is it because we are afraid of what another might say or do to us, especially because we do not have an understanding of that person’s perspective? Perhaps it is more accurate to say that Fear is the opposite of Love.

Purucker writes:

Humanity will be ruled by fear just as long as they love themselves; for then they will be afraid of everything that is going to happen — afraid to venture, afraid to act, to do, to think, for fear lest they lose. And they will then lose . . . The strong person is one who loves, not who hates. The weak hate because they are limited and small. They can neither see nor feel others’ pain and sorrow, nor even sense so easy a thing as others’ viewpoints. But those who love recognize their kinship with all things.”

It makes me wonder how often I have missed opportunities because of fear — fear of what others may say, may think, may even do. What opportunities have we lost due to fear? I think of H. P. Blavatsky

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and all of the others who have come before us. If they had been fearful of what others might say, think, or do, where would we be today? Probably not here!

I would like to share a story, on a much smaller level, with you about an opportunity that was almost lost due to fear.

As you may know, I have been a mental health counselor for a number of years, working primarily with children. I have also had the opportunity to supervise other counselors who were working with children.

One day, a counselor came to me to consult about a young client, Quinta (not her real name) who had been severely abused — physically and sexually — at about age 5 and who is now age 10. Quinta told the counselor that shortly after her abuse at age 5, there has been a “scary” girl who lives in her closet. Quinta described the “scary” girl as having a rope around her neck and blood all over the front of her clothes. Quinta said the girl’s name is Violet and that Violet follows Quinta and asks to be her friend. Quinta reported that initially she told her mother about Violet, and her mother shut the door to Quinta’s bedroom and said they would not go in there again. Shortly after, the family moved to a new home — and Violet followed them. Quinta had been holding this information inside for five years, always terrified of Violet.

In our professional consultation, we discussed various possibilities for Violet’s appearance — visual hallucination, projection of Quinta’s trauma, a soul trapped due to its own trauma. Regardless of the reason for Violet’s appearance, it was clear that Quinta perceived her as very, very

real. If the psychiatrist who worked with Quinta was contacted, he may very likely put her on medication to stop hallucinations. Although this seemed the most appropriate way to respond, we decided to try another option for a week or two. We felt that waiting a week or two would not be problematic since Violet had been in Quinta’s life for at least five years.

Quinta and her mother have strong Christian beliefs, so it was determined that the counselor would speak with Quinta’s mother about the situation and suggest the use of prayer. Shortly after this discussion, Quinta came to her mother and said that Violet was following her and asking to be her friend. Quinta said she was scared and just wanted Violet to go away. Quinta’s mother suggested that they pray together which they did. They prayed that Violet would go to the Light to be with Jesus.

When the counselor saw Quinta after this incident, Quinta reported that she had not seen Violet since the day she and her mother prayed. Quinta then drew a picture showing Violet slowly ascending to a light and to Jesus.

What if our fear of encouraging Quinta had resulted in going the route of medication? Listening for and to the still, small voice within which some may call intuition allowed this child — or children, if you prefer — to heal.

When we are no longer afraid, when we no longer see the world as me vs. you or us against them, we begin to experience Universal Love. It is then that we may begin to move toward the heart of the heart of all that is . . . the Heart of Theosophy.

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

True Religion

True religion is not a set of beliefs and rituals, hopes and fears; and if we can allow the child to grow up without these hindering influences, then perhaps, as he matures, he will begin to inquire into the nature of reality, of God. That is why, in educating a child, deep insight and understanding are necessary.

Most people who are religiously inclined, who talk about God and immortality, do not fundamentally believe in individual freedom and integration; yet religion is the cultivation of freedom in the search for truth. There can be no compromise with freedom. Partial freedom for the individual is no freedom at all. Conditioning, of any kind, whether political or religious, is not freedom and it will never bring peace.

Religion is not a form of conditioning. It is a state of tranquillity in which there is reality, God; but that creative state can come into being only when there is self-knowledge and freedom. Freedom brings virtue, and without virtue there can be no tranquillity. The still mind is not a conditioned mind, it is not disciplined or trained to be still. Stillness comes only when the mind understands its own ways, which are the ways of the self.

Jiddu Krishnamurti
Education and the Significance of Life
Chapter 2, "The Right Kind of Education"

A Way to Universal Consciousness

MARÍA CARMEN CÉSAR GALANTE

WHEN I was offered the opportunity to give a talk at the last European Congress of the Theosophical Society (TS), it occurred to me how difficult it is to contribute new and sparkling ideas on its theme. But I also thought that each one of us is making his or her own way, and on this basis I will present some ideas that perhaps will be neither sparkling nor new.

Theosophy, as Divine Wisdom, offers us a great range of ways towards getting to connect and finally live with and in Universal Consciousness. This is the way it has been since the beginning of time and it has developed in all religious traditions, philosophies, and sciences. But probably what should worry us today, is how, in such a confusing period, full of darkness, we are able to find the path, and then have access to Universal Consciousness.

In spite of the difficulties, I believe that, those of us who are searching for the Light, are ever nearer to reach our objective. No other century has been as outstanding as ours, for the calm observer. Everywhere there is unrest, not just in the human spirit, but also in the heart; all around there is a battle between Light and

darkness, between dead and living ideas, between impotent will and active force; finally, wherever you look, there is war between animalistic man and the nascent spiritual man. All this demonstrates that in spite of having accomplished great technical advances, our soul is still in its infancy, given that we are not certain about what is in our head and in our heart. We operate in the extremes, letting ourselves be carried away by impulses in a stressful and not very serene duality.

But we do have a great advantage over past generations, and it is that we are moving in a world of communications, where everything is known instantly, where we may turn to every kind of information via a screen, and just as with the oracles of antiquity, today many mysteries are revealed which were earlier reserved for secret or inner circles.

But, I ask, is it true that there is a path? because this implies a displacement, a spatial movement, whether it be physical or mental. In reality a path per se does not exist; we use the word as a metaphor in order to understand certain processes that take place in our inner world, as the dif-

Mrs María Carmen César Galante is a former General Secretary of the Spanish Section and previously a long-term member in Argentina. Talk given at the European Congress of the TS, Barcelona, Spain, August 2017.

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ferent traditions have transmitted them to us through their heroes' feats, the legends and myths of the gods, or the life stories of the exemplary lives of mystics and realized beings. They all "tread" a path where their qualities were tested before reaching the final ordeal, where either success or failure would await them.

As the secret science describes it, all that is manifested in this material world originates from noumenal worlds. Pure and indestructible Nature, the essence of absolute reality, already existed before destructible, material Nature. The properties of the first are: indestructibility, penetration, indivisibility, and continuity. Matter is part of the noumenal world, which is destructible, divisible, and subject to changes. Therefore, it is permanent only until the disproportions and dissonances disappear, and all will go back again to harmony self-consciously.

What is destructible holds us, always, to the sensitive; the indestructible tries to free itself of sensitive chains and looks for sublimity of the spirit. This is the source of the apparent and continuous battle between good and evil. That is our nature, we have a divine origin, but the material world drags us into its whirlpool of sensations, with attractions and repulsions, which temporarily veil our real essence.

I also ask another question: Is it sufficient to acquire knowledge through reading or conferences, courses, or seminars we attend? This indicates that, on the one hand, we are eager to escape the prison of sufferings and unhappy mental states,

but on the other, there could be other motives masked by a pseudo-spirituality. Below I gather some phrases by Master KH from *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, where Sinnett's motives are outlined:

They are: (1) The desire to receive positive and unimpeachable proofs that there really are forces in Nature of which science knows nothing; (2) The hope to appropriate them some day — the sooner the better, for you do not like to wait — so as to enable yourself (*a*) to demonstrate their existence to a few chosen Western minds, (*b*) to contemplate future life as an objective reality built upon the rock of Knowledge — not of faith, and (*c*) to finally learn — most important this, among all your motives, perhaps, though the most occult and the best guarded — the whole truth about our Lodges and ourselves; . . .

(Letter No. 2, Barker, 3rd and Revised Ed., 1962, p. 7)

These motives, the Mahatma later assured him, were selfish from the point of view of the Brotherhood. And he continued telling him:

. . . you must be aware that the chief object of the TS is not so much to gratify individual aspirations as to serve our fellow men; . . . you have ever discussed but to put down the idea of a universal Brotherhood, questioned its usefulness, and advised to remodel the TS on the principle of a college for the special study of occultism. This, my respected and esteemed friend and Brother — will never do!

(Ibid., pp. 7–8)

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The Master adds:

We will be at cross purposes in our correspondence until it has been made entirely plain that *occult science has its own methods of research* as fixed and arbitrary as the methods of its antithesis physical science . . . *he who would cross the boundary of the unseen world can no more prescribe how he will proceed* than the traveller who tries to penetrate to the inner subterranean recesses of L'Hassa — the blessed — could show the way to his guide. *The mysteries never were, never can be, put within the reach of the general public*, not, at least, until that longed-for day when our religious philosophy becomes universal.

(Ibid., p. 6)

The Letter points out that there never were more than a few who could conquer the secrets of Nature:

The adept is the rare efflorescence of a generation of enquirers; and to become one, he *must obey the inward impulse of his soul* irrespective of the prudential considerations of worldly science or sagacity.

(Ibid.)

We long to be free or to attain wisdom, but what is it that will make us free or wise? To know our origin, know who we are, and once we are certain, to act accordingly, going through a regeneration, through observation of our thoughts, feelings, and actions, practicing meditation. In this way we will understand which are the personal and individual attachments, and we will begin to live in universal consciousness.

Saying this sounds very simple, but

how do we put it into practice? The solution can be very simple or very complicated, depending on whether we look at it from top or from the bottom, from universal planes or from those of manifestation. I suggest that we make this observation from our noumenal perception, because that is when we can better understand the particularities, given that if we do it in reverse, it is possible that we might lose sight of the essentials.

Having reached this point, with the perception of an open mind, free of prejudices, whether they be religious, cultural, racial, or philosophical, we will allow the impact of the LIFE that surrounds us to reach our soul.

J. Krishnamurti, in his diary, related an incident that made me reflect how our mind can see its own conditioning, when he explains:

When I was a small boy I used to see Sri Krishna, with the flute, as he is pictured by the Hindus, because my mother was a devotee of Sri Krishna . . . When I grew older and met with Bishop Leadbeater and the TS, I began to see the Master KH — again in the form which was put before me . . . and hence the Master KH was to me the end. Later on, as I grew, I began to see the Lord Maitreya. That was two years ago. . . . Now, lately, it has been the Buddha whom I have been seeing, and it has been my delight and my glory to be with him.

I have been asked what I mean by “the Beloved”. I will give a meaning, an explanation, which you will interpret as you

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please. To me it is All — it is Sri Krishna, it is the Master KH, it is the Lord Maitreya, it is the Buddha, and yet it is beyond all these forms. What does it matter what name you give? . . . My Beloved is the open skies, the flower, every human being. . . . If I say, and will say so, that I am one with the Beloved, it is because I feel it and I know it. I have found what I longed for, I have been united with it; therefore, from now on, there won't be a separation, because my thoughts, my desires, my longings — those of the individual "I" — have been destroyed . . . I am like the flower which gives its perfume to the morning air, it does not worry about who passes by its side . . . It is no good asking me who is the Beloved. Of what use are explanations? For you will not understand the Beloved until you are able to see him in every animal, in every blade of grass, in every person who suffers, in every individual.

*(The Years of Awakening:
A Biography of Krishnamurti
by Mary Lutyens, p. 356)*

It is very interesting to investigate the life of Krishnamurti, because he has been a personage that — to our good fortune — lived in very recent history, which makes it easier to understand his existential experiences of the union of the temporal and the eternal. In this way, when he experienced those moments of union, he would bring to this world the lifeblood with which he nurtured his conferences:

Friends, do not concern yourself with who I am; you will never know . . . You are not

concerned with the Truth, but you are concerned with the vessel that contains the Truth . . . Drink the water, if the water is clean: I say to you that I have that clean water; I have that balm which shall purify, that shall heal greatly; and you ask me: Who are you? I am all things, because I am Life.

(Ibid., p. 357)

These words of Krishnamurti made me remember the experience of Moses, related in the Bible, when he felt the call of the divinity and ascended Mount Sinai. There he heard a voice that said to him, "Take off your shoes, as you're stepping on sacred ground", and he asked, "Who are you?" and the voice answered, "I AM THAT I AM", which means, *I am that who was, who is, and who will be, that is, I am that which is always present, I AM.*

The occult code to interpret this scene is: The ascent to Mount Sinai means that Moses was already prepared to have access to levels of higher consciousness, and the duty to bare his feet means that shoes represent the material world, the physical, which needs to be momentarily dropped from the experience; and the Lord's answer to Moses' question coincides with what Krishnamurti expressed about the Beloved. The biblical story goes on to explain how Moses receives the divine message, represented by the tablets of the Law, and how he when going down from Mount Sinai finds his people worshipping the Golden Calf, breaks the tablets of the Law. This means that, upon returning to the material world, he corro-

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borates the words of the Master when he says: *“The mysteries never were and never can be placed within the reach of the public at large.”* This is because we still worship the Golden Calf, the material life.

Coming back to Krishnamurti, he transmits a magnificent message with these words:

Every one of you is a disciple of the Truth, if you understand the Truth and do not follow individuals . . . Truth does not give hope; it gives understanding . . . There is no understanding in the worship of personality . . . I say that Liberation can be attained at any stage of evolution by a man who understands, and that to worship stages, as you do, is not essential.

(The Life and Death of Krishnamurti by Mary Lutyens, KFI, p. 73)

I have never said there is no God. I have said that there is only God as manifested in you . . . but I am not going to use the word God . . . I prefer to call this LIFE. Of course there is neither good nor evil. . . . When you are in love with life and you place that love before all things, and judge by that love, and not by your fear, then this stagnation which you call morality will disappear. (Ibid., pp. 73–74)

I dare to suggest that on this path it would be convenient to have a constant

and persevering dedication in the search for TRUTH, converting this objective into an important part of our lives, maintaining alive and active the link with the source of life.

And I ask myself a last question: How will we know that we have started to tread this path? . . . Because we will have dropped fear and will have the certainty that we are not alone.

Finally, if we have accomplished the necessary calmness in which may rise our inner nature, and inspire those who surround us, forming a powerful nucleus, we can create a “critical mass” which lives, because we will open a channel with the noumenal planes, saturating this phenomenal world with the pure water of LIFE. *An individual can transform his or her environment, but many can transform the world.*

This experience will make us cross a portal that unites us to a world that is not far away, which is not foreign to our own nature, and that “is closer than our own breath”.

All is spirit, all is matter; depending on whether the Unique expands or contracts. God will inhabit the mire of the purified earth.

(The Message Rediscovered by Louis Cattiaux)

Let every man first become himself that which he teaches others to be.

Gems from the East, Feb. 22
Compiled by H. P. Blavatsky

Reconnecting with Ourselves: The Challenges of Modern Society

SONAL MURALI

THERE is much to rejoice in today's world for the generation that grew up reading *Harry Potter*, which marks a watershed moment in literature. One book, one story launched at the same time across the continents in one language, became an overnight obsession with a generation of youths and adults alike, replacing classics, mythology, fairy tales, as well as tales of epics and adventures across cultures.

The world has shrunk. Yet many would not like to use the term "shrinking" and would rather see it as "expanding". Our frontiers of knowledge are ever expanding. We know more about the physical world as well as space in the known history and feel that many things are within our reach. We are truly networked today and distances have dissolved bringing us closer than ever.

The last two decades have changed the world since the World Wide Web came into existence. The mission of Google, founded in 1998, was to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful, so that information as well as technology could be

shared easily. However, in 2018 digital inclusion of a vast portion of humankind remains to be accomplished. And if technology has reached its last member, it has reached in a morphed version — thus its benefits remain grossly unequal.

Globalization has further made the shrinking possible by liberalizing trade and mobility. Yet our concerns about the future have increased and the World Economic Forum 2018 had deliberations on "Creating a Shared Future in a Fractured World".

A Fractured World

Globalization was a dream that did not see distances or borders as impediments. It did result in a certain standardization of lifestyle, values, and behaviour across the world, but the world still continues to struggle with poverty and hunger. The "giant step for mankind" has taken us to a fractured world — the world was never whole, but today probably it is more fractured than ever. Media, religion, identity politics, nationalism, have all become means to serve the purpose of power centres that are essentially self-serving. It is

Ms Sonal Murali has worked as a volunteer at the Theosophical Society, Adyar, for many years.

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no wonder that we are also staring at two of the biggest threats — climate change and terrorism, both man-made.

Materialistic values set in with the advent of industrialization and seeds of globalization were sown when Columbus discovered America while searching for Indian spices. Today science has reshaped our landscape, and globalization, and media has made it widespread. Jacques Mahnich (Theosophy-Science Lecturer, Adyar Convention, Dec. 2014) says:

Science has deeply penetrated our day-to-day lives, and pervades now almost all aspects of human societies. The industrial, economic, financial, educational, artistic, and cultural domains are all relying on technologies. . . . Worldwide means of communication, real-time access to information, online processes, have all powered the acceleration of development. In that sense, the world has become a global village. Top universities and research centres now have an interdisciplinary and multinational approach. The kind of synergy this affords has been unprecedented.

The question whether science feels ethically responsible for its use does not concern many. Mahnich describes the current situation as sitting in a high-tech race car without a steering wheel or seat-belt. The impact here is at the planetary level, affecting *all* life.

Therefore it is vital that we look at the impact of globalization and technology on our societies, families, and ourselves collectively and at individual levels, socially and psychologically. The “shrinking”

phenomenon has put us all in a kind of “melting pot”. Diversity is fast disappearing. What have these rapid changes done to our minds, values, homes, lifestyles and relationships? Has this created an existential threat for us *Homo sapiens* in a digital modern society?

Sociologists have said that, on the one hand, we shall find more heterogeneous groups and, on the other, there will be more urban ghettos where the unwanted are weeded out and kept in boundaries. Today we are at the peak of individual freedom and yet, from time to time, unexpectedly, we exhibit a swarm mentality where there is no identity, only a collective frenzy. When there is no sense of belonging for each member of society, space for the individual diminishes and being part of a mob provides a sense of security and identity. These rapid changes do not allow any time for processing, and many feel completely lost. We need to gain a nuanced understanding of these paradoxes of contemporary times.

To Have or To Be

Erich Fromm, in his book *To Have or To Be?* says a shift in the American culture from “being” to “having” came with the Industrial Revolution. It became obsessed with “having”, and the amount of possessions dictated the “happiness index”, firmly rooted in the belief that money can fix any uncomfortable situation. This is in contrast with the oriental understanding that nothing external is responsible for how one feels within, and that no amount of external circumstances

can have any impact on one's state of mind.

This shift to "having" also led to "having things that are man-made", as opposed to the unlimited joy that life offers us freely. Goods became a status symbol and "false needs" were created. The "having" mode concentrates on material possessions with the resultant feeling of power and aggression, which is the basis of the universal evils of greed, envy, and violence; whereas the "being" mode is based on love, sharing, and engaging in constructive activity. Fromm feels that the struggle of these two modes of existence has affected the spirit of humankind. The simple act of examining in our daily lives, his dictum "to have or to be?" can save our threatened planet and also bring about a new social and psychological revolution.

One-Dimensional Man

Life is dynamic and full of subtleties, but the kind of narrowing of life and living that the current generation is experiencing is aptly and metaphorically described by the philosopher Herbert Marcuse in his *One-Dimensional Man* in a one-dimensional society. His argument is that the false needs created by the advanced industrial society integrate individuals into the existing system of production and consumption via mass media, advertising through subliminal means, and industrial management.

A few individuals dictate our perceptions of freedom by allowing us choices to buy happiness. He views consumerism as a tool for domestication of the population, a form of social control.

Irrational creation of new products, calling for the disposal of old products, or obsolescing of old products, continues. An individual loses his humanity and becomes a tool in the industrial machine and a cog in the consumer machine, all the while deluded to believe that he or she has the power to purchase.

According to him, in this state of "unfreedom" consumers act irrationally and buy more, work more to buy more, and ignore the psychologically destructive effects of waste and environmental damage, and search for social connection through material items, which become the basis for everything. Since the items are controlled by the industry, it is an authoritarian mechanism. As a result of the domestication of the population, the revolutionary potential in the West has declined to a minimum.

The concept of a "one-dimensional man" asserts that other dimensions of human existence have been eliminated. We live in times of social domination of man by man and totalitarianism can be imposed without terror, while people continue to feel that they are free.

Compulsion of "Becoming" in Liquid Modernity

Changes occurring in modern society are so rapid that the modern world is slowly losing any sense of solidity. Each new structure replaces the previous one, which is declared "old-fashioned" by date, not actually by its usefulness. Zygmunt Bauman calls it "liquid modernity" that is constantly in a state of mobility and

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change, constantly overthrowing the earlier forms, necessitating a constant change in relationships and identities. Change remains the only constant. He says:

Forms of modern life may differ in quite a few respects but what unites them all is precisely their fragility, temporariness, vulnerability, and inclination to constant change. To “be modern” means to modernize compulsively, obsessively; not so much just “to be”, let alone to keep its identity intact, but forever “becoming”, avoiding completion, staying underdefined.

The constant compulsion of “becoming” might result in an existential challenge. Modernity is always something new and different, a feature of modernity that is undetachable. In this chase to be modern there is no “final state of perfection”, an infinity of improvements with no end in sight and none desired. This creates a perpetual feeling of “incompleteness” in the person. Ours is one of the many societies all over the world that can claim to have young people committing suicide.

Society demands of the individual a constant search for identity with its own set of parameters for standardizing, and searching for an identity becomes a task. Being individuals in the liquid society means not merely being good consumers, but being competitive goods in the global market. Such a condition does not just require purchasing the “fashion items”, but also to purchase a “fashionable body” and assists in self-manipulation of our own physicality and of the next genera-

tion. Cosmetic surgeries are a common trend now and shopping for genes is not far away. Social media further assists in self-manipulation of our individual and family happiness.

J. Krishnamurti said that fear and desire are the two primordial forces propelling humanity in the psychological realm: desire to become, and fear of losing what one is, or not, becoming what one desires. This is unlike a flower that does not desire to become a flower, it flowers naturally. One can see how explosively this desire “to become” has been fuelled by modern society. It is not merely “to become” with a tangible out-come, but always being in the state of “becoming”; no longer a question of “more-for-me”, but “more of becoming”, reinventing oneself constantly.

This also has the element of self-deception, by not allowing a person to see how he or she is operating in this one-dimensional matrix, the common feature being “temporariness”. It is easy therefore for one to assume that randomness and uncertainty dictate the nature of things and that there is no inherent or implicate order. This may not merely put a colossal amount of stress on people, but it inwardly destabilises them. Given the nature of market economy that is ruling the world, the response of society to the above can be seen in the mushrooming of meditation techniques and gurus that a person constantly in the state of “incompleteness” can shop for, instead of addressing the root of the problem within oneself.

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True to its name, “liquid modernity” has no shape, but can take innumerable forms, and flow in an unpredetermined way. Evidence can most easily be seen in the contemporary approach to self-identity, where constructing a durable identity that coheres over time and space becomes increasingly impossible. Bauman says that we have moved from a period where we understood ourselves as “pilgrims” in search of a deeper meaning, to one where we act as “tourists” in search of multiple but fleeting social experiences.

Umberto Eco, an Italian philosopher, says that problems remain invisible to people born within a certain society. He talks about the upheaval in ideological values, the crises of different kinds, the unbridled individualism, and says that in this liquid society it is not easy to find a pole star to guide us and lead us to light. Was it perhaps easier when a Jesus or a Buddha walked the earth?

Impact on the Brain

J. Krishnamurti spoke about the crisis in human consciousness, where the brain will atrophy as people become more and more dependent on gadgets and automation. However, the stage of warning may have passed and we might be on an irreversible course.

Dr José Foglia, at the international TS Adyar Convention on 4.01.2018, spoke at length about how the digital revolution affects the brain and the challenges it poses to people socially and psychologically. Slowly, as its impact group becomes younger, developmental stages of

the brain might be affected. Given our increasingly digital environment, this might be a pervasive phenomenon.

The other existential crisis is the rise of dialectical thinking, which sees existing things “as other than what they are”, denying the possibilities present in themselves by arriving at the most economical and reasonable reconciliation of information. A flower, or a place, or a person is seen not for its inherent possibilities, but is reduced to facts given about it and later he becomes part of semantic memory.

When verbal language came into being, the manifested world got reduced to the “naming”, labels, symbols that stood for it. With the advent of computers, a binary mode of either/or reduced it to a caricature of what it is. Finally in a virtual reality, it is like an animated version of the caricature of the world, thus severing all possibilities of ever coming in contact with the real world or experiencing it in its fullness.

In this context, Krishnamurti’s teachings become the most radical and the *only* solution to the fractured psyche of the human race. He reminds us again and again that the word is not the thing. He exhorts us to see it in actuality, and not merely know it as a fact. He asks us to go to the crux of duality that knowledge is not the actual thing. It is very clear how we are fundamentally on a different course in this age of information where “data” rules supreme, power is synonymous with who is collecting and controlling data, has access to data, speed of transfer, and so on.

Digital Dementia

With regard to digital technology we have moved from addiction to dependence. Overuse of it has become necessary occupationally or due to the digital environment one is forced to function in. Constantly being in a binary mode of thinking brings about a disconnect versus the analog mode which has continuity.

Manfred Spitzer speaks of how overuse of digital technology can cause a breakdown of cognitive abilities, resulting in digital dementia. He cautions that short-term pathways in the brain will start to deteriorate due to underuse. He terms it “Technology-Induced Memory Atrophy”. Gradually people might lose the ability to think or interact with people face-to-face.

Functioning in a digital environment has impacted all the four types of memory — episodic, semantic, procedural, and working — bringing about an imbalance with semantic memory that is relied upon heavily and is seriously affecting our attunement to reality. Marcel O’Gorman, currently doing research on digital abstinence, states that the prosthesis has become confused with the organ, and we run the risk of experiencing events not as participants, but as recording devices.

One of the last cognitive domains to deteriorate is Procedural Memory, which enables people to learn skills that become automatic (unconscious). With people, and even children, spending 4 to 7 hours a day with gadgets, the domain remains underdeveloped. Working memory is in jeopardy as we allow the internet to inter-

rupt us in more and more different ways, affecting concentration, focus, and attention, resulting in though fragmentation. Today millions of children suffer from Attention Deficit Syndrome, which has led to hyperactivity and violent behaviour in extreme cases.

Spitzer concludes that children and young people are in danger of losing or not even developing cognitive skills; particularly at risk is “neuroplasticity”, the brain’s ability to adapt to new requirements. Children use media for long hours, and since everything which is perceived leaves “traces in the brain”, it is the impressions of digital media and not real-world experiences that leave their marks on the brain. The ability to process things from the real world atrophies as a result. Children are not likely to acquire these skills later in life because they have not been generated during the most important phase of brain development.

In this age of data, our education and society rely heavily on semantic memory, which is not based on real-life experiences but derived from printed text or by digital means, not connected with sensory experiences, emotions, and feelings, or by interaction with other people and living things. Outsourcing our memory to smart phones in more and more ways is catching up and dependence on gadgets at the micro level is common. Short-term memory lapse and brain fatigue are found even among youngsters. Digital fasts or taking a digital sabbatical has become a survival mechanism.

Development of the rational and fact-

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finding skills of the left side of the brain takes place at the expense of the right side, which is creative, imaginative, artistic, thoughtful, and intuitive. The left side measures, judges, analyses, whereas the right side synthesizes and perceives differently. There is increased activity in the left hemisphere on a vast scale today, leaving the right side untapped or underdeveloped.

Compassion and empathy are becoming weaker. Everything has become a commodity to be purchased and used. Mother Nature, the animal kingdom, and other human beings are commodities. Education is now perceived as “developing human resources. Exploitation of labour and human trafficking are on the increase in emerging economies. Wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of a few.

The Need to Reconnect with Ourselves

Many thinkers are of the opinion that the present crisis affecting our planet is unprecedented in millennia, with globalization, the media, and technology being the major factors. A sense of universal responsibility is missing as individuality and self-interest are at the core of everything. The sense of incompleteness is pervasive, and pleasure without accountability is the norm today, based on the premise that human beings are at the apex of the natural order and everything is made for their enjoyment.

Society has collectively turned into the second bird of the Upanishadic tale, who

enjoys, and not the one who observes. Rights are important and freedom of choice applies with regard to duties or obligations. Social media has invaded our privacy, and *what* should be posted on social media subtly starts controlling our lives. It is a dangerous situation where one has completely lost touch with what is authentic and spontaneous in its true sense. It denotes a kind of plasticity, metaphorically, ironically, and physically too — a made-up version that hides reality. To stretch the metaphor, plastic cannot regain its equilibrium.

Self-interest at the cost of the larger good has become the mainstay. The question now is, how do we bring about wholeness in our lives? How do we really reconnect with Nature and other living beings? How do we stop this centrifugal process and come closer to the centre of our being? How do we stop these essentially destructive activities and really reconnect with ourselves?

Theosophy has given to the world immensely valuable literature concerning man and his place in the universe, of the fundamental unity of existence, of the interconnectedness and interdependence of everything. Many theosophical teachings have now become part of the mainstream thought among environmentalists and social thinkers, with a deep undeniable realization that one cannot remain isolated anymore. We are in it together and affect each other *all* the time. But to know this to be true at a deeper level is the only way we can bring about a real change.

Theosophical teachings are replete

Reconnecting with Ourselves: The Challenges of Modern Society

with sutras, or aphorisms, on how to live. It exhorts us to give more than we receive; to lead a deeply altruistic life and have a profound and abiding respect for all living beings and for life itself. When this happens, there would naturally be a spirit of custodianship and a truly global outlook that can bring about a world without any frontiers or borders, not limited or confined by boundaries or ideologies, founded on equality, where men and women would treat one another and all living creatures and bounties of Nature with respect. Theosophy teaches us to be humble in the knowledge that we are a mere speck in the vast design of a universe which has an intrinsic order and rhythm. It is with this spirit of unity that we can truly make Theosophy a living power in the world.

Our heritage is the theosophical teach-

ings that will continue to be a beacon of light based on wisdom for the service of humanity. Wisdom, which is the highest quality of mind and can be awakened through self-transformation, shows that selflessness is the only way versus the self-interest that is the root cause of all the ills of the world today.

Radha Burnier said:

Life has immeasurable dimensions and subtleties. It is rich, creative, dynamic. Truth, being the discovery of the beauty and mystery of Life, is also necessarily without limit, a blessing without parallel.

We have morphed and radically altered this blessing into a one-dimensional phenomenon, impacting our lives in every way. There is an urgent need to re-examine ourselves, individually and collectively. ✧

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

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S. HARIHARA RAGHAVAN, *PUBLISHER*

Milarepa: From Sinner to Saint

CYNTHIA OVERWEG

SEATED in a barren and frigid cave high in the Himalayas, Milarepa meditated day and night, staying warm with the advanced yogic practice known as *tummo*, the ability to generate body heat by manipulating channels of energies within the body. Weak and emaciated, he had been meditating in remote mountain caves for many years, leaving only to beg for food. Because of his strict adherence to a vow of continual meditation practice, his body had shrunken to a skeleton, and his eyes were sunken and hollow. His only source of nourishment for over a year had come from an abundant supply of nettles he found growing near his cave. He had eaten so many nettles that his sagging skin had a greenish hue.

Death seemed imminent, but Milarepa's physical austerities had a clear and deliberate aim: he wanted to attain enlightenment or die in the attempt. So fierce was his meditation discipline that he refused to let even severe hunger interrupt his goal. When a group of hapless game hunters stumbled onto his cave looking for something to eat, they screamed in horror, believing Milarepa was a ghost.

He assured them he wasn't, as they ransacked his cave looking for money. Finding nothing, they beat him. Their cruelty filled Milarepa with compassion, and he wept for them.

A year later, a second group of game hunters showed up at his cave, but their attitude toward Milarepa was much different. They saw the value of his devotion to practice and offered him food. Milarepa told them: "I have received the oral instructions for attaining Buddhahood in one lifetime and one body. Having renounced this life, I am meditating alone in the mountains and devoting myself to achieving this enduring aim." The game hunters then left him alone to meditate.

Fortunately for Milarepa and the spiritual legacy he left behind, he did not die of starvation, and the green pallor of his skin disappeared when he stopped eating nettles and finally took some nourishing food. The beloved eleventh-century Tibetan saint went on to realize his cherished aim and then taught many others how to do the same.

Milarepa was a roving Tibetan yogi who devoted himself to meditation and

Mrs Cynthia Overweg is an educator and writer living and teaching at Krotona on the Perennial Wisdom linking East and West. Reprinted from the *Quest*, Spring 2014.

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tantric practice in caves across southern Tibet. What initially drove him to mountain retreats was an intense desire to overcome his devastating past, which included his participation in black magic, revenge, and murder. Feeling the weight of heavy negative karma and overwhelmed by remorse, he considered suicide more than once. But he found a gifted teacher who showed him a way out of darkness.

What his life shows, says José Cabezón, Ph.D., a Buddhist scholar who holds the Dalai Lama Chair at the University of California in Santa Barbara, is that “no matter how difficult one’s life has become or how many wrong turns one has taken, it is always possible to turn one’s life around”. But, at the same time, Cabezón adds: “Patience on the spiritual path and an apprenticeship to a qualified master are necessary to spiritual progress.”

Milarepa learned how to turn his despair into a spiritual practice that eventually transformed him into Tibet’s most revered yogi. It is said that he not only gained liberation in one lifetime, but also became a bodhisattva, a fully realized being who takes a vow to liberate all sentient beings through compassion and wisdom, no matter how long it takes. “There is always the sense that the bodhisattva starts out with basic altruism and then develops an ever more expansive vision of reality and compassion,” says Francis Tiso, Ph.D., a Catholic priest and Buddhist scholar who wrote his doctoral dissertation about Milarepa and has studied the Tibetan saint for thirty-five years.

“Only when Milarepa realizes that he needs to find the way to liberation ‘in one body and one lifetime’ in order to avoid the post-mortem consequences of his evil deeds does he go in search of a teacher who can show him the virtuous way of Buddhist practice,” explains Tiso, who has written a book on Milarepa and went to Tibet several times to do research. “We only begin to see Milarepa as a real bodhisattva much later in his life, when he encounters people in various desperate situations,” Tiso points out.

Milarepa was born in southwestern Tibet sometime around 1052 and died in approximately 1135. The specific dates of his birth and death are disputed by historians, but there seems to be agreement that he lived into his late seventies or early eighties.

Most of what we know about Milarepa’s life and teaching comes from his principal Tibetan biographer, Tsangnyön Heruka, a well-known, fifteenth-century, Tantric master. Milarepa’s story was made famous in the West in 1928 with the publication of *Tibet’s Great Yogi Milarepa*, edited by W.Y. Evans-Wentz, a Theosophist who also brought *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* to the English-speaking world.

To glimpse the epic journey of Milarepa’s spiritual metamorphosis and the mastery he gained over the nature of mind, it’s useful to tell the story that thrust him into an inner hell but also led him to seek Buddhahood. Milarepa was the only son born to wealthy parents who showered him with love and material comfort. His

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father, Mila Sherab Gyaltsen, named him Mila Thöpaga (“a joy to hear”), which proved to be prophetic, since Milarepa (*repa*: “cotton-clad yogi”) had a wonderful voice and instead of lecturing on the Buddhist teaching, known as the Dharma, he “sang” or narrated his own lyrical poems describing his spiritual insights and mystical experiences.

His mother, Nyangtsa Kargyen, also gave birth to a daughter, Milarepa’s younger sister, Peta. They lived an idyllic life with enough financial freedom to do as they pleased. But the good times came to an abrupt and tragic end when Milarepa’s father died of a mysterious disease when Milarepa was just seven years old. Although his father left a will with instructions on how his wealth was to be managed for the benefit of his wife and children, he did not leave the inheritance directly to his wife.

Medieval Tibet’s patriarchal structure usually placed women under the protection and domination of their male relatives. This was catastrophic for Milarepa, his mother, and sister, because his dishonest and greedy paternal uncle was put in charge of the family’s fortune. Soon after the funeral, his uncle and aunt confiscated their wealth, blatantly ignoring the dying wishes of Milarepa’s father. Milarepa, his mother and sister were forced to live like beggars without money to buy food or clothing. They were robbed of their dignity and everything they owned. Milarepa’s mother nearly went mad over the betrayal and the grinding poverty she and her children had to endure.

Once Milarepa was old enough to marry, his mother begged her brother-in-law and sister-in-law to return at least some of their money. But they taunted her by saying, “If you are many, wage war. If you are few, cast magic.” Powerless to change the situation, she asked her son to learn black magic to get revenge on their tormentors and on those who stood by and watched it happen. Her grief was so extreme that she vowed to kill herself if the treachery of her in-laws was not punished.

Milarepa agreed to study the black arts and wreak revenge. He left home and found a lama who taught him how to cause terrible damage with black magic. He developed malevolent skills with a powerfully focused mind and a sustained determination that set him apart from other practitioners. The first spell he cast caused his uncle’s house to collapse during a wedding feast when the house was filled with his relatives. Thirty-five people were killed.

Ironically, his cruel uncle and aunt were not injured, although their sons and wives were among the dead. But Milarepa didn’t stop there. He also sent a terrifying hailstorm that ruined his relatives’ crops just before harvest time. Mother and son now had their revenge, but they continued to suffer. Survivors of Milarepa’s destruction threatened to kill his mother, and she was treated from then on as an outcast. His sister, Peta, became homeless, roaming from village to village working as a servant and begging for food, while Milarepa stayed in the mountains serving

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the lama who taught him how to do so much harm.

It is at this point in the story that we are confronted with the full magnitude of the horrifying consequences of unbridled anger and wonder if there is any conceivable redemption for Milarepa. And that is an intrinsic element of the story: redemption is possible if you are willing to do the hard work of self-transformation.

Milarepa was haunted by remorse and a deep longing to be free from misery. Revenge was not so sweet after all. “At that stage of his life, he had delusions in his mind. Most of us are not murderers, but we suffer like he did from anger, fear, attachment, pride, and confusion,” says Amy Miller, a Tibetan Buddhist nun and director of the Milarepa Meditation Center in Vermont. “He realized he needed a guide to help him out of his self-absorption, and he found a qualified teacher.”

And so Milarepa left the lama who showed him the dark path to search for a teacher who could end his suffering. After failing with the first teacher he met, he was sent to the man who would open the door to his spiritual transformation. He is known as Marpa, “the translator”, a title that honors his translation of precious Tantric texts from Sanskrit into Tibetan. Marpa was married, had a son, and taught many students. He traveled several times to Nepal and India to obtain his own initiations, which included secret oral transmissions of Tantric teachings. Much later in the story, he gave these safeguarded transmissions to Milarepa.

Once under the guidance of Marpa,

Milarepa was put through a strenuous and pitiful apprenticeship in which he was repeatedly denied any teaching whatsoever. For many years, Marpa constantly tested Milarepa’s resolve by humiliating him in front of others and forcing him to build, then tear down and build again, a number of tall stupas. The treatment was harsh and sometimes unbearable. Milarepa broke down and pondered suicide, believing he was too great a sinner to ever receive Marpa’s teaching.

But Marpa was well aware of Milarepa’s past and his inner struggle. He was helping him cleanse his bad karma and teaching him to rid himself of self-importance and ego. Although Marpa knew that Milarepa was extremely capable, even destined to become his greatest pupil, it was not until Marpa was convinced that Milarepa had earned the privilege of learning a sacred and transformative teaching that he gave him instruction.

In today’s vernacular, what Marpa did might be called “tough love”, but there is also an esoteric underpinning to their relationship. Thus, Tiso suggests, it is important to reflect on the guru-disciple relationship. “The devotion that one experiences is not servile or obsequious; it has to come from who and what you truly are, which is a delicate balance of great humility — our nothingness — and our greatness, the divine body into which we are transformed by spiritual practice,” says Tiso.

Sensing that Marpa was the key to his spiritual regeneration, Milarepa gathered the inner strength to persevere. But Marpa

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continued to withhold his teaching, and Milarepa reached a breaking point. He left Marpa to find another teacher. After some twists and turns involving forgery and deceit, Milarepa returned and was finally accepted as Marpa's student. It was the first time since his early childhood that Milarepa had experienced something close to joy. It was as if he had been born again.

Milarepa began his spiritual unfoldment as Marpa (whose teaching lineage was from the Kagyu school handed down from the great Indian sage Naropa, who in turn received it from Tilopa) initiated him into the subtleties of Vajrayāna, which emphasizes Tantric practice and direct experience over book learning. "Tibetans believe that every form of Buddhism is capable of transforming the mind in positive ways, but only Tantra, the esoteric path, is capable of bringing about enlightenment in one lifetime", says Cabezón.

In the most advanced form of Tantric practice, known as the "completion stage", the goal is to "transform the physical human body into a body of an enlightened being, a nonphysical body of light", Cabezón explains. "Those who attain this are said to leave no physical remains behind at the time of death. Their bodies transform into light or rainbows."

Once Marpa instructed Milarepa in Tantric practice, he demonstrated the possibilities that awaited him if he could meditate without distraction for the rest of his life. Marpa caused his body to dematerialize and rematerialize to become his chosen deities, known as Hevajra, Chakrasamvara, and Guhyasamāja. He

also transformed his body into a lotus, a bell, and a sword as well as circles of light. The wondrous display of Marpa's powers filled Milarepa with happiness and the determination to have the same mastery over the constituents of his own body and mind. And he did exactly that.

After many more years of meditation and practice, Milarepa could transform his body into any form he wished, including fire and water. He also learned yogic flying — the ability to fly through the sky and travel great distances. On one occasion when he was flying over the countryside, he saw a farmer who lost a relative to his lethal sorcery. The farmer recognized Milarepa and cursed him. It was this encounter that solidified Milarepa's resolve to become enlightened not just for his own benefit, but for the benefit of all beings.

The allure of Milarepa's mystical attainments has captivated the Western mind for centuries. It is beyond the scope of this article to attempt to explain the Tantric practices that are supposed to turn an ordinary man or woman into something superhuman. Suffice it to say that Milarepa learned how to practice the Six Yogas of Naropa and Mahamudra meditation and, having mastered them, he became free of the mind's boundaries. It was a gradual process supervised by Marpa, which is also a central theme — the essential guidance of someone who knows the way to freedom. "The question is: 'How free do you want to be?' We're OK being relatively free, but when something bad happens to you, or you do something bad, what

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then?" asks Amy Miller, whose work at the Milarepa Meditation Center focuses on helping people discover their relationship to their own suffering.

Milarepa's life is filled with so many dramatic events that for the sake of brevity, only the highlights can be given here. Before we proceed to arguably the most compassionate moment of his life, mention should be made of his sorrow when he found the bones of his mother; his joy when reuniting with his sister; his wisdom when coming to terms with his aunt and uncle; and his gratitude for visitations from the mysterious *dakinis*, celestial female deities who gave him prophetic advice and instruction. But perhaps it is the final episode of his life that best illustrates his transcendent journey.

By his early sixties, Milarepa had attained enlightenment. He spent the rest of his life teaching his disciples, including a few women, how to achieve liberation. But his cave-dwelling lifestyle and lack of academic or monastic credentials sometimes caused jealousy among other teachers and brought him ridicule. On a cool autumn day, Milarepa was invited to be the guest of honor at a wedding celebration attended by his disciples and many other guests. In the audience was the man who would become Milarepa's assassin. His name was Geshé Tsakpuwa. The Geshé (a scholarly monk) had no use for what he viewed as Milarepa's pretence to wisdom. Wanting to embarrass him in front of the crowd, he asked Milarepa a number of intellectual questions about the Dharma.

Milarepa responded that to understand the nature of reality one should fast and meditate in the mountains. This felt like an insult to the Geshé, who kept challenging Milarepa on an intellectual basis. But the crowd booed the Geshé and told him to hush. Humiliated, the Geshé plotted a murderous revenge. And now we have come full circle in the story: revenge started this spiritual saga and reappears at the end of Milarepa's life.

Not wanting to kill Milarepa himself, the Geshé induced his girlfriend to poison him. To get her cooperation, he promised to marry her and gave her a beautiful piece of turquoise to sweeten the deal. They hatched a plot to bring Milarepa some tainted food.

The minute the Geshé's lover showed up with poisoned food as an offering, Milarepa knew what they were up to. Through his clairvoyance, he saw their devious scheme. When the woman offered Milarepa the food, her conscience took over, and she had a sudden change of heart. She begged him not to eat it, confessing that it was poisoned. But Milarepa believed his life's mission had come to an end and that his death could be used as a teaching on impermanence. He offered to purify her evil intentions and suggested that if she were to meditate, she could transcend the limits of her mind. He then told her the poisoned food could not hurt him and ate it. The implication is that Milarepa was choosing to die and that while the body would disappear, he would not.

When Milarepa showed signs of sickness, the Geshé came to see him, feigning

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concern. Believing that Milarepa had no spiritual power, he urged him to send the illness to his own body. Instead, Milarepa transferred the illness to the door of his retreat cell, which broke into pieces and crashed to the floor. Still not persuaded, the Geshé again asked Milarepa to send the sickness to him. Milarepa did so. The Geshé crumpled to the floor, writhing in pain, and nearly died before Milarepa withdrew the poison back to his own body.

Finally convinced of the yogi's greatness, the Geshé wept uncontrollably and begged for forgiveness. He vowed to practise meditation and to serve others. Pleased by the Geshé's sincerity, Milarepa offered to give him his teaching.

When the great yogi died, there was a miraculous display of light in the heavens with hosts of celestial beings honoring the saint. The air filled with fragrance, and beautiful flowers dropped to earth. Then Milarepa's body disappeared in a blaze of light that became a beautiful rainbow.

Francis Tiso summarizes Milarepa's voluntary death this way: "The choice to die becomes emblematic of the Kagyu tradition: to turn negative circumstances into skillful means; to identify oneself with ordinary humanity in order to liberate; and to emphasize spiritual practice and experience over scholarship and verbal expressions of Buddhist views."

We may never know all the facts about the historical Milarepa, and perhaps it does not matter. It was his relentless pursuit of spiritual realization in the face of his frightening past that gives his story a powerful transformative resonance that has endured for nine centuries and reaches far beyond the borders of Tibet.

In Milarepa's life, we can see shades of our own dysfunctional lives coexisting with our highest spiritual longing, and we can find inspiration to keep our own inner work alive. His arduous spiritual journey illuminates the sacred and the profane as one continuum in an ever-evolving human story. ✧

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Theosophical Work around the World

Argentina

The National Annual Summer School was held at the Theosophical Center in San Rafael from 21 to 28 January 2018. The guest speaker was Martín Leiderman, originally from Venezuela, and a member of the TS in America. He held a course in the mornings on the study of H. P. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* (SD) — Cosmogogenesis and Anthropogenesis. The general topic developed was "The Mystery of the Human Consciousness". The 65 participants were greatly encouraged to start or renew the study of this work by HPB.

An afternoon was devoted to a discussion by participants on education, whether Theosophical or within the national system. Mr Leiderman also gave a public lecture on "Plato: The World of Ideas" in San Rafael city, at the TS Lodge building, with about 70 in attendance.

Brazil

The Brazilian Section held its 37th summer school at Aracaju, in the northern region of the country, from 24 to 28 January. The theme was "Meditation and the Occult Side of Things", which was emphasized in many of the lectures that were given. Panels were conducted with an approach to the major meditation traditions around the world. Practical meditation sessions were conducted and

a meditative walk on the beach were part of the program. More than 100 participants were accommodated at the Aquarios Hotel in Atalaia beach.

Adyar

Adyar Day celebration started with the procession by students of the Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School passing through and singing at the portico of the Headquarters Hall.

In the main hall, the Adyar song (offered by Jaishree Kannan) opened the programme, followed by the opening remarks of International Secretary Ms Marja Artamaa. Mrs Nancy Secrest, international Treasurer, discussed the importance of Adyar and the wonderful atmosphere one finds here; Mr Akilesh Krishna, from the Krishnamurti Foundation, stressed the fact that Krishnamurti's teachings are the modern expression of the Ageless Wisdom; and Mrs Clemice Petter, a volunteer at Adyar, emphasized the great significance of Giordano Bruno's life and teachings, as well as the need to bring the scientific mind into the religious field.

Recent News

Two new Lodges received their Charters in January 2018: Brahmapura in Germany and Vidyasagar in Bangladesh.

Mrs Irena Primc was recognized as Organizing Secretary of the Slovenian Regional Association on 5 February, succeeding Mrs Blanka Blaj Borstnar. ✧

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