

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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THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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

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

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

Free Will and Compassion

TIM BOYD

H. P. BLAVATSKY makes the point in numerous places in her writings that Theosophy is the “accumulated wisdom of the ages”, passed down through countless generations of seers, and repeatedly “tested and verified”. While this should not be mistaken for a formal definition of Theosophy, it does give a sense. She also states that “to the mentally lazy or obtuse, it will always remain a riddle”. Although necessarily incomplete, these statements present the idea that Theosophy is not merely a collection of concepts and ideas, but that it is experiential. Equally, its recognition involves the intellect. The mental principle must be activated. While it is experiential, in the absence of some clear application of the mind, it remains a riddle. The growth of the quality of discrimination, discernment — a product of the cultivation of the mind — is a necessary agent to move beyond the surface of the Ageless Wisdom teachings.

Since the early days of the Theosophical Society, among members there has been a profound attraction to all matters related to the psychic realm. In HPB’s writings and the letters from the Mahatmas a good deal of cautionary

advice was given about fascination with psychic phenomenon and the agencies that produce them. That advice has been consistently ignored in the pursuit of psychic experience and phenomena.

Even to this day, when we look at theosophical publishing houses around the world, the books that are the most popular are on chakras, clairvoyant observations, matters of other planes, and the cultivation of capacities enabling one to function on those planes. Of course, all of this is a part of the theosophical approach, but the emphasis is skewed from the cultivation of the discriminating mind capable of testing and verifying at a deeper level.

The fact is that the Theosophical Society itself was founded based on psychic phenomena that were the rage of the moment in the 1870s. In *The Original Programme of the Theosophical Society* HPB says that she was sent to America in 1873 “for the purpose of organizing a group of workers on a psychic plane” — a group capable of influencing humanity from these inner planes. The chosen movement to advance a deeper view was spiritualism, which was receiving great attention in America

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and Europe at that time. It was thought that by linking the initial efforts of the TS to this worldwide, recognized movement, the broader context of Theosophy could be presented and the prevailing incorrect views could be expanded. We suffer the consequences to this day.

Whether one agreed with HPB's ideas or not, all the accounts of people who were around her confirm that she was remarkable. The people that gathered in her circle were some of the brightest minds of the era. Many shared descriptions of the wide range of phenomenal occurrences that were constantly happening around her: the tapping and other sounds that would come from the walls, the ceilings, the floors, inside of their own heads, levitation of a variety of objects, the production of physical objects seemingly out of thin air, the accurate pronouncement of information clairvoyantly obtained, and prediction of future events.

One example: HPB was a habitual smoker and rolled her own cigarettes. On more than one occasion she would be sitting in a meeting, surrounded by others, having left her tobacco pouch, papers, and matches in another room; she would summon them to her and they would move through the air, across the room, to her hand in full view of everyone there. This was a "normal" experience for people sitting in her presence. When you read H. S. Olcott's *Old Diary Leaves*, the range of phenomena that were witnessed by reliable people is extensive. This is what attracted many

of the initial members of the TS to the theosophical teachings. This is also what made it very difficult for them to move on from phenomena.

A. P. Sinnett was an early member of the TS who received 148 letters from the Masters of the Wisdom. Even he, having been exposed to a sublime wisdom from the highest sources, and having served as the person to translate these teachings into contemporary speech, ended his days attending séances. His attraction to phenomenon was irresistible.

From HPB's childhood all kinds of phenomena were happening around her. Early in her life these were matters that were out of her control. During the middle portion of her life she produced phenomena consciously with the intent of attracting attention to hidden things, and then providing the deeper explanation behind them. This is the period when she produced the famous tea cup that today is in the Adyar Museum. The problem was that people were definitely attracted by their craving for phenomena, but felt no need for the philosophy behind them, and their desire for more phenomena was limitless.

In her later life, HPB would use psychic powers only with the sincere students who had gathered around her. Particularly with the inner group of students she attracted when she was in England she would use her psychic abilities as a teaching tool. Annie Besant describes joining the TS and accepting HPB as her teacher, and how she had a question about how it was that HPB

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produced tapping sounds in the room. Besant describes the HPB held her hand above Besant's head; she felt an electric tingling and tappings started to take place on her skull.

During this process HPB was describing the various ways in which these tappings were produced through directing the elementals, with the will of the operator, it could be done *anywhere*. At the end of her life, having learned about the public's insatiable desire for phenomena, only with her inner group did she produce them.

In *The Secret Doctrine* HPB noted that "Whatever plane our consciousness may be acting in, both we and the things belonging to that plane are, for the time being, the only realities. The vast majority of humanity functions at the level of the mind of desire — kama manas, the mind that craves excitement. A major focus of the work of the TS has been the attempt to draw together a group of people who, through self-effort, can rise beyond the craving for phenomena, and for the various distractions from Reality.

The motive force behind the Theosophical attempt has been the idea that there is such a thing as free will. There is the possibility of making a range of choices that lie *outside* of the boundaries of normal habitual behavior. We each have that capacity. So the attempt was made to elevate the function of the TS as a whole, in order that the TS's work of elevating the level of humanity could be accomplished. This same work has been going on throughout human history.

All of the great teachers have tried in various ways to awaken us to the possibility that we can choose differently.

Blavatsky referred to Jesus as "a great teacher". She noted that to the people who were close to him, his disciples, he taught openly, but to others, to the public, he would teach in parables. He would tell stories that would be understood according to each individual's unfoldment of consciousness.

The last parable that Jesus gave is worth our consideration. It is called "The Parable of the Talents" — a talent being a large unit of currency that was equivalent to 60 pounds of silver. In that parable the master of a household, a very wealthy man, was leaving to go on a long journey. So he called his three servants to him and distributed his wealth among them. He gave to each one of them, according to their capacities. To one he gave five talents, to another he gave two, to a third he gave one, and then he left.

On the master's departure, the servant who had been given five talents immediately went and started to trade, and with that five he made another five. The same thing happened with the one that had been given two talents: he also took them and traded and the two became four. The servant who had been given the one talent was afraid to lose it, and also afraid of his master. He felt that he was a very hard man, so he took his talent and dug a hole, buried it in the ground, and covered it over.

After a long time the master returned to his household and called his servants

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to give an accounting for how they had utilized the wealth he had left with them. The first one came and said: "Master, the five that you had given me I traded, and I have made another five." So he returned ten to the master. The comment by the master was: "You are a good and faithful servant. I have trusted you with a little; I will place you in charge of a lot." The second one came and gave a similar message: "The two that you gave me I traded, and they have turned to four." And again the same response: "You are a faithful servant. You have been entrusted with a little, and I will put you in charge of much."

The last servant came and said: "Master, I know that you are a hard man and that you are one who reaps where you have scattered no seed, so I was afraid and took the talent you gave me and put it in a hole, but here it is, I give it back to you." The response of the master was: "You thought I was a hard man and wanted only to gather where I had not sown. If you had believed that, then you should have, at the minimum, given it to someone who would have given you interest, even if you were not someone capable of trading. I cast you into the outer darkness, and will take that one talent that I gave to you and give it to the one who returned to me ten."

In this final parable there is a meaning for what it means for the five becoming ten and the two turning into four. What is it about the one that is unchanged, which did not increase or decrease? One meaning speaks about the resources

that we all have available to us through karma, the ways in which we have developed over time, and what we do with those resources.

For the one who was cast out, the resources that were given to him were hidden in the material world, literally covered over by the earth, and unexpressed. There are those among us who enter into this world seemingly quite richly blessed with a wealth of inner resources. There are others who come with much less. In each case the question that we will eventually ask ourselves is how these resources were utilized.

One of the chief messages that we find again and again in the theosophical teachings is the message about the powers that are latent within us. Often we interpret those powers as psychic or clairvoyant abilities, but the chief power that is referred to in the teachings of *all* the great teachers is this one idea about compassion and the array of powers that reveal themselves in the exercise of this one power. Compassion necessitates kindness, a form of clairvoyance, enabling one to see the suffering and the need of another person.

Buddhist and Theosophical teachings speak about specific powers called "the paramitas", or perfections. Compassion necessarily involves the expression of the perfections, or paramitas: generosity, patience, perseverance, indifference to pain and pleasure, harmony, equanimity, wisdom. How do we utilize the various talents that are ours? It is not unusual to have people of great talent who because

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the fundamental powers of compassion is insufficiently developed, are unusable in a particular task.

The riches that have been bestowed upon us, the very fact that we find something like Theosophy, that we find

a place of expression, such as the Theosophical Society and the work it is doing in the world, gives us an opportunity to cultivate these talents, a field in which to plant the seeds that have already been planted within us. ✧

300. . . . Compassion is no attribute. It is the LAW of LAWS — eternal Harmony, Alaya's* SELF; a shoreless universal essence, the light of everlasting Right, and fitness of all things, the law of love eternal.

301. The more thou dost become at one with it, thy being melted in its BEING, the more thy Soul unites with that which IS, the more thou wilt become COMPASSION ABSOLUTE. . . .

307. Now bend thy head and listen well, O Bodhisattva — Compassion speaks and saith: "Can there be bliss when all that lives must suffer? Shalt thou be saved and hear the whole world cry? . . .

309. Thou shalt attain the seventh step and cross the gate of final knowledge but only to wed woe — if thou would'st be Tathagata, follow upon thy predecessor's steps, remain unselfish till the endless end.

310. Thou art enlightened — choose thy way.

The Voice of the Silence
Translated and annotated by
H. P. Blavatsky

* Sanskrit for the basis or root of all things, in its essence. (Per H. P. Blavatsky's *Theosophical Glossary*.)

Soul-Wisdom or Head-Learning?

N. SRI RAM

WHAT we call Theosophy these days was known in ancient India as *ātma-vidyā* or knowledge of the Self, also as *brahma-vidyā*, knowledge of that eternal Source, from which, it was said, all things emanate, by which all is sustained, and into which all return; both these descriptions have been given and treated as almost synonymous. It has also been translated as knowledge of a Reality underlying all things, a Reality to be found by each one within himself. In modern times, the term occultism has also been used and identified with Theosophy, although the two terms have obviously different connotations.

The occult science — the word “science” implies the existence of an observable truth, which observation may turn into a deep realization if one goes deeply enough into the nature of that truth — is concerned with the constitution of man and the universe in all their aspects, physical, psychic, mental and spiritual. Knowledge of the Self and knowledge of the nature of the universe have both figured in the exposition of theosophical ideas. There are books which seek to explain the universal process, and there are

also books and writings which concentrate upon the constitution of man, the nature of the being that he is.

The *Bhagavadgītā* speaks of “the field and the knower of the field”. That is the title of the thirteenth chapter of the book. Broadly the field may be understood as the whole realm of matter, or particularly as the expanse of primordial matter from which, through a process of differentiation and combination, matter as we know it is said to have come to exist. The knower of the field may be equated with Spirit or more understandably consciousness in its true nature and quality. Now the *Gītā* makes this statement, giving an insight into the fundamental nature of things:

Whatsoever creature is born, immobile or mobile, know thou that it is from the union between the field and the knower of the field.

In other words, that thing or creature has an aspect of object or matter which is observable and also an informing Spirit which is the subject, life or consciousness. We can understand this as regards living things, since they have a vesture of matter

N. Sri Ram (15.12.1889–8.4.1973) was the 5th international President of the TS, Adyar, since 1953 until his passing. Reprint from *The Nature of Our Seeking*.

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and also consciousness in some degree. But the statement includes also what we regard as non-living. There may not be in them consciousness of the sort that man possesses but there may be a capacity for response or an elementary sentience which is a form of knowing. If I feel with the hand the surface of a table, I come to know whether it is smooth or rough, soft or hard, and that is also knowledge. Even an insect knows, in its own degree and manner, something about the things with which it comes into contact, but the full meaning of the word “knowing” becomes revealed only in man when he has evolved up to a certain point.

If the word “knower” is not too narrowly interpreted, his nature must include the whole psychological process of man. In man consciousness exhibits a range, modes of motion, qualities and capacities which we do not find in any lesser creature, “lesser” as being not so evolved. Man is capable of love, of experiencing beauty in many forms, or even formless, various states of consciousness which mark him out from other sentient or intelligent creatures. Unfortunately he is also capable of psychological distortions and hallucinations from which no animal suffers, so far as we can tell, because the nature of his mind lends itself readily to pressures of many sorts. But the fullness of its capacity and its real quality are manifested only when it is in its original and unmodified state.

Being the knower to the extent that he is, man can engage in two different pursuits. He can sally forth into the vastness

of the universe, probe it as far as it comes within his reach; he can also enter into the depths of himself and thereby obtain a knowledge of the depth and vastness that lie within him, as yet perhaps only partially unfolded. He can study his environment, the whole field of matter with all its modifications and act upon it whether wisely or unwisely; he can also gain knowledge of himself which from within can modify the course of his conduct as well as all his relationships. When we say “himself”, we may not have a real or complete conception of what that word “himself” means.

Modern exact science aims at gaining knowledge of “the field”. In fact the scientists use that word and speak of various force-fields — gravitational, electromagnetic, and so on, all existing simultaneously in the field of matter. But there is not only the material field of which man has cognizance; there is also the psychological field which he can observe and survey, the mysteries of which he has to discover for himself. Psychology means an understanding of the nature of the mind, of feelings, will and emotions, in fact the entire nature of the action that takes place within oneself, in that nature which is not the physical body; but it is ordinarily considered to belong to the province of philosophy rather than that of science, because its theories and conclusions are not considered exact. It has been possible for man to measure the distances between the sun, the earth, and the other planets and calculate the vibrations of the electron, and these observations have been made with very consider-

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able precision, but as the movements of the mind are so personal and elusive, differing from person to person and moment to moment, and also difficult to show on a screen where all can view them, psychology is not considered an exact science like chemistry or physics. But this view did not obtain in ancient India. It was thought quite possible to obtain very precise knowledge of the nature of the human being in its entirety, of all the movements that take place within his heart and mind. But this study could be undertaken only by those who were able absolutely to eliminate what might be called the personal equation and see all things and themselves perfectly clearly as in a level and faithful mirror.

As the field around us may be many fields in one, layer upon layer, and not only that which is open to observation by us at present, so the being of the knower may contain various vestures, each with its special characteristics, constituting the totality of that being. The universe we are in may hold many things which it is not possible for us to know through any instrument that we can invent. In other words, there can be an occult universe with an extension, depth, and nature that with the instruments of modern science cannot be probed at all. No one can reasonably deny the possibility of the existence of unknown fields and of action of which we do not have any knowledge at present. With regard to such things we can only take into consideration whatever information comes from sources which seem to us knowledgeable, and use our

own judgement and discrimination. We cannot explore this occult universe with the faculties we possess, but there have been persons who have attempted to do so and given information with regard to it. What they say can be valuable, but that must be judged by oneself. If any of these sources is invested with an authority which all are expected to accept, then such imposition of their ideas, even if true, becomes a hindrance to the exercise of one's own free intelligence. If we lay down for general acceptance what we think is authoritative and what not, such a course would stereotype certain ideas, and prevent not only a proper evaluation of them but also any development possible beyond them. It is important for one's own growth and unfoldment as well as for the good of humanity that one should have the freedom to come to his own understanding, and not be content with borrowed ideas, perhaps only superficially understood on the basis of words that have been used to convey them.

The observation of the so-called knower has obviously to be direct, personal and by oneself. The description or words of another will not give one the necessary knowledge or realization. If someone describes what love really means, but you do not know it for yourself, he can say as much as he likes about it but you will be none the wiser for it, being unable to translate it into terms of your own experience. You must have experienced or felt it to know what is being said. Similarly, if a person does not know what beauty is, if he has not experienced

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it, there can be a whole encyclopedia on that subject but he will not be able to gain any real knowledge about it. There may be other similar states of consciousness which have to be realized within oneself and by oneself.

Inevitably self-understanding becomes an understanding of life and mind. These terms include the whole range of experience which a man can have, his conduct, his thinking, reactions, feelings and the concepts he can form of such principles and qualities as justice, morality, courage and so forth. The terms "life" and "mind" sound very simple, but they cover a vast ground, waiting to be explored.

Life means action and relationships. Relationships can be with things, persons and Nature, and these can be such as to reflect the true nature of one's being or give rise to problems and difficulties. All our problems arise from the fact that the entity that operates in us or as ourselves is not the pure knower. The so-called knower in ourselves is a prejudiced knower, conditioned in various ways, by race, religion, nationality, customs, and many other things. The mind that constitutes him or it is a restless and burdened mind.

But there *is* the possibility in man of his mind and heart being so transformed that he can not only know truly, but also act with the wholeness of his being in various ways. The self, with which we identify ourselves, is a mixture of light and darkness; light in so far as it includes a mind which is capable of knowing however dimly at present, darkness because this mind is moved by reactions and

passions not pure, but coloured. It is darkened by the colouring which it absorbs. When you eliminate the self from the knower what remains is only the process of knowing, and that brings with it a quality which can make life very different from what it has been.

It is only such knowledge of oneself that can turn into wisdom, not knowledge of the field, except as it is related to the knower. Everything we touch, or observe, even in passing, has a certain impact on us. We cannot separate the world around us from what we are within ourselves because the two are related. But it is not knowledge of the things outside oneself which produces wisdom, but knowledge of how one reacts to them, what one is, knowledge of the possibilities to be realized in oneself, the whole depth, span, and nature of what we regard as ourselves.

We should bespeak the special attention of those who seek Truth, that is, something beyond their worldly pursuits, to this aspect of Theosophy, which includes the understanding of the self, the whole movement of thought, all the emotions and feelings associated with it; the response to and the experiencing of beauty; questions of morality and right action, as well as what rightness consists in; in short an understanding of life in all its forms and aspects. As one addresses himself to this task, one realizes what a vast field the knowledge of oneself really covers. One may recall the words of the poet: "Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass, stains the white radiance of eternity." It may seem a meaningless pageant, mere

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motley, or endless drudgery, the same old motions, experiences and monotony without end. Shelley's words express the truth that behind life as we see it and know it, that is, life as a process of time, there is a timeless reality the knowledge of which flashes upon us at rare moments. The "white radiance" is that of the truth or beauty which that reality conceals. It is in a state of purity within oneself that the real colours of life are seen, and they are not the colours perceived by a mind darkened by the processes of time, by experiences of the past and projections of the future.

Says *The Voice of the Silence* by H.P. Blavatsky: "Remember above all to separate head-learning from soul-wisdom. Even ignorance is better than head-learning with no soul-wisdom to illumine and guide it." What does soul-wisdom mean? Is it attainable, or is it too mysterious, not for us at all? Is it something imagined, invented by someone according to his fancies? We shall know its quality and nature perhaps only when head-learning is out of the way. If soul and life are not apart, it must be a wisdom which, springing from within oneself, imparts to life its proper colour, depth and intensity. Any kind of learning, whether of modern science or *The Secret Doctrine* or anything else however wonderful, can turn into head-learning, un-related to life, verbal and prosaic, if we do not bring to it this quality of wisdom with all that it means. One can go on acquiring information but

that will not by itself make life a thing of joy or an expression of the truth that is within ourselves. On the contrary it can make life unmeaningful, ponderous and dull. Learning from books is not necessarily better than right action of other sorts. It is the quality with which we invest the activity that gives it its true value.

What is called for is not only the study of books, but also of life, "all the life that surrounds you", in the words of *Light on the Path* — life of the human being, the animal, the bird, the plant, anything that may be called life. It says further: "Learn to look intelligently into the hearts of men", that is, of the people you meet at any time. "Regard most earnestly your own heart." This does not mean becoming absorbed in one's own emotions and feelings. "Earnestly" means not superficially but with attention and interest. Reading books does not give insight. It is life which gives insight, and insight means penetration, going beyond the words into the depths, the real meaning of things.

We have to discover a way by which Theosophy or the Divine Wisdom can become for us a vital pursuit, not a purely formal and intellectual affair, a matter of cramming or the acquisition of a jargon. Theosophy is not head-learning, not even knowledge of the ordinary sort but something much more precious. It must mean wisdom, as distinguished from knowledge of the ordinary sort. It is knowledge of the essential truth of things. ✧

An Inquiry into Truth and Beauty

BARBARA HEBERT

TRUTH and Beauty, the primary concepts upon which the theme of the 2018 International Convention is built, are intrinsic in the theosophical world view, as we have heard from so many of our speakers. They are eternal principles that are inherent in the Ageless Wisdom. However, the tremendous depth of these perennial concepts requires study, discussion, and contemplation. They may raise questions for us, both from a philosophical and a practical point of view.

We will explore a few of these questions, such as, What is Beauty from the Theosophical perspective? What is Truth from the perspective of the Ageless Wisdom? What is the relationship between them? How do we implement these abstract concepts in our lives? As seekers on the spiritual path, we have an almost instinctual desire to search for and ultimately realize, to the best of our ability, the eternal principles known to us as Truth and Beauty.

Many of our speakers have said that Beauty is in the eyes of the Beholder. What one person perceives as beautiful may not be perceived by the next person as beautiful. The same may be said of truth . . . in

the non-theosophical world, that is. What one person perceives as the truth may not be perceived by the next person as truth. We see this often in our world. One person believes the image of Christ on the crucifix is beautiful while the next person sees the image of multi-armed Siva as beautiful. One person's truth is that bad behaviors will result in an individual spending eternity in the fiery pit of hell, while the next person's truth is that consciousness does not continue after death. These differences in perspectives, among many others, have been the cause of strife and disharmony among people, religious traditions, and countries since the beginning of recorded history.

Within the perennial wisdom tradition, the concepts of Beauty and Truth are perceived in a very different way. They are understood as emanating from another realm of consciousness — from a field beyond this phenomenal world in which we live. The depth of these concepts is probably beyond the comprehension of most, if not all, of us; yet, as seekers on the path of divine wisdom, we are almost compelled to seek, to the best of our ability, the depth

Ms Barbara Hebert is President of the Theosophical Society in America. Talk delivered at the international Convention, Adyar, on 2 January 2019.

An Inquiry into Truth and Beauty

of meaning behind Beauty and Truth. Let us explore what the concepts of Beauty and Truth mean; how they are related to one another; and, perhaps most importantly, how we can incorporate them, at least on some level, into our daily lives as we tread the spiritual path.

The motto of the Theosophical Society is: “There is no religion higher than Truth.” From this, we may understand that Truth (with a capital T) lies beyond any spiritual or religious tradition. Truth stands alone as the Ageless Wisdom. It has always been and will always be. It is the Ultimate Reality, as opposed to Maya, the illusory world in which we live. One aspect of Truth, as shared in the theosophical teachings, is that all life is one. This is the basis for the first object of the Theosophical Society. We, and everything around us, are an expression of the One Life . . . or whatever we may choose to call it.

Take a moment and look around . . . everything you see is the One Life, all of the things you see — brothers and sisters; trees, dogs, flowers, birds, insects — all of these are expressions of the Ultimate Reality made manifest in this phenomenal world. We are looking at aspects of the One life. How glorious, and truly how beautiful. Expressions of the One life . . . This must be Beauty. And we are surrounded by it every minute of every single day, if we would only recognize it.

If the Ultimate Reality, the One Life, whatever we call it, is Truth, then it must also be the highest form of Beauty. Beauty is Truth, and Truth is Beauty. The equivalency of Truth and Beauty is not a new

idea. Tagore said that “Beauty is truth’s smile when she beholds her own face in a perfect mirror.” John Keats spoke very similarly: “‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’ — that is all ye know on Earth, and all ye need to know.” Even St. Augustine had a few words to say about the relationship of Beauty and Truth: “Beauty is the splendor of Truth.” This is why we are compelled to seek Beauty and Truth — when we find one, we find the other.

I am not sure if we can totally experience Beauty and Truth while living in this physical existence, but we can find glimpses of it, moments of inner knowing that something is so right, so joyous, so other-worldly, so indescribable that we know in our heart of hearts that it is Truth. It changes our perspective on the world. Everything that we see and experience has that intangible feeling of Beauty, with a capital B, because we have glimpsed Truth.

These ideas, while beautiful, are just that — ideas. We must move beyond thought and implement these ideas into our daily lives. Self-transformation, self-regeneration, expansion of consciousness, whatever we call it, we must change ourselves so that we can change the world. It is through this process of self-transformation, self-regeneration, that we begin to incorporate Truth and Beauty into our lives.

From a very practical perspective, it is reasonable to ask: how do we do it? Minute by minute, I think. It is a process that requires time and effort. The more we can stay in a state of calmness and balance, listening to that still inner voice, the more

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likely we are to find glimpses of Truth in our everyday lives. When we focus on the idea that everything we see and experience is an expression of the One Life, then we begin to see Beauty in all that surrounds us. We strive to glimpse Truth, we see Beauty.

Once again, it sounds so simple to say, but, at least for me, it is very difficult. It requires constant attention to one's thoughts, feelings, behaviors, actions and reactions. Former international president Radha Burnier writes in her book, *Human Regeneration*:

Since regeneration is the purpose of the Society, the nature of the work must encourage awareness of what we are doing and thinking, of our prejudices, our hidden dislikes and desires. The mind must become more sensitive, perceptive and intelligent, and sense the inner nature of life, its meaning and beauty. Regeneration involves this qualitative change of consciousness . . .

Self-observation is key. With self-observation, we learn to recognize those thoughts, behaviors, feelings, and reactions that require change. Without awareness of the need to change, we cannot make the change. Once we are aware of the need to change, then we can begin to make changes. The first step, then, is to become aware of what needs to be changed, or, to use Radha's word "regenerated".

Regenerating or changing is a process. It takes time and practice. It reminds me of babies learning to walk. They begin to

pull up, see a whole new world, and experience a sense of autonomy and independence like no other. Then, they begin to take a step, fall, get up, and begin again. This is how we change as well. We start the process through self-observation and find a whole new world, and experience the freedom that change can bring. We begin to make the changes, and we fall — or at least we fall back into our old ways — but we try again, and again, and again, until finally some aspect of self-transformation has occurred.

Making changes in our thoughts, our feelings, our behaviors, and our actions and reactions helps us as we traverse the spiritual path. We, hopefully!, find that we are calmer and more balanced. We can more easily hear that still small voice within. We move a step closer to that "field beyond" — and we have made an impact, however small, on the consciousness of humanity. As Rumi says:

Always remember you are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, smarter than you think and twice as beautiful as you'd ever imagined. Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself.

Let us be wise and change ourselves. In this way, we are more likely to catch glimpses of Truth and to recognize the Eternal Beauty with which we are surrounded. We are more likely to realize that we are both a part of and surrounded by the glorious expressions of the One Life — Truth and Beauty and to step more closely to A Field Beyond. ✧

Self-knowledge — The Quest for Truth

CLEMICE PETTER

THE Theosophical Society (TS) encourages the study of comparative religion, and states that there is no religion higher than Truth. So it seems important to go into it and see if we can explore the connection between Truth and self-knowledge. Why is it so important to start with self-knowledge?

In the Preface to *The Voice of the Silence*, Blavatsky wrote:

The Book of the Golden Precepts — some of which are pre-Buddhistic, while others belong to a later date contains about ninety distinct little treatises. Of these I learnt thirty-nine by heart, years ago. To translate the rest, I should have to resort to notes scattered among too large a number of papers and memoranda collected for the last twenty years and never put in order, to make of it by any means an easy task. Nor could they be all translated and given to a world too selfish and too much attached to objects of sense to be in any way prepared to receive such exalted ethics in the right spirit. **For, unless a man perseveres seriously in the pursuit of self-knowledge, he will never lend a willing ear to advice of this nature.** (emphasis add)

From this short extract it is clear that without self-knowledge there will be no willingness to listen to teachings that are of a different nature than the selfish “me and mine”. It says that self-knowledge is the first step into the realm of Truth. Self-knowledge is to lay the foundation; it is the starting point for those who set sail toward Truth.

Human beings have lived on illusion, in darkness, which is ignorance, and many believe that this is natural to the present stage of humanity’s evolution. But it may not be so. If we look very closely we may see that humanity has not been searching for Truth, even though all religions say they are. What the majority of people is interested in is an easy, comfortable way of life, but if one is looking for something known, like comfort, one is already not interested in Truth, because Truth is the unknown, it cannot be recognized, because it is always new, does not repeat itself, cannot be held in one’s hand, cannot be carried over to the next day.

And this is part of the difficulty; human beings are afraid of change, of letting go of the known, which is our conditioned way

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of life — however miserable it may be, we are unwilling to let it go. There is identification and a certain sense of security in the known, in being sure, in thinking we know what to do, and how to react when facing life. But life does not ask for permission; it changes. And being so heavily loaded with all kinds of theories and formulas about how to live, what is right and what is wrong, it is impossible to flow with life. We resist, we want to apply our dead yesterday's solution for the fresh, living, now. And this breeds all sorts of misery.

To start the quest for Truth, the first step is self-knowledge. Let us go into it and see why it is so. When we want to look at the sky through the telescope, the very first thing to do is to make sure that the lenses are the right ones and are clean, that all the adjustments are properly done, that the whole instrument is precise, so that we can see without distortion. In the laboratory the scientists are very meticulous with the microscope also. It is of fundamental importance that the equipment is precise and adjusted correctly, so that whatever is going to be observed will be seen without distortion. Otherwise the whole work will be useless, cannot be trusted, and the result may even be disastrous. In the same way, to investigate Truth the first step has to be about the instrument, the equipment that we have for this investigation. What are we going to use as an instrument in the quest for Truth?

The only instrument we have is the mind. It is obvious and necessary to understand how this mind works, how it

behaves, its reactions; its motives and illusions have to be observed. If this mind, which is the instrument, is not precise, clear, clean, free from knowledge, wants and wishes, from likes and dislikes, it will distort whatever is seen and the outcome of it is more and deeper illusion. The accuracy of the mind lies in its capacity to empty itself continuously, never to accumulate. And the art of emptying itself is the art of living. To empty itself the mind has to have a certain quality of awareness without identifying itself with what is going on. The mind has to have the capacity of being impartial, not personal or impersonal. It is important to make clear that it is not possible to be unbiased as long as there is the "me" projected by a divided, confused mind.

As long as the mind feels separate, such as thinking in terms of "me" and "you", it cannot be impartial; the only thing to do is to observe the fact that one feels separate, without putting in an effort to be one with others, but only remain with the fact, the feeling of separateness. The "me" cannot be one with the whole, because the moment one says "I am one with the whole", there are still two ("I" and "the whole"); it is not unity. Also the mind likes to act, and it may project a state that it thinks is impartial, but this projection is another form of illusion; it will detach itself, be cold, indifferent, and we may call it detachment, but this brings with it the seeds of cruelty. Attachment and detachment are the two sides of the same coin, the same movement of the mind. It is the same as if we were in a room and saw that the part of

the room where we are is not clean, so we move to the opposite side of the room; but we are still in the same, dirty room.

A mind that is divided cannot possibly imagine *that* which is whole, because the moment it imagines, it already divides. It is like trying to make a single ice block by putting water in an ice mould that is divided into many small compartments, the result will always be many small ice cubes instead of a single ice block. We can change the shape of the mould, have it round or square, but the ice will still be divided. To see something as a whole we need to look at it with a mind that has no division, that is pure, not contaminated by ideas, ideals, prejudices, and judgments — the “me”.

It is not enough to think that we can stop judging or having formulas for life. This process of trying to apply formulas to something new, that is going on right now, has to be understood. It cannot possibly be stopped by will, by discipline, for any such formula or way of discipline comes always from the past. Humankind has been trying to change through formulas and discipline for millennia upon millennia and has not succeeded. It will never succeed because it is impossible to see what *is* with eyes blurred by stagnant muddy dogmas. The work we have to do is to understand, to have a mind that is constantly learning and not accumulating knowledge and techniques. Techniques dull the mind, and repetition of formulas for life is the enemy of Truth.

At the very beginning of *The Voice of the Silence* we find: “Having become indifferent to objects of perception, the pupil

must seek out the Rājā of the senses, the thought-producer, he who awakes illusion.” Here Blavatsky states that the King of the senses is the thought-producer, and by producing thoughts it awakens illusion. So illusions are the product of thoughts. Since the King of the senses is constantly producing thoughts, it is also continuously awakening, breeding illusions. And as long as there is no understanding of this process, it will go on. Ignorance of this process is the ignorance of one’s self.

We live in illusion because there is no self-knowledge. We do not know what is going on inside our own house, our mind, how it operates, how this “me” came into being, why it reacts this or that way, or why it reacts at all. Why is it not still? We do not know. But we like to think we know, and for that we have created many theories and practices about how to live, how to behave, how to breathe, without ever trying to understand the basics in our self. Why is it that we get so angry when things do not go the way we wish? Why this need for control, even though we know that the most important things in life we cannot control: things like when we are born, into which family, who is going to come into our life, who is going to go away, or the day of leaving the physical body.

So we never go into that which is the most basic, and yet we want to know about the creation of the Universe and how it works. It is as if a child who does not know how to read and write says that she wants to go to the university and learn all the complex subjects without mastering the basics, which in our case is the

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understanding of the illusion called “me”, how it came about, what the root of it is. This is the foundation where we need to start the quest, and yet these are the questions we are running away from.

Why have theories about everything become so important? Is it not because, in fact, we do not know, and the mind cannot stay with not knowing? It feels it is in danger and it wants to feel safe, secure, and immediately accepts a theory or explanation and is satisfied with it. The mind is satisfied with words, which have no meaning in daily life at all. What *has* meaning in daily life is what we are doing, why we are miserable, unhappy, aggressive and ready to fight back the least provocation; and killing is not only physical, in fact the most destructive way of killing is psychologically, with words, and gestures and we never even think about it. Apparently we do not see the power of words. What *is* important in daily life is to see the greed, jealousy, envy, competition, and the brutality of power. And all that is going on despite all beliefs, ideals, and theories one may cultivate.

Truth lies in small things; it is not something far away from daily life. Truth is in everything, in every second of life. It cannot be perceived because we look at life with a mind of yesterday, a mind that is made blind by superstitions, dogmas, beliefs, and formulas about life — what *should* be — which is the projection of a distorted, unbalanced mind, that has no contact with what *is*, and therefore projects what should be, the ideal. To understand, to see how the mind has distorted

itself, how it constantly breeds illusions that are destructive, to be aware of the consequences of it, and what we are doing to our self and to the Earth, is the beginning of self-knowledge.

We are ignorant of our own ways of thinking, behaving, and of being. And it is this ignorance that has created this terrible world in which we live, and without self-knowledge, do what we will, perform rituals, pray for peace, run to the church every Sunday morning for the rest of our lives or sit quietly in a corner as much as we wish, none of this will help us to see Truth, simply because those things do not make for the understanding of oneself. They do not help us to understand our relationship with our wife and children, with money and property; they do not affect our daily life. As soon as one fulfills the duties in the church, or temple the same old way of behavior goes on.

To understand ourselves there has to be passion, there has to be the urge for understanding. And we have to be very honest in this matter. We need to be honest about what we are seeking, what is driving us. Is it that we want to feel secure or have some hope and comfort? Or are we seeking to achieve or get something, like enlightenment? If that is the case, I am afraid there will be great disappointment, because in this Quest there is no achievement; it is not something one will get at the end. In fact, there is no end to self-knowledge, one cannot say “I know myself” at any point. The moment one says it, it becomes a lie; there is no fixed entity to know, only the thought process that created the illusion called “me”.

We are living things, always moving, changing. One can know a door or a car; those are dead things that do not change much. But human beings are living, in flux; they cannot be “known”. Then we may ask, how shall I know myself if there is nothing to know? This is the beauty of it, as long as one does not know the thought producer, as long as there is no self-knowledge, there will be the illusion of a separate entity called “me”; one feels very strongly that one is separate and goes on strengthening this. But the moment the mechanism that has created this illusion and sustains it is seen, it falls apart and the mind starts to be aware, awake all the time; it is no longer put to sleep by all the rubbish created by thought. And this is the beginning of Peace or Truth.

There is a good story to illustrate this, a myth about vampires, creatures who act only in darkness, so they go out at night and sleep during daytime. It is said that they have to find a dark place before the sun rises, because if the light touches them, they will turn into smoke and disappear. In the same way this “me” exists only in darkness, in ignorance. When the light of understanding touches it, it turns into smoke. To be able to see without distortion is the first step. And, as J. Krishnamurti said: “The first step is the last step.”

To see without distortion one needs to understand the whole process of breeding illusion, the whole process of one’s mind, and in this process of understanding oneself, one has to walk alone, for it is all about one’s *own* illusions and distortions. The only help we can and *will* find is in

relation with each other, because it is in relationships that this “me” reveals itself, that one can see one’s motives, ambition, jealousy, greed, justifications and ways of escape, all likes and dislikes, the self-importance that one carries through life, the sense of being superior or inferior, and so on. To be able to really see, one has to look, to be aware, first of all, of one’s ignorance. As Blavatsky pointed out: “The first necessity for obtaining self-knowledge is to become profoundly conscious of ignorance; to feel with every fiber of the heart that one is ceaselessly self-deceived.”

Without self-knowledge there is no basis to know where to start from. One’s thinking is distorted by all the things created by thought, so there is no possibility for clear understanding. The movement of a mind that works in ignorance is “to conclude”, and conclusions are fixed, stagnant pools that bring further confusion. Whereas understanding has a different nature, it is flexible, flowing, and makes space for further understanding. It does not shut the door and says “I know”.

If one sees through a biased, tendentious mind, it is like when one drives a car that has its steering wheel pulling to one side. One cannot go far with such a mechanical problem, it has to be taken care of. Similarly, if our mind is of an orthodox nature, full of conclusions and knowledge, it will always pull into the direction of its conclusions. One cannot move, it brings paralysis. So to clear up the instrument, to make it clean, pure, meaning, not contaminated with this “me”, is the first step of a long journey into oneself, into

the unknown. As J. Krishnamurti pointed out, it means “freedom from the known”.

We have no time to play around anymore, human beings are destroying themselves, not only physically, in endless wars and conflicts of all sorts, but also psychologically. There is selfishness everywhere; the whole structure of society strengthens this structure of the “me”. Our education is designed to strengthen it, small children in school are being encouraged to be competitive, and we grow up being taught that we have to be “first”, have to get the best job, the best marks, and so forth; we are taught to look for the approval of the world, to search for the applause of others. And in this process of seeking recognition instead of Truth, we lose ourselves.

The world has become highly technological and we do not know what to do with all this technological advancement. If humanity does not change, it will be disastrous, because we are going to use technology to destroy each other; this is already happening. Those who are somewhat interested in the welfare of humanity, who love humankind, have a tremendous task, which is *not* to change the world out there. The task is to change ourselves! to learn about ourselves. After all, the people who have tried to change the world have only created more havoc. The communists have tried to change the world and look what has happened, the totalitarians, the dictators, have all tried to change it, and some have even done it in the name of god. The result, we all know, is more and more misery.

Let us not fool ourselves thinking the

world can be changed by the same kind of people who have created it, by the same mentality, the selfish mind, the mind that is concerned with “my” country, “my” religion, “my” culture, “my” salvation, and so on. The world can and *must* change, but it can only happen if you and I are willing to transform ourselves completely. For a new civilization to come into being a new kind of people have to come first, a new kind of human being, with a different mind and heart, a heart capable of love, and a mind that is not divided, a whole human being.

There is a very good video of J. Krishnamurti where he is talking with children in the Rishi Valley School, he talks about corruption and explains that passing money under the table, bribing, black market and so on, are just symptoms and not the cause of corruption. He goes on and explains that the real cause for corruption is self-interest. If we are willing to look into this teaching we will see how deep inside it goes. This means that we cannot fight corruption by fighting the symptoms only. We may need to take care of the symptoms, but the most important is to cure the disease that is creating the symptoms. If we go on only handling symptoms and never looking at the root cause of it, the malady will strengthen and spread like weed.

The solution is to go to the core of the problem and find the cure for the disease. Once the disease is cured the symptoms disappear naturally, we do not have to concern ourselves with them. Self-interest is the cause of all human problems; it has

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many subtle symptoms that show themselves in our relationships, such as fear, anger, jealousy, suspicion and so on. Self-interest comes from the idea of separateness, which is an illusion projected by a restless mind. A mind that is in constant movement, jumping from one want to another. Desires and cravings are storms agitating the surface of a deep sea. If we can go deep inside, we will find out that whatever happens at the surface does not disturb the calmness found in the depths of our being.

To find out what is True and false in life one has to start with oneself, with one's daily life, to understand our relation with our neighbor, with the man that brings the milk, with servants, the beggar on the

street. But this is too simple, it will not give fame, no one will know, there will be no applause. As long as we are looking for our own aggrandizement and achievements there will be no hope for humankind. Let us be honest at least in this, let us be aware of what we are looking for.

If we are looking for Truth, we have to start with humility, because one does not know what life may bring. We need to be humble and accept life as it comes, and be happy that one is no longer contributing to further misery in the world. But if one is looking for applause, we must also be aware that one may get it, but with it *also* comes all the misery and calamities that we know so well. So, it is up to each one of us. ✧

There is a state beyond our efforts or effortless. Until it is realized effort is necessary. After tasting such Bliss, even once one will repeatedly try to regain it. Having once experienced the Bliss of Peace no one would like to be out of it or engaged himself otherwise. It is as difficult for a jnani (realized person) to engage in thoughts as it is for an ajnani (ignorant person) to be free from thought.

The common man says that he does not know himself: he thinks many thoughts and cannot remain without thinking.

Any kind of activity does not affect a jnani; his mind remains ever in eternal Peace.

Sri Ramana Maharshi
Talks with Sri Raman Maharshi

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

Truth comes in a flash.

Truth or understanding comes in a flash,
and that flash has no continuity;
it is not within the field of time.

Do see this for yourself.

Understanding is fresh, instantaneous;
it is not the continuity of something that has been.
What has been cannot bring you understanding.

As long as one is seeking a continuity —
wanting permanency in relationship,
in love, longing to find peace everlasting,
and all the rest of it — one is pursuing something
which is within the field of time,
and therefore does not belong to the timeless.

J. Krishnamurti
The Book of Life

Evolution of the Higher Consciousness: An Interview with Pablo Sender — II

JOE HASIEWICZ

Joe Hasiewicz: In Chapter IX, you talk about “scales of consciousness”. How far can the practices we have just discussed take us along these scales?

Pablo Sender: According to HPB, in any mental perception there are seven scales of awareness. The first four are of a physiological nature and relate to how a physical perception is transferred to our awareness. Then, there are three purely mental levels, the highest of which is a bridge to *buddhi*. Of these three, the lowest is our regular daily thinking, which is conditioned by our education, experiences, prejudices, and so on.

At the second scale, comes a higher level of mental awareness in which we are free to decide what impressions we take in. For example, if we get upset about something, in the lowest of these levels, we just react. But if we can raise our consciousness to the next scale, we can say, “I see that I am upset, but I am not going to get entangled in the reaction.” In other words, at this level, when dealing with our thoughts and emotions, we can talk ourselves into doing the right thing. There is a certain freedom here.

Finally, there is the highest mental level, which she calls “spiritual apperception”, meaning “self-perception”, and according to her, the state of spiritual self-perception reaches the *higher manas* — a level that can be illumined by *buddhi*. I propose in the book that this state of spiritual apperception is one of pure *self-perception*. And once we enter this state of spiritual *self-perception*, we can “watch” whatever emotions, thoughts, or problems happen to be there.

If we can step back and watch without getting drawn into the reaction, and just remain aware, then, suddenly, everything disappears, dissolves, because a higher order comes down. I think this is what she is referring to in the article called “The Great Paradox”, where she writes:

When first he thus succeeds in thus retreating into himself, he seeks there only for refuge from the storm in his heart. And as he struggles to control the gusts of passion and desire, he realizes more fully what mighty powers he has vowed himself to conquer. He still feels himself, apart from the silence, nearer akin to the forces

Mr Joe Hasiewicz is President of the Wheaton-Olcott Lodge of the TS in America (TSA). This interview was held on 19 July 2018, at a public meeting of the Lodge in the TSA Headquarters, Wheaton, Illinois.

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of the storm. How can his puny strength cope with these tyrants of animal nature?

This question is hard to answer in direct words; if, indeed, such an answer can be given. But analogy may point the way where the solution may be sought.

In breathing we take a certain quantity of air into the lungs, and with this we can imitate in miniature the mighty wind of heaven. We can produce a feeble semblance of Nature: a tempest in a tea-cup, a gale to blow and even swamp a paper boat. And we can say: “I do this; it is *my* breath.” But we cannot blow our breath against a hurricane, still less hold the trade winds in our lungs. Yet the powers of heaven are within us; the nature of the intelligences which guide the world-force is blended with our own, and could we realize this and forget our outer selves, the very winds would be our instruments.¹

She is saying that emotions are forces of Nature and, when we approach them from the personal level, we have little chance of winning, but if we realize that we are the whole, then the whole can defeat the storm.

JH: Strangely enough, I experienced something similar today, sitting in a train car, going over the questions that I was preparing for this interview. I typically like to sit in what is designated as the “quiet car”, where, during the rush-hour commute, people are asked to respect the sign and remain quiet. So a woman with two “talkative” children sat down across the aisle. Usually I get irritated when that sort of thing happens, but I thought to

myself that this was a perfect opportunity to practise self-observation. At first, it was not easy to separate myself from the distraction, and then it was not easy to disentangle myself from the irritation, which, as you say, is a powerful thing that draws you in. But I thought that this could be done. I did not say anything to them, as I normally would give a gentle reminder — I just sat and observed, and eventually the irritation dissipated.²

PS: It is a strange phenomenon, because we could say that we are separating ourselves from the irritation (in the sense of avoiding being dragged into it), but it is also equally correct to say that we are embracing it completely — becoming one with it. It is an attitude that is difficult to explain. We just stay with it, with full awareness, until a higher force or reality — allegorically speaking — comes and sets everything in “order”. It feels like this order comes from outside, because “I”, as “the thinker”, am not producing it.

JH: What is the source of this “order”; is it intuition?

PS: Yes, if by “Intuition” we mean *buddhi*. To respond from the highest scale, when there is a reaction in our personality, we need to do two things at the same time: avoid fighting the reaction, because any attempt to control or manipulate it introduces *duality*, a quality of the lower *manas*. But at the same time, we cannot allow ourselves to be absorbed by the reaction, which is also the operation of the lower mind (as *kāma-manas*). These two options — reacting and fighting the reaction

— belong to the first and second scales about earlier. In the highest scale, that of spiritual apperception, we are embracing the reaction, but we are keeping ourselves as witnesses of it. As a result of this, we feel as if there was a space between us and the reaction. It is in this state that *buddhi* can come into play — producing the state of *manas taijasa*.

We watch the reaction and after a while, fifteen minutes or two seconds — it depends on the situation — the reaction disappears. Sometimes it disappears suddenly, from one second to the other, but most of the time, it just disappears slowly, until we are no longer upset.

JH: However, must we not have the patience and stamina to wait it out?

PS: Patience, stamina, and courage also. We do not like negative emotions, so we try to do something about them because they are uncomfortable. Staying with the discomfort is not that easy. But then, we also need the basic skill of being able to focus our minds on something, without distraction. If we are not able to pay steady attention, it will be difficult for us to stay in this state of apperception.

JH: As we develop the ability to access this “taijasic state” more frequently, what should we aim for next, in terms of our spiritual evolution?

PS: In teachings to her inner group, Blavatsky says:

The student . . . should fix the fourfold consciousness³ on a higher plane and nail it there. Let him make a bundle of the four

lower and pin them to a higher state. He should centre on this higher, trying not to permit the body and intellect to draw him down and carry him away.⁴

This is always the practice — to see how deep we can go and stay there. It reminds me of the famous Buddhist Heart Sutra.⁵

There is a state of consciousness that seems to be always receding; I call it a “dark silence”. As we gain ground, we look inside and there seems to be nothing there. There is emptiness, only silence. But if we keep practising, we start noticing that what seemed to be just emptiness and silence, is really full of subtle thoughts that we did not notice before, then, gradually, peace and harmony appear, a feeling of joy, a silent sense of being, and so forth. Based on my limited experience, I think that we just have to keep “pushing”, in the sense of dwelling in the highest state that we can possibly reach, until the silence recedes and we “move on”. This will show us the path. We just keep discovering subtler and subtler aspects of ourselves.

JH: We talked about the practice of self-observation, where we observe our psychological, emotional, and intellectual movements without involvement. Other practices described in *EHC* are based on HPB’s “Diagram of Meditation”, where we conceive of the various expansions in time and space. How can we combine these practices? Are they in any way dependent on one another?

PS: I do not think that they are dependent on each other. I think that we need to see

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what works for each of us, individually. I go through moods. Sometimes my mind is active, other times it just wants to be quiet; sometimes I have a lot of energy, other times I do not have as much. We have to adapt the practice to whatever we can do at the time; or at least this is how it works for me. If I feel drawn to silence, I would not use a technique when I have to ponder over something, or to visualize. When my mind is too active to stay effortlessly in silence, I use techniques that direct mental activity in the right direction. The techniques we find in Theosophical literature are all different aspects of an overall single practice and attitude designed to help us move toward the goal of spiritual evolution.

The “Diagram” is a wonderful tool to use in our daily life. I would not call it “Diagram of Meditation”. (In fact, this diagram came from notes taken by a student, so we do not know if this name was given by Blavatsky.) Rather, this is a Diagram of Living — living from the higher nature. It is as if she was saying, “You have to perceive as the higher nature does. Don’t get yourself caught in the limitation of your body.” Our body may be here, but not us as consciousness. We are everywhere. If we can live with this in the background, sensing that we are everywhere, then we will see that we will arrive to the same state discussed in the other approaches — that of quiet witnessing. ✧

Endnotes

1. *H. P. Blavatsky, Collected Writings*, vol. VIII, Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1960, p. 128.

2. JH: The experience is not always the same. In a subsequent event, some months after this interview, a comparable situation occurred, again in a quiet car, where two women, probably unaware, sat down and began talking. This time the feeling was more intense, bordering on anger. I again shifted into the mode of self-observation, but this time the experience was different. I began focusing inwardly on a level that was something other than the daily thinking and emotional levels. I observed this moment of anger within myself and I wanted to stop because it was rather uncomfortable, yet I persisted observing, but this time I felt that it was in a different sort of way. Eventually, the anger disappeared rather suddenly, as if I had woken up. I am not sure how long it took. This time, I had the distinct sense that I had changed or defeated something, and it was followed by a sense of peace.

In his *Self-Culture*, I. K. Taimni writes: “The first point we have to note is that control over our emotional nature can be acquired only in circumstances from which we generally seek to run away. It is only in conditions of stress and strain that we can acquire that conscious mastery over our lower nature which is a prerequisite of real spiritual development.”

3. In Theosophy, the four lower levels are part of our personal consciousness.

4. *The Inner Group Teachings of H. P. Blavatsky*, Point Loma Publications, p. 61.

5. From the Heart Sutra: “*Gate!, Gate! Pāra-gate! Pārasaṃ-gate! Bodhi. Śvāhā!*” (Go! Go! Go beyond! Go completely beyond! To enlightenment. Amen.)

The Internal and External Work of the Theosophical Society

GASPAR TORRES

“THE Internal and External Work of the TS” was the most important talk that Radha Burnier shared with the members of the Cuban Section of the Theosophical Society (TS) during her last visit to this country in 2004. (She was in Cuba on three previous occasions: 1987, 1993, and 2000.) Studying her lectures keeps alive her presence, the memory of her dedication to Theosophy, to Wisdom, in the highest meaning of the word. We still have her invocation used in her first Convention as international President of the TS, which reached Cuba via *The Theosophist* journal of January 1981, and it is still used by most of the Cuban Lodges. This is a link we have with her that will endure. What follows refers to one of the Inner Founders of the TS, that is, to one of the Masters of the Wisdom, and his Letters.

Letters of the Masters

The importance of the Letters of the Masters is fundamental. As explained by H. P. Blavatsky (HPB), C. W. Leadbeater, Annie Besant and other great leaders of the TS who had contact with these Great

Beings, it is known that it is not that They communicate with each other, or have opportunities for cooperation, but that They constitute a conscious Unity, the Hierarchy, or Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood, as they are called in theosophical terminology. In that Hierarchy there is only one relationship, as expression of the Unity of Life, of wisdom applied to action, as help to the Plan of Evolution of the Logos. However, They do not have an unlimited capacity to help inferior kingdoms, because this relationship requires that certain standards be met.

These Inner Founders, especially the two who took the responsibility with the TS, Masters M. and KH, received A. P. Sinnett’s request to be instructed by them, to answer his questions, and would help him more directly. Master KH particularly — as has been said, due to karmic reasons of gratitude — agreed with, first Sinnett and then A. O. Hume, that they could receive answers, help, communication, and so on.

But in order to establish this communication, They had to use two beings

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related with them that still belonged to the human kingdom. One was a disciple of the Master, possibly an Initiate from the Far East, and the other, HPB, who sometimes was in India and other times in London or in another country. The language limitation, in the case of the disciple, and the occasional health limitations to which HPB was subjected, resulted in a certain weakness in these communications. That is why we can never take anything that appears in the Letters as the absolute truth. (This is in addition to the fact that the Absolute Truth cannot be put into words.)

Nevertheless, the Letters contain an incomparable collection of teachings that the Master communicated, eventually, to humanity, thanks to the authorization given by his Superior the Mahachohan that those Letters could reach their addressees. In the letters addressed to Sinnett is found the largest treasure, as they add up to more than 100. They inspired Sinnett's work, *Esoteric Buddhism*, which along with HPB's *Isis Unveiled*, constitute the first great wealth of modern theosophical teachings.

The real theosophist is a philanthropist

Mrs Burnier says in her conference that one of the inner founders of the TS wrote: "The real theosophist is a philanthropist; and philanthropy does not mean only distributing food and clothing." And she explained it by again quoting the Letter of the Master: "Live not for yourself alone, but for the world." She explains that HPB also said that the TS is above all a universal brotherhood, and that this is the only secure foundation for universal morality.

The Masters insisted on this since the beginning. Sinnett protested and one can say that he was not able to understand; this was one of his limitations. He was a titan and had an obvious link with the Masters, but he did not understand the meaning of "universal brotherhood". He insisted on trying to attract the attention of the world about these phenomena. Master KH refused, and when he left the correspondence with Sinnett in the hands of Master M., Sinnett insisted again and M. also refused.

Universal brotherhood is most important, and Mrs Burnier insisted on it: "We give Brotherhood superficial meanings." We give it a sense of external courtesy, instead of focusing on the reality of the fact that although we may feel, think, or act differently, we are brothers in only one being. This brotherhood cannot be based on anything but understanding the differences those of opinion, of the emphasis that the great religions have had in their respective missions in the world, and so forth.

Dogmatism

Further on, Mrs Burnier said: "This is the reason why, since the very beginnings of the TS, these Masters in their letters gave us the instruction of refusing any form of dogmatism, and usually we think that dogmatism is the attitude assumed by certain religious persons."

Religion is the wisdom brought to humanity in a particular historical, religious, political, and social context. When we adequately look at each one of the great religions we can see that it has encom-

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passed a stage of civilization. But we cannot find in history a single religion free of dogmatism, or that has maintained its original purity until the present. The proof is in the three great Western religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Dogmatism cannot be present in the TS if the latter aspires to realize its mission. Sometimes persons with vested interests want to give importance to the comparative study of religions so that certain dogmas of religious institutions can be imposed within the TS. The comparative study of philosophy, science, and religion does not at any moment include dogmas of any religious institutions, if the Masters' legacy is studied intelligently. We need to study in a comparative fashion what unites all religions in the Divine Wisdom, which lacks the possibility of dogmatic expressions. The moment there is a dogma — for example, “If you don't attend mass you will go to hell” — that will be outside of theosophical study. This is very important, and Mrs Burnier emphasized this in her conference.

Nowadays the same thing is happening in the field of science. In *The Secret Doctrine* HPB gave proof, referring to the development of the universe and of humanity, that materialistic science was and will be totally wrong, as long as it does not study man in an integral manner and continues referring only to the physical shell.

For their part, Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, while studying the atoms of physical matter, published several articles that later became part of their book *Occult Chemistry*. They said that atoms were

divisible, that they were composed of a series of sub-particles and that there were force fields between them. This book remained in most of the libraries and scientists rejected it, as they did with *The Secret Doctrine*. Today the former has been republished and is being corroborated by Australian and Canadian researchers who have been able to develop the same type of vision.

Our mind and thoughts

“We are not prepared to examine the attitude that exists in our own mind.” This is the great problem that Mrs Burnier raised. We know that the human mind has conscious levels that we try to use in our daily life, but there are subconscious and unconscious, and we have to try to establish contact and develop the supraconscious and supramental part if we wish to accelerate our evolution. When the human being progresses, it is going to better integrate all these aspects. None of us can believe that only our thoughts motivate our actions and opinions, because there are other levels on which there are a burden of prejudices, childhood traumas, and experiences from previous lives — so not everything is as simple as it looks.

Nobody can guarantee that what they think today is a definitive decision, and that what we do, say, and feel today is what our whole being has determined. It may be that this is the result of the work of the most superficial part of our mind functioning through the brain, and that when we awaken tomorrow we may realize that some inferior aspect has dragged us, and

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that a different, superior one begins to inspire us.

That is why we should constantly go over our life, as recommended in the *Golden Verses of Pythagoras*. Before going to sleep it is good to examine what has been done, lived, thought, talked, and felt; be glad for the good and decide not to repeat the undesirable. Daily, before sleeping, we need to reevaluate our life, and then get up next day with the purpose of doing what is right, just, good, and noble. It is also important to be sincere and look at why we failed and what is it in our unconscious or subconscious mind

that betrays us and causes us to be so fallible. Mrs Burnier said that in that way we would avoid falling into what is the most harmful for humanity: prejudice and lack of will to change our thoughts.

She tells us that prejudice is a curious thing, that human nature had been the same for millennia, and that since the Mahatmas wrote those letters there has not been any change, as prejudices have continued. Today some people disagree and say that the mind has freed itself of many things, but it does not look like that is the case. We have to work to reverse this situation. This is our fundamental work.

Let us not be too easily satisfied. Let us not think that there are nice people in this world. Of course there are a lot of nice people, even in this unpleasant world. But being nice is different from being free of self-centredness, self-preoccupation, the self in its varied manifestations. The fundamental change has to do with rooting out the self completely — not necessarily in one day. It means really working for *nirvana*, for *nirvana* is “putting an end” to the egoistic self.

Radha Burnier
Human Regeneration

Where Did I Come From?

RABBI RAMI SHAPIRO

WHERE did I come from? Your answer to this question is influenced by your answer to the previous question, “Who Am I?” If you imagine yourself to be somebody, which is what most people imagine, then your answer to the question “Where did I come from?” is “I came from somewhere other than here.”

The somebody most of us imagine ourselves to be is not the somebody we are at the moment. This somebody changes physically, emotionally, and intellectually all the time. Since most somebodies want to be somebody who is recognizable over time, most somebodies imagine that they are somebody else, somebody other than the impermanent self of this moment, somebody that occupies a set period of time between birth and death, and perhaps (as we shall see in the next essay) even beyond death. Most somebodies imagine a soul.

This soul is not a world soul or the singular, infinite, and eternal Subject behind the I-I of Ramana Maharshi that manifests as each “I”, but a personal soul that is your unique “I”. Since this soul is somebody else, most people who imagine this soul imagine that it comes from somewhere else.

I once had a fascinating conversation with a Catholic priest who defended his Church’s objection to birth control by explaining that all as yet unborn souls stand in a heavenly queue waiting for an egg to be fertilized so that they can then inhabit that egg and be born into a human body. Since contraception prevents conception the next soul in line is prevented from inhabiting what should have been the next fertilized egg, and the entire soul-line is slowed down. Birth control really is not fair at all.

Of course if these souls were already in heaven, I could not help but ask my friend why they would want to come to earth at all, knowing that by doing so they risk moving on to hell. His answer was simple and compelling — at least to himself. Souls had to be born into bodies so they could be baptized and thus reserve a spot in heaven.

“But that’s my point,” I said, “If they are already in Heaven. . .”

The conversation went on a bit, but his answer was basically this: it is a mystery. We will come back to this notion in our next essay dealing with heaven and hell.

The point here is that the soul, as most of us imagine it, is just a bigger notion of

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ego, the “I” we imagine ourselves to be, when we imagine the story we tell about this “I” is real, and that the “I” itself exists outside the story itself.

The problem with the notion that “I came from somewhere else” is that you are never really comfortable with where you are now. You don’t really belong. You are alien.

I am writing this shortly after the Boston Marathon terror attack. One of the two brothers is dead, and the other is currently in the hospital suffering from extensive blood loss due to multiple gunshot wounds. The younger brother we are told came to the United States at the age of nine and, up until a week ago, seemed to be well assimilated into American life. His older brother, on the other hand, never seemed to fit in. He was alienated from the United States, and his alienation helped turn him into a terrorist and a murderer. He then influenced his younger brother and caused him to become alienated as well, and to ultimately murder and maim people for a cause they both convinced themselves did fit: jihadist Islam.

This is what happens when we do not belong. We become alienated, isolated, and have no concern for the place we are, yearning instead for the place we would rather be. In the case of jihadists that place is heaven as their version of Islam defines it. But do not imagine this other worldly alienation is unique to Muslims.

“Look, the earth just isn’t my concern,” a Christian neighbor told me once. “I’m not going to be here all that long. God gave this planet to us to use as we see fit.

We can do what we want to it, it’s heaven that really matters.”

Of course not all Christians and Muslims feel this way, but those that do make it clear what it means to be alien. People who believe this way treat the earth as renters often treat their apartments — poorly.

Things are quite different if your answer to the question “Where did I come from?” is “here”. If you come from here, you care about here. If you come from here you belong here. There is no alienation. The renter is now an owner.

The author and humorist David Sedaris was being interviewed by Terri Gross recently, and he explained that when home in England, he would walk an eight-mile stretch of road around his house and pick up trash. According to Sedaris, the British are notorious litterers. He did not do this as an act of protest, or to raise the consciousness of the British people regarding littering. He did it because it needed to be done. He did it because this was his neighborhood and he wanted it to be clean.

Here in Tennessee people are more litter-conscious, but every once in a while I see drivers dump trash out of their cars. I once saw a student of mine empty out his car ashtray as he pulled into a campus parking spot. I asked him why he did this, and he said, “I don’t like to see the mess or smell the ash in my car.”

“But you don’t mind seeing it on the ground of your campus?” I asked.

“It’s not the same,” he said without a tinge of guilt. “I practically live in my car.”

When we come from somewhere other than here, we do not mind littering here at

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all. After all, we are not going to be here all that long.

Alan Watts often spoke about our origins. In one talk he asks us to imagine space aliens doing a flyby of planet earth before the birth of life. “Just a bunch of rocks”, they would say and keep on going. A few million years later they fly-by again and the rocks are teeming with people. “We were wrong”, they say to one another, “these rocks were peopling”.

The Perennial Wisdom, a shared core of mystical teachings found in almost every religion, is about the earth peopling. But more than that, it is about the Absolute universe-ing, galaxy-ing, planet-ing, tree-ing, cloud-ing, you-ing, and me-ing, and so on. The Absolute includes the relative the way an ocean includes its waves.

We are, as Watts puts it, as natural to the universe as apples are to apple trees. Or to put it another way, we and all existence are the way God is God.

In English “God” is a noun, and we speak about “God” the way we speak about any other object. In Hebrew, my spiritual mother tongue, God is a verb. When you read an English Bible and come across the word “Lord” or “LORD” you are reading a terrible euphemism for the Hebrew verb “YHVH”, a future imperfect form of the verb “to be”. YHVH is the is-ing of reality, that birthless, deathless and ceaselessly waving ocean in which all waves (all existences) rise and return.

Our entire western worldview is influenced by our obsession with nouns. Yet there are no nouns in Nature: nothing static, fixed, or unchanging. Everything

is a verb, alive, fluid, creative in its own way. Everything is dancing, and that includes us as well. We are part of the dance of God or Nature; we are waves of the infinite sea of creativity.

Let’s look at how this is found in several different sacred texts.

The whole world is pervaded by Me,
yet my form is not seen.

All living things have their being in Me,
yet I am not limited by them.

Nevertheless, they do not consciously
abide in Me.

Such is My Divine Sovereignty that
though I, the Supreme Self,
am the cause and upholder of all,
yet I remain outside.

As the mighty wind, though moving
everywhere,

has no resting place but space,
so have all these beings no home but Me.

(Bhagavadgītā IX.4–6, Bhagavad

Gita: Annotated & Explained, p. 71)

This teaching from the *Gītā* is a beautiful expression of panentheism, the notion that God is the all in which everything resides and of which everything partakes, but that is still greater than anything at all. *The whole world is pervaded by Me, yet My form is not seen.* The reason God’s form cannot be seen is that God has no form. God is the act of forming (and deforming and reforming).

When I teach this to children I often use different shaped bowls and vases. I begin with a large pitcher of water and pour that water into a tall thin vase. We discuss the shape of the water in the pitcher and the

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shape of the water in the vase and notice that these shapes are very different. I then ask, "So what is the shape of water itself?"

Without settling on an answer, I pour the water into a round flat cake pan and then into a rectangular bread pan, and ask the question again, "So what is the shape of water itself?" It does not take long for everyone to agree that water takes on whatever shape there is, but has no shape in and of itself. What is true of water is true of God. God takes on all shapes, including yours, but is of itself no shape at all.

If the word "God" is a problem for you, substitute "Life". The point is the same: you belong here the way everything belongs here because you and everything else are an organic expression of here. Or, as the Muslim teacher Al-Ghazali wrote, "There is nothing in existence other than God." (Al-Ghazali, Book 1: The Eighth Foundation)

The Stoic sage Marcus Aurelius says the same thing in his *Meditations*: "You must now at last perceive you are a part of this universe." And Jesus says the same when he says, "I am the vine, you are the branches." (John 15:5)

Jesus offers a more nuanced understanding in the *Gospel of Thomas*, logion 50: Jesus said:

If they ask you, "Where are you from?" reply to them, "We have come from the place where light is produced from itself. It came and revealed itself in their image." If they ask you, "Are you it?" reply to them, "We are its Children. We are chosen ones of the living Father." If they ask you, "What is the sign within you of your Father?"

reply to them, "It is movement. It is rest."

Let us take this one slowly. "We come from the place where light is produced from itself." What kind of place is this? How can anything be a product of itself? Think of the sun — which is all light — producing the rays of the sun that are also all light. Think of the ocean — which is all water — producing waves that are also all water. We are an expression of the One the way sunlight is an expression of the sun and waves are expressions of the ocean. We are not other than the source, just not all of the source. We are the source source-ing, just as sunlight is the sun shining and waves are the ocean waving. This is what Jesus means when he says we are the children of this infinite reality.

The last line of this text is my favorite: If they ask you, "What is the sign within you of your Father?" reply to them, "It is movement. It is rest." What is movement and rest but life itself? What is the sign that we come from this singular reality? Life. Or, as the 19th century Hindu saint Ramakrishna put it, "God Himself has become the universe and all its living beings . . ." (Ramakrishna, *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna: Annotated & Explained*, p. 161). Or as the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart taught:

The more God is in all things, the more God is outside them. The more God is within, the more without.
(Aldous Huxley, *Perennial Philosophy*, p. 2)

The Perennial Wisdom is the wisdom of belonging. It is the wisdom that comes when we understand reality as a singular verb of endless creativity. ✧

Truth and Beauty in Our Daily Life

ISAAC JAULI

H. P. BLAVATSKY (HPB) states in *The Key to Theosophy*: “If Eastern comparisons may be permitted, Theosophy is the shoreless ocean of universal truth, love, and wisdom, reflecting its radiance on the Earth, while the Theosophical Society (TS) is only a visible bubble on that reflection.”¹

This invisible bubble of wisdom is available to human beings when they decide to apply it to daily life. As Master KH asserts in Letter No. 68:

Does it seem to you a small thing that the past year has been spent only in your “family duties”? Nay, but what better cause for reward, what better discipline, than the daily and hourly performance of duty? Believe me my “pupil”, the man or woman who is placed by Karma in the midst of small plain duties and sacrifices and loving-kindness, will, through these faithfully fulfilled, rise to the larger measure of Duty, Sacrifice, and Charity to all Humanity — what better path towards the enlightenment you are striving after than the daily conquest of self, the perseverance in spite of want of visible psychic progress, the bearing of ill-fortune with that serene

fortitude which turns it to spiritual advantage — since good and evil are not to be measured by events on the lower or physical plane.²

This common life is endowed with sufficient spiritual weight to be studied as a frame of real reference of personal and social growth. Here we ask ourselves the existential question which directly concerns almost every woman and man: Can daily life, the ordinary everyday life, that of the common citizen, the housewife, the employee, the businessman, and so on, be the type of life that deserves to be fully lived, make people happy, and be, if we may say so, a practice to discover beauty, and truth?³

We think it can be the beginning, that daily life is the best path to travel on every day, where we find our way and follow our destiny to fully realize ourselves. Time and time again, it is suggested that our ordinary actions in daily life are the heart of the field where our personality develops and improves itself.⁴

Already in ancient Greece, the philosopher Plato proposed three concepts that would be assumed in future centuries as

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the greatest values of humanity: truth, beauty, and kindness. He took the definition of beauty to the metaphysical level, that is, elevating it to spiritual beauty. In this way, he deduced that beauty is what everybody wants, identifying it with kindness and truth. This was the ideal “platonic” beauty.

Plato’s concept about beauty includes both physical and spiritual, of bodies and artistic objects, both colors and sounds, and also laws and moral attitudes. Therefore, beauty is good and true, goodness is true and beautiful, and truth is good and beautiful.⁵

Later, Plotinus (AD 205–270 Roman philosopher, born in Egypt) affirms, as Plato did, that beauty is in life, not only in its forms, but also in something that hides behind forms and is identified as “soul”. Beauty is not found in forms, but in its “radiance”. The soul is what makes

us perceive that radiance in all things. All forms, have a light of beauty, truth, and goodness.⁶

Only through daily life, with an orientation towards beauty, truth, and goodness, can we find the path to improving ourselves and deriving a new theological philosophy of daily life, at our stage of development, which turns our attention to Life. We need to get to the point where our Divine Self or “I” is the guide of every daily act and thought, in ordinary life. As HPB affirmed:

I have just told you that the *ideal* efflorescence of all the abstract, therefore undying and eternal qualities or attributes, such as love and mercy, the love of the good, the true and the beautiful, that ever spoke in the heart of the living “personality”, clung after death to the Ego, and therefore followed it to Devachan. ✧

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