

## Freedom of Thought

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

## Freedom of the Society

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

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



# THE THEOSOPHIST

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**Cover:** Dr Annie Besant (1.10.1847–20.9.1933) was an Anglo-Irish orator, writer, and social rights activist, international President of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai, India, from 1907–1933, and in 1917 became the first woman President of the Indian National Congress in her struggle for Indian home rule.

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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.

# Theosophy and Education

TIM BOYD

I WOULD like to discuss what is our approach, as theosophists, to educating ourselves. Since the founding of the Theosophical Society (TS) we have been deeply involved in establishing educational institutions. I am especially grateful to Vic Hao Chin, Jr, for the educational efforts that have been started at the Golden Link schools in the Philippines, which we have tried to model with our current effort at the Adyar Theosophical Academy (ATA).

Each of us has been exposed to and has found value in the role of Theosophy, the Ageless Wisdom, and we have committed to some process of self-education. In some respects it seems similar to the education we were exposed to in schools, but in fundamental ways it is a very different approach. I would like to discuss three basic principles involved in this thinking about education.

First we have to establish in our minds that there is a universal and omnipresent consciousness that is always expressing itself through everything. Even with the infinite number of forms that there are in the world, this universal consciousness is still not fully expressed. In the *Bhagavadgītā* Krishna says: “Having pervaded this universe with a fragment

of myself, still I remain.” The religiously minded tend to think in terms of God or the divine. But this omnipresent, always available, universal consciousness is the first principle.

The second principle is that this universal consciousness is not divided and cannot possibly be divided. For us this is sometimes difficult to grasp. This is because everywhere we look, everything we see seems to confirm that we are actually all separate from one another. If we move our hand, think a thought, or feel a feeling, the person next to us does not respond in the same way. All of our personal experience confirms this distance and separation. This condition of our thinking was described by H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) as “the heresy of separateness”. One of the primary purposes of the TS has been to try and establish the sense of brotherhood, the actual experience of a cooperative effort to realize truth that roots us in an inherent unity.

The third principle relates specifically to education and our educational process. It is that the higher, or hidden, self *can* be revealed. It is revealed through intelligent effort applied over time. This is the basis of our own education, process, and practice. In different ways we all engage

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in this type of study. For some it is the study of ideas as written in books; some throw themselves into activities that are beneficial to others; for some the focus is in stillness, meditation, or even the arts. But whatever our practice or study is, ultimately it should show some fruit. We are told that we should work without any desire for results. This is true, but should not be taken to mean that there are no results, because there *are*.

There is a specific outcome resulting from a proper educational approach. On one occasion I was present for a conversation that His Holiness the Dalai Lama was having. Someone asked him about the results of his lifetime of Buddhist practice. He said one result is that he feels much happier. Most people involved in that conversation were probably looking for some sort of esoteric explanation, but this is what he said was so important.

Even though it is a fact that everything living desires happiness, I think it is a mistake to make happiness a goal. Even though we all want it, we can see happiness as a symptom or byproduct of a deeper cause. For us, as self-educators and practitioners, we should ask ourselves the following questions: “Over the years of my study and practice, has it made me happier? Am I more free from the burdens of a desiring mind? Am I more free from the inhibitions and problems that most of us carry?”

I had a good friend who was a past President of the American Section of the TS, Dora Kunz. She was most well

known for her clairvoyant abilities and for developing a formal training in healing for nurses which was adopted by universities in a number of countries and led to 100,000 nurse healers. One of the difficulties that she often had to address with her nurses was that they were experiencing “burnout” in the process of continually connecting with the suffering of others. As a healer, Dora herself was in contact with people who were in deep pain and suffering. But the training she had to communicate to the nurses was that the healing process can never be personal. The universal consciousness is presenting itself in countless forms limited by pain and suffering. The work is not with the form, however fragmented it may appear, but with the underlying consciousness, which is always whole.

We need to examine how we have been trained and **conditioned**. It is a process that starts at birth. Our first educators are our family and the society into which we have been born. We are educated in the process of self-identity. From the theosophical or Ageless Wisdom point of view there is a soul that comes into the body. The soul is not conditioned by gender, nationality, or religion, or any of the things that it soon takes on in connection with the body it is working through. With the process of coming into the world a soul is identified as male or female, a certain nationality, religion, family, and so on. All these different separative identities become imprinted.

From an initial state of wholeness we

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become quite fragmented into genders, religions, nationalities, political parties, and so on. A great factor in our earliest education is our parents. They are the original educators in our world. However, if we are going to be completely honest, regardless of how much we may have loved and do love our parents, it would be wrong not to recognize limitations.

When we think about it, most children are raised by 20- or 30-year olds who are trying to pass their “wisdom” to their children. And frankly, there is not much wisdom to pass on early in life. So we perpetuate a cycle, repeating the traditional things that have been handed down by generations of parents who came before us, hoping that the children will listen. One of the things we should recognize is that children have never been too good at listening to their parents, yet they have never failed to imitate them.

This creates issues because the example that we give is what is communicated. I know people who are fully grown adults, and when they hear someone talking loudly they feel anxiety. This is because in their home, growing up, they learned that when voices became loud, violence followed. The words that we teach are not the answer. **Children learn by example.**

In the Buddhist way of teaching, one of the most important lessons is compassion. From their perspective, **compassion** is defined as the desire to relieve the suffering of others. In trying to teach the idea of compassion to others they recog-

nize that for all of us there are people we like and others that we do not. There are people who have actively done harm to us, that we may even define as enemies; and there are others toward whom we naturally feel compassion. But for compassion to be genuine, it must be universal, it must be felt toward *all* beings. So they had difficulty in developing a method of teaching, but they came up with a brilliant approach.

In Buddhist cosmology the idea of **reincarnation** is fundamental. From that perspective we all have reincarnated countless times; so many times and in so many places and conditions that every person at some point in time has been a mother to us. So they say that in order to develop compassion for someone you do not care for, just think of them as someone who could have been your mother in a past life. In the Eastern world this approach has been successful because of their cultural reverence for mothers.

As Buddhism came to the West many teachers found difficulties with this approach. With so many Western students there were issues from childhood of mothers who were not kind, who were not loving, who were distant, even abusive. So when Western students tried to think of others as their mothers, it did not necessarily result in a feeling of compassion. In our self-education most of what we have to do is to *unlearn* much of what has been imprinted upon us.

From our parents and social milieu we pass on to **the schools**. Earlier Vic spoke

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about possibilities for the educational institution, such as the Golden Link schools, but I am fairly certain that none of us had the benefit of going to such a school. Although we may have been occasionally exposed to remarkable teachers, the overall milieu was one where competition, comparison, and fear-based compliance were the norm. This is one of the major influences that has conditioned our way of thinking.

When I was in school I was very much involved in athletics, and some of my most useful training for living was passed on in that setting. Sports requires the recognition of limits and pushing beyond those limits within us, and the way that sports training links the body with the mind is so important. When rightly done it is a training in positivity, positive emotions, and cooperative effort; it also requires leadership by example.

During my time in the TS I have had the opportunity of studying and listening at the feet of some truly great people. From my perspective there is one common lesson that they all teach — each says it in their own way and expresses it differently, but the idea is that we are much more than we have been trained to believe.

HPB said: “The first necessity for obtaining self-knowledge is to become profoundly conscious of **our ignorance**, to feel with every fiber of the heart that one is ceaselessly self-deceived. The second requirement is the even deeper conviction that such intuitive and certain knowledge can be obtained by effort.”

She is expressing the idea that we are continually seeing the world wrongly. Equally important is that this condition of wrong-seeing can be corrected. That brings us to the area of our education, our practice. Whether we are learning to play an instrument or the instrument of our consciousness, there are three aspects that are very important.

In any practice a key realization is that it is going to take time. It has taken us a lifetime and more to accumulate the conditioning that we have to deal with. So we need to understand that this process of self-education will occur over time; it is not going to be immediate.

The second aspect is **intelligent effort**. We educate ourselves about who we think we are. In Theosophy we teach ourselves about the soul, the planes in Nature, and so on. With regularity of attention, over time, we intelligently apply the effort that will change the conditioned limits within which we have trained ourselves to function.

The third and perhaps most important aspect is **patience**. We need to be more patient and forgiving with ourselves. We will stumble and fall many times, but we get up and continue. When we talk about “education” the root word has an important meaning. It means to lead or draw out from within. The focus of the word itself is on something that is already present within us. When we think about the universal consciousness, this is what is to be drawn out. Every person who sincerely embraces a spiritual path, necessarily becomes a healer. “**Healing**” means

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to make whole. As we recognize that we are in many ways fragmented, and begin with that recognition, then we can move to becoming whole.

The process involves several simple steps. We begin with study, looking for information, which is useful, but this is not enough to transform. It gives us an idea and leads us to knowledge that can be applied, but information, and even formal knowledge, are not transformative. So along with study we have to experiment. The Dalai Lama has said that each of us has the greatest experimental laboratory that is available — our own consciousness. So we experiment with quiet.

In our education from school and most likely from parents, it is rare that there has been any training in actually engaging in the process of **becoming quiet**. But without this skill we are incomplete. Until we can reach some level of centeredness and stillness, we are at the mercy of our emotions, which come and go, our thoughts, which are constantly moving, and our bodies, which have their demands.

As we start experimenting with quiet, regularly and intelligently, we notice things start to happen. Most of the time when people are sitting on their cushions they would say that they are meditating, but probably that is incorrect. It is not meditation, it is *practicing* meditation. We are relaxing the body, focusing on the breath, observing our thoughts and emotions, or becoming more quiet. As we become more familiar with this process,

it actually becomes possible to genuinely meditate, to reach the point where we are not engaged with the thoughts. This is when we have moments of true intuitive insight, a perception of wholeness.

I. K. Taimni, I believe it was in *The Science of Yoga*, gives an example of intuitive insight. He asks us to imagine walking in a field on a very dark night. We are only aware of the immediate surroundings where we are standing. Imagine that suddenly there is a flash of lightning. For a brief moment that flash reveals to us the entire landscape. Having this perception, we are then able to navigate a terrain that was previously dark and unknown. In our process of experimenting with quiet we will experience moments when we will become profoundly still, when grand ideas and visions will momentarily be breathed into our consciousness, and suddenly we find ourselves functioning at a higher level.

This is an important aspect of this process — we must commit ourselves to learn to experiment with quiet, and to become more deeply still. As this becomes more of a normal condition for us, our way of seeing changes. The perception of wholeness, seeing something of the universal consciousness, is an antidote, a cure to fragmentation. With this sort of realization, our very presence produces a sense of wholeness in others.

In the Bible we read that “the prayers of a righteous man are powerful”. That is to say, the words, thoughts, the presence of a person who is linked to the

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universal consciousness is powerful. It is something of a culmination of this process of self-education. From this we develop the intention that our role in this world is to heal. It is not merely an act of the personal will, but it becomes our continual intention and need to remain connected with this sense of wholeness, and to allow the energies of this connection to flow through us and have their effect in the world. In this condition, whether we are working with education

in a school or a family, our presence and influence is powerful.

Each one of us was born for a specific work that we are here to do. That work is not defined by a formal occupation that we are paid for, the work is to make this world whole. Wherever we are and whatever we find for our hand to do, we do it with this attitude of mind. Although we do not look for results, we can be assured that everything we do, every cause, has an effect.



*From the Q&A following the above talk given at the invitation of the Brazilian Section of the Theosophical Society on 31 August 2021:*

Q: How do we make a child smile and be happier?

A: Sometimes we look for methods to manipulate the world, but it always comes back to “who you are speaks so loudly, people do not hear the words that you say”. We stimulate happiness in others when we have happiness in ourselves. Children tend to be able to smile much more easily if they have not experienced too much trauma in their lives. It does not take a lot on our part to bring some degree of happiness. It is about sharing the happiness that is within us.

Q: The quotation you gave us by HPB, on our inability to see ourselves as we are, is similar to the definition found in her *Theosophical Glossary* on *avidyā*, or ignorance: “(Sk.) Opposed to *vidyā*, or Knowledge. Ignorance that proceeds from, and

is produced by the illusion of the senses, or *viparyaya*.” How do we overcome ignorance in our lives?

A: The primary question is: “How is it that we are continually self-deluded?” In Yoga, there is the teaching on how we gain knowledge of the world. It teaches that there are organs of knowledge associated with the five senses: ears, nose, eyes, tongue, and skin. All these organs are continually reporting to the consciousness about the world in which we live. That information, at its very best, is partial, or limited. For instance, a bloodhound dog can walk through a place and clearly distinguish the scent of a person who was there two days earlier. Or there are insects and animals whose eyes are able to perceive things at the level of infrared or ultraviolet light. These are just indications of the limitations of the way we come to know reality.

HPB’s “Diagram of Meditation” states that one of the aspects of meditation is a

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particular way in which we need to see the world: “We have to see in every embodied being only limitation. In the beginning we have to train our mind to see that the universal consciousness is continually limited in its expression. This training ultimately has results in the way we come to see the world — a breakthrough to Reality. The great mystic, Rumi, said something that relates to this: “In a wind, every leaf, every twig and branch in a tree moves differently, but they are all connected at the root.” The antidote to separation is the focus on the root.

Q: What is the greatest challenge that you met with the Adyar Theosophical Academy (ATA)?

A. Anything that is worth doing requires effort. The ATA began as a vision, or dream. In our enthusiasm we went ahead and what we found is that this process works in a counter-intuitive way. The basic idea is that once we genuinely commit ourselves to anything, all the opportunities to realize the focus of that commitment appear in ways that we do not anticipate. We did our planning, provided for structures and people, we met obstacles and, in some way or another, they dissolved. The great philosopher and mystic, Goethe, made the following statement: “Whatever you can do, or dream that you can, begin it; boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.” ✧

**The importance of working together, of cooperation, cannot be understated, because most of us live in a world that is completely broken, fragmented, in which there is constant struggle, one group against another group, one ideology against another, one nation against another, one class, and so on. Technologically we are enormously in advance, but there is more fragmentation than ever before. As one observes, factually, what is going on, it is absolutely essential that each one of us learn how to cooperate. We cannot possibly work together about anything, no matter if it is about the new school, or the relationship with one another, or to end the monstrous wars. If each human being is isolating himself in an ideology, his life based on a principle, a discipline, a belief, a dogma, there cannot be cooperation. Is it at all possible to break down all these values that one has deliberately built against others, whether it is at all possible for man to be free?**

J. Krishnamurti

Public Talk 3, Saanen, Switzerland, 11 July 1968

# India's Awakening

ANNIE BESANT

FOR many long years past I have urged on you, and on those like you in all parts of India, the necessity of a spiritual awakening before the awakening of a material prosperity becomes possible. You know that during many years past, since the Theosophical Society was established on these shores, the importance of religion, the necessity of spiritual knowledge, has been constantly insisted upon, and constantly urged.

In doing this, those who brought the renewal of the message were only treading in the footsteps of their far-off predecessors, who have ever declared that from the Spirit come forth all things that exist, and that without the life of the Spirit not even animal, vegetable, or mineral life were possible. That profound truth in the ancient philosophy of India is the only foundation for progress of every kind. **One Spirit**, and one only; one Life, and none other; every form from the one living Essence; every being rooted in the everlasting One.

In the past, I have sometimes traced for you the steps of India's descent; how

from the time of her great spirituality, when the life of the Spirit was seen as the sun in the heavens, how from that time down-wards, with the decay of spirituality, went also the decay of all desirable things. And I remember how often I have pressed upon you how first there came the lessening of the spiritual life, then the decay of the original side of intellectual thought, of the creative intelligence, and only when those had gone far down into the twilight, came the slow decay of material prosperity. You may remember that I have put it to you that the awakening, the reviving, of Indian life must follow the order in which the descent had gone.

First of all, the reviving of **true spirituality**, of true religion, of the vital understanding of the profoundest truths of all existence; then, after that has made its way to an appreciable extent, then must come the training, the culture, the guidance of the intelligence, so that a wisely planned and wisely guided education might train the future workers of the land.

I remember saying to you that when

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**Dr Annie Besant** (1.10.1847–20.9.1933), International President of the TS, Adyar, from 1907–33. From a lecture delivered in 1910, published in her *India: Bond or Free? — A World Problem*, 1926, and also as ch. 7 of *Annie Besant in India*, compiled by C. V. Agarwal and Pedro Oliveira, Olive Tree Publishing, Woy Woy, Australia, 2021.

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the spiritual life has again become potent, when the educational life has again become pervasive, then only can material prosperity safely return. To men with the knowledge of the One, with the unselfishness which grows out of the realization of the common life, to their hands only can be safely entrusted the material guidance of the people. It is along that line that Indian progress has gone for many a year past. . . .

Let us, then, at this moment of immense importance to India's future, consider what ought to be the line most wisely to be followed in the great rush which is coming upon us. I pause a moment on the sentence just uttered, of the hands that guide, and the wisdom and the love which shape a nation's destinies. . . .

It is no new thought to you (who have grown up in the atmosphere in which the celestial and physical worlds are mingling) that the Devas, the Shining Ones, mingle in the affairs of men. Nor should it be a new thought to you — although to many it may now seem strange — that every nation also has its own Devas who guide its affairs, who shape its present and its future. Let me then remind you that in the vast unseen hierarchy who mingle in human affairs, there are Devas of many grades, as well as the great Rishis who are the planners and regulators of events.

First of all, there is the plan of the Lord himself, of Ísvara, the Ruler of the system, who sketches, in the dawn of the creative days, **the plan of evolution** along which his universe shall go. Out of the innumer-

able conceivabilities in the mind of the Supreme, some are chosen by Ísvara, who builds a system, as the material for his system, and woven into the plan for his unfolding. No pen, save that of his finger, writes that wondrous drama, which slowly is unfolded in the history of the evolving universe, written so that none may change, written so that none may amend, written by a wisdom inconceivable to us, and by a love of which the deepest love of the human heart is but the faintest and most shadowy reflection.

Then the working out of that plan is given into the hands of those whom we may call his ministers, the great Ones who come into the system, from systems long gone by, to cooperate with him in the shaping of a new humanity; into their hands his plan is given, and theirs the brains of wisdom and the hands of strength that bring that plan into the details that we call history. They plan out the working and give to every nation the acting of a part in that great plan; to the Deva who rules the nation, and who has under his control a hierarchy of lesser Devas, that part is given to be worked out in the history of the people.

Now the plan is for all humanity, and not for one nation only, and each nation, in turn, has its part to play; each nation in turn is cast either for the moment's weal or the moment's woe; and those only can read aright the history of humanity who know the powers that work behind the veil; for you cannot manage a household unless you know the will of the householder, and before you can

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realize the wisdom of household guidance, you must know the wants of the children and of the other members of the house. . . .

First of all, in order that India might again take her place amongst the nations of the world, mightier even than in the past — a glorious past — there came the spiritual messengers, who were to revive the varied religions of the land. That has been done to a great extent as regards **Hinduism and Buddhism**. But you must remember that the other religions must also have, and to some extent have had, each in its own place, the advantage of the same spiritual and enlivening influence. Look at the community called **Zoroastrian**, and see how it has of late years become spiritualizing in its tendencies instead of materializing as in the past.

The great faith of **Islam** is the one which only shows in a very limited measure the enlivening influence of the new spiritual impulse, yet there also the same working is beginning, and there also there are signs of the spreading of the same influence, so that Islam also shall take her place, spiritually alive and spiritually potent, to bear her part in the reshaping of India as she is to be. That work is not finished, in fact never will be finished, rather ever continuing, but all the first great steps are taken and success in that is assured.

Passing to **education**, an immense amount has been done, and far more has yet to be done, as I shall put it to you in a few moments. We have only begun the very ABC of the educational reform

which is necessary in order to make India what she should be. Now, when a nation does not move sufficiently swiftly along the path of progress, when she does not rouse herself enough to the voice that appeals, that warns, and that counsels, then the Deva of the nation takes other means in hand, in order to awaken his people and make them see along what lines their path should be trodden.

And these other means used by the Deva are goads. They are like the whip that touches the horse when he is too lazy, and what you look on as national misfortunes, as things that you even cry out against with insistence and with passion, these are very often, rightly seen, the goads which make a nation move a little faster towards the goal on which the Deva's eyes are fixed. This is especially true just now, and will serve my purpose well as an illustration with regard to education.

Education is a matter that belongs to the nation when rightly understood. Fathers and guardians are the people who ought to fashion the national education. How long have I been urging upon you to take this matter of education into your own hands, and not leave it for others to guide and plan. How long, in my travels up and down through the country, have I urged upon you the importance of this question of national education.

I remember how about three years ago when I spoke in Bombay, I urged on every man and on every woman, mother and father, that on them lay the heavy responsibility of the education and the training of the child. I remember how there I urged

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upon you that your own interests, if nothing else, should stir you to the guidance of your children's education; for you do not want to continue to overcrowd, as you are doing, the ranks of the so-called learned professions and of the Government service. Those are not things which make nations great, however necessary they may be, and however necessary they are, for the mechanism and administration of the nation.

The things that make a nation great, from the material standpoint, are not the learned professions and Government service, but scientific agriculture, well-devised manufactures, thoughtfully planned arts and crafts, and the innumerable forms of workmanship that go to the building up of national wealth. But along the lines on which education has been going on, this has been left on one side, and, mind you, the blame for that does not lie on the Government; it lies on the people. It is useless and idle to blame Government, when you are the people who can do it, if you have the heart, the will, and the perseverance. Out of your pocket comes every rupee that the Government spends on education. . . .

Last year in speaking on "**Theosophy in Relation to Politics**", I urged upon you the formation of Educational Boards in every district of India. Now Government has nothing to do with that. You do not need to ask for Government permission or authority. You have only to gather a few of your cleverest men and princes together and make them into an Educational Board, for a definitely outlined

area. What is wanted is not Government help. It is your work. What is wanted is self-devotion, energy, initiative, the willingness to go through years of drudgery; for only in that way can true education be built up.

This has not yet been acted on. The idea, when spoken about anywhere, causes a good deal of cheering, but only in a few places has there been any real earnest work, even in starting an Indian school. Hence a goad was needed, and it has been applied. An Education Commission goes all round the country. The Education Commission presents its report, and the representative of the vast majority of those whose children have to be educated under the new law presents a minority report — a minority of one.

Now certainly, if you weigh heads instead of counting them, that minority might outweigh many, for that one was Mr Justice Gurudas Bannerji. He knew very well what sort of education was wanted by the people, but he was only one, and the English majority shaped the Education Bill, and passed the Act. When it was passed, a number of very wise protests were made — thoughtful, well-considered, and rational; but why only protests? Why were not the protests followed by the formation of Boards, which should do that which the protestors wished? The protest was wisely made. Such protests are necessary, but they should be followed by action, for thought that is not followed by action acts like a gangrene in the human mind.

Better remain silent, better not even

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think, if you are not prepared to act; better not think, unless you are prepared to put your activity into action, for in the higher spheres, as you know, thought produces action; down here, thought, and especially talk, without action, does not get a nation very far along the line of progress. So all the energy flows out in the talk, and nothing is done. The national Deva thought that something more in the way of pressure was wanted, and the Education Act became law. And very well it did. You do not approve of it, nor do I; but still it was wanted, because nothing else would stir the people into action. That was why I said that where a people would not move by exhortation and advice, some goad was used in order to stir them into activity. . . .

In the matter of education, why not begin to act? You know you send your boys still by thousands and thousands to missionary schools, and it is a disgrace — not to the missionaries, for they are doing work which they honestly think to be to the glory of God and for the good of all men; they believe that their religion is much better than yours, and I am bound to say that they love it better, because they work for it much harder, as a rule.

You ought to remember that your religion is the oldest of all living religions, and the most perfect in its range and in its details. Surely, it is not for you to take the children, whose bodies you have given, and, robbing them of their birthright, put them into other hands and mould them in an anti-Indian fashion. The missionaries

do not make many Christians. Here and there they do, as in Trichinopoly, but, as a rule, they do not make many converts. But I tell you what they do. They dig up the roots of devotion and religion in the plastic soil of the boy's heart. They wither them with ridicule, they trample them down with sarcasm, and when the boy grows up, he grows up an unbeliever in all religion, a bad Hindu and not a Christian — a kind of hybrid, who is of no use to his country. When you despiritualize an Indian, you denationalize him. Why does that go on? *Because you do not care.* It sounds hard to say so, but it is true. If you cared, it would not last for another month. What does it want to bring about the change? . . .

Why should you be afraid to tread a new path? What is the creator of every form save the spirit? Why then be afraid to go on with the life, and to leave dead forms behind? And the strange thing is that often men cling most passionately to the forms which do not really belong to the life, but which are only excrescences which have happened to grow up round the living forms, as barnacles grow on a ship's bottom, and can be knocked off without harming the ship.

There is one rule that helps us in distinguishing customs that are only barnacles from the vessel that carries the life. That is to be preserved which is ancient, according to the Shastras (four sacred scriptures of Hinduism), and universal. But that which is local, partial, modern, not according to the Shastras, these are the things which may indeed have been useful at the time

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of their formulation, but are now the useless and even mischievous barnacles on the ship. Trust to life, to the living spirit.

We were not there to guide the life, when it made the glorious past. Life can be trusted, for it is divinely guided, and all we have to do is to cooperate with it. That is the idea you must have above all things. Life is something greater than yourselves; you are only one tiny part of life, and the life makes its own forms. Study its tendencies and work with them, but it is life that builds, not men. Then you cooperate in the building of the forms, and if a form does not succeed it will be broken; and you should be glad in the breaking of the useless form as you should be glad in the form that means success.

Failure often means winning, and it needs dozens, nay hundreds, of attempts before the perfect masterpiece shines out in full. Trust life; that is the great lesson for these days of change, for change is coming, change from every side. Those changes that are good will endure, and you must be very patient while they are in the making. But full of hope and full of courage.

All men die. You may say: Is that encouraging? Surely yes, for when a man dies, his blunders, which are of the form, all die with him, but the things in him that are part of the life never die, although the form be broken.

There is a new form to be built here, a form which has never yet been built, and she exists in the world of spirit; as one nation, she exists in the world of mind. As one nation, she has never yet existed

on the physical plane, but the day of her birth is near. Many States and Kings have been, many Maharajas, Rajas, and sometimes one Raja, great beyond his fellows, has held a wide imperial sway. But never yet has there been one India from north to south, from east to west.

But she is coming. That one India, when she comes, will have her head crowned with the Himalayas, and her feet will be bathed in the waters that wash the shores of Tuticorin; she will stretch out her right hand to Burma and Assam, and her left hand to Kathiawar and Baluchistan. That India has to be born. How? First, by believing in her with a strenuous faith, for faith is a mighty power; and then by thinking of her and aspiring after her as an ideal. For what a man thinks becomes actual in practice. And never yet was a nation born that did not begin in the spirit, pass to the heart and the mind, and then take an outer form in the world of men. That India, the sound of her feet is on the mountains, and soon the rising eastern sun shall glow upon her forehead. Already she is born in the mind of men.

But let your thought for unity be potent and resolute; learn to drop sectarian divisions; learn to drop provincial divisions and animosities; leave off saying: "I am a Madrasi; I am a Punjabi; I am a Bengali; I am an up country man"; leave all that behind and teach your boys and girls to say "I am an Indian". Out of the mouths of the children thus speaking shall be born the India of tomorrow. Many religions will grow within her; not

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only her own parent religion, but others too will be woven into her being. Hindu and Muslim must join hands, for both are Indians. Muslims, Parsis, Christians, must join hands, for all are Indians. In the India of the future, all men of every faith must join.

If India is to be the spiritual light of the future, in her must be focused the light that comes from every faith, until in the prism of India they are all united into the one light which shall flood with sunlight the world, and all lights shall blend in the Divine Wisdom. That is our work. My Brothers, I am now talking to you, but this thing will not be made by talking. It is made by living. I would not dare to speak to you and offer you counsel, if I did not strive to live that which I advise.

Day by day, week by week, month by month, I strive to shape my life on the noble models which may serve the land, and in serving India will serve Humanity; for greater than any land is Humanity, and greater than any one people is the race of whom all people are but branches; and if we have such hopes of future India, it is because we believe that her coming will be a new light to the world. There was an old people in the ancient days, and not very ancient either, that was conquered, and apparently cast away. One person of that race cried out: "If the fall of them be the riches of the world what shall the receiving of them be but as life from the dead?"

If India's humiliation has, in a very

real sense, been the riches of the world — for this has been the means of spreading India's thoughts in the most widely-spoken tongue of the world, to the North and South, East and West, all round the habitable globe — what shall it be for humanity when India herself in her new glory is born into the world?

India, from whose lips, in this land of the Rishis, came the religion that uplifts and spiritualizes, the philosophy that illumines, and the science that trains; India, from whose mind, throughout the world of mind, came those great systems of thought which are now recognized as the noblest products of the human intellect; India, whose feet once passed through many States, and made everyone of them fertile, prosperous, and wealthy; India, who was perfect in spirit and mind; when that India is born into the full vision of the eyes of men, perfect in body, is it too much to say that her coming will be as life from the dead?

That is the glorious goal, for which we work; that is the splendid hope, that cheers our labour; that is the sublime aspiration, that rises perpetually to the ears of the Devas. For India's coming means the spiritualizing of humanity; India's thinking means the lifting of thought on to a higher level; prosperity shall be the justification of religion, the justification of philosophy, as part of the life of a nation; and the world shall be redeemed from materialism because India is awake. ✧

# Helping Women Discover Their Wings

DEEPA PADHI

Often I am asked why I bring in this “Women Empowerment” issue, which is essentially social and political, into Theosophy and the Theosophical Order of Service forum. What would be the theosophical perspective on women’s issues? My reply has always been that every being, whether male, female, or transgender, is first of all a human being, and therefore has a human right, which is gender equality. All acts of violence against women — domestic, public, and workplace — as well as empowerment of women are based on gender discrimination.

Every human being, irrespective of gender, has an intrinsic value independent of extrinsic values like profession, power, status, wealth, and so on. Every human being is complete. No one is superior or inferior to another. The first Object of the Theosophical Society (TS) clearly states: “To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood [sisterhood is included] of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or color.” Theosophy speaks of the Oneness of Life. We are all like atoms, obeying the same law together. Our denying this law does not dis-

prove it, “It simply . . . keeps us miserable, poor, and selfish”, said a great theosophist, William Quan Judge, main co-founder of the TS along with Madame H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) and Col. Henry S. Olcott.

By treating women as if they were inferior to men, we are neither doing justice to the first Object nor to the fundamental teaching of Theosophy, which states that all human beings having the same spiritual and physical origin, are of one and the same essence, and that essence is One, Infinite, Pure Consciousness. Therefore, nothing can affect one nation or one human being, without affecting all nations and all people.

As HPB said, “It is an axiomatic truth that by wronging one man [in this case a woman] we wrong not only ourselves but the whole of humanity in the long run.” A year before the death of HPB, in 1891, she was busy creating a Home in the East End in London for working women. She did not stop during her whole life, even for a moment, working against injustices in the world, one of which was, and still is, gender disparity.

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Dr Annie Besant, another great theosophist, who, after the passing of Col. Olcott in 1907 was elected as second international President of the TS, was an acknowledged champion of gender equality, was the first woman to raise her voice against gender disparity and fight for women's rights in India. During the 1908 international Convention of the TS, she constituted the Theosophical Order of Service (TOS) as the right platform for putting into practice Universal Brotherhood by educating people on gender equality, oneness of being, and helping women discover their wings.

I would like to analyze the issue of "women empowerment" in three different contexts — why, what, and how:

1. **WHY** is woman empowerment necessary? Women occupy more than half of the population of the world, and it is obvious that the world will not progress as long as women are not empowered. This need arises due to ages of suffering as a result of women's domination and discrimination carried out by men. Violence against women is unfortunately a universal feature. They have been the target of varied types of violence and discriminatory practices brought about by men all over the world.

The 1993 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women includes a widely accepted definition of violence against women as: "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of

liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." A woman faces gender discrimination and violence "from womb to tomb", as the cliché goes. Female foeticide and sex-selective abortions are common phenomena. Female infanticide is the deliberate killing of newborn female babies. This is a cause of major concern in many countries like India, China, and Pakistan. Child marriage, genital mutilation, sexual abuse by strangers and family members, differential access to food, medical care, and education are very common in the rural areas of developing countries.

In adolescence, many times girls become victims of violence during courtship or dating, economically coerced sex, sexual harassment, trafficking, sexual abuse in the workplace, rape, murder, sex tourism, and so on. When a girl attains womanhood (reproductive age) she becomes the target of physical, psychological and sexual abuse by intimate male partners and relatives, forced pregnancies, sexual abuse in the workplace, sexual harassment, honour killing, rape, nonacceptance by family members, therefore becoming forced destitute, suffering from stigmatization, and so forth. In India, there are dowry deaths caused by the in-laws.

Even elderly women have no respite from being tortured. In India there has been the practice of Sati, that is, burning the wife along with the dead body of the husband. Although this practice was originally declared illegal in 1829, it continued mostly in rural areas. Fortunately these days this practice is rarely seen.

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Abuse of widows includes forceful seizure of property, accusation of witchcraft, differential treatment in food and medical care, and so on. A lot of social and religious restrictions are imposed on them. These practices are seen more in India. There are examples of elderly mothers being driven out from their own houses by their sons and daughters-in-law.

There is no region of the world, no country and no culture in which women live free from violence. In Africa, when they are compelled to undergo genital mutilation or the sewing up of their genitalia, their mothers, with much pain in their heart, think that such an act is ultimately good for their daughters! Gender inequality is the result of tradition, culture, and social structure. When an unjust practice is tolerated and allowed to be perpetuated generation after generation, it becomes a mindset difficult to get rid of.

In 2014, I was invited to give a talk on “Gender Issues in a Changing World” in the TOS International Conference at Adyar, Chennai, in which I mentioned gender equality and also suggested a change of the expression “Universal Brotherhood” into “Universal Humanhood” or any other substitute that would be gender-neutral. After my talk, one of my European friends came up to me and said: “Bravo Deepa! Being an Indian woman how could you dare to talk in favour of gender equality, which goes against Indian tradition?” “Of course, I am proud of my country and its healthy traditions, but not of certain practices in the name of tradition based on super-

stitions, prejudices, and the superiority complex of men”, was my reply.

In the Vedic period, that is, from 1500 to 500 BCE, women used to enjoy high social and religious status. The *Rig Veda* says: “The home has verily its foundation in the wife.” In the *Yajur Veda* women are eulogized with ten names in their praise. Women’s education has been highly appreciated in the *Atharva Veda*. Many learned women like Maitreyi, Gargi, Lopāmudrā, Ghoshā were there during the Vedic period. Unfortunately, the post-Vedic period saw the decline of female education. During the Buddhist age, women were again encouraged to read and write, as illiteracy was considered a crime in Buddhism. When *Manu-samhita* (the code of conduct for men and women) was composed in 200 CE, the prescribed duties of women went against their independence and education. The marriageable age was lowered from 16 to 9.

My mother used to tell us about the status of women in the early 20th century. She was married at the age of 11. In spite of the Sarada Act for the prohibition of child marriage, people used to practise child marriage secretly for fear of being socially outcast. At that time, the child bride was not supposed to speak to any elders in the in-laws’ house and very little to her husband. She had to express her needs through sign language. Girls were not supposed to laugh or talk loudly. Of course, now things have changed a lot.

2. **WHAT** is women empowerment? Mahatma Gandhi said: “Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate

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in the minutest details in the activities of man, and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him.” This explains the basic rights of women. Women empowerment is a process of becoming conscious of their rights and responsibilities. Empowerment of women is not a war, and certainly is not against men, for supremacy. It is an inward journey to discover woman’s true self with all its potentialities. As men and women are the two sides of a coin, women empowerment is necessary along with that of men for the growth and development of family, society, and nation.

Dr Besant had once made a statement that India could never become great again unless women and men “walked side by side and hand in hand”, just as a bird could not fly high “with one wing broken before it starts upon its flight”.

3. **HOW** can the constraints of girls and women be addressed? Some of these constraints are:

a. *Lack of Education*: This is because of lack of awareness of illiterate parents. Early marriage is also part of why dropout rates are high, as girls get married at an early age. Parents consider daughters as a burden and a great responsibility, because of which they want to get them married at an early age. Other impediments to the education of girls are the financial constraints of parents. In the lower strata of society, parents do not send their daughters to school, as they help them in the household work. Many parents also feel concern, and rightly so, for the safety of their daughters in schools.

b. *Lack of Initiative and Motivation*:

As job opportunities are not available for the majority of girls, there is no initiative to pursue studies beyond the school level. Yet it is a good sign that almost all countries in the world, to some degree, have legal provisions for support by social infrastructure and economic activities, to mitigate the above constraints.

### **Educational Empowerment**

Education has the highest empowering role for girls and women among other factors, as it refines the sensitivities and perceptions, which help in building their own personalities as well as providing confidence. It draws out the best elements in children to the fore. Development means bringing out what is latent. People are said to mature and develop when they advance through successive stages to a higher or more fully grown state, physically mentally, and intellectually. Therefore, any empowerment without education is hollow and unsustainable. Inclusion of “Gender Equality” or “Women Empowerment” in the school syllabus is absolutely essential. Every child, boy or girl, should know that they have equal rights, as both are human beings and both should be respectful to each other.

A young girl from Pakistan, Malala, fought for the right of girls to education and has shown by example that girls can undertake the task of improving their own situations. She could achieve this under the most hazardous circumstances. She got the Nobel Peace Award in 2014 for her ceaseless efforts to fight for girls’ education. Malala symbolizes the rights of children and empowerment of girls.

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### **Social Empowerment**

Social empowerment helps women to go beyond the traditional patriarchal taboos and social obligations. This gives them self-confidence and self-worth. Social empowerment is based on the concept of equal treatment to both genders in society. In India girls are taught to keep quiet and accept what a man — her father, brother, or husband — says even if it is wrong. Hypocrisy is at the root of this mental make-up. If coming home late at night is not allowed for girls, it should not be allowed for boys either. When women are socially empowered, they are free to express their ideas, views and suggestions. A woman can achieve her passion and excel in any field she likes. Social empowerment enhances the ability to have a voice in decision-making processes like career, marriage, and pregnancy.

A change in the mindset of men and women is of great importance. Patriarchal and matriarchal societies should merge into an equal society. This would be possible if man becomes aware of the fact that men and women are like the two sides of a coin, one side cannot be bigger (superior) or smaller (inferior) than the other. Human rights include the rights of both men and women.

It is said, women are the enemies of women. Women as mothers-in-law, matrons of brothels, and abettors in kidnapping and abduction cause violence against young girls and women. Younger women also ill-treat aged mothers-in-law and dependent widows, driving them to hunger and solitude. These practices should

end. Empowering women should start with women by women. Women need to show their support for other women around them and create a team to combat violence from the opposite sex.

### **Economic Empowerment**

In developing countries, more women than men live in poverty. Economic disparities persist partly because much of the unpaid work within families and communities fall on the shoulder of women. There are slums in India where one finds women working but men just whiling away their time. The wives earn but men snatch the money and spend on liquor. This is prevalent more in tribal areas in India. In one such area, women collectively attacked the liquor shops and were successful in their mission as they received the support from the government. Thus began the idea of the “Pink Brigade” in India. Women experience barriers and discrimination in almost every aspect of work. Employment opportunities and security need to be improved. The key is skill-based education for young girls and women and their gainful employment in the economic sectors, both public and private, and also respectful conduct at the workplace. Innovative approaches and partnerships are necessary to scale up women’s economic empowerment.

### **Political Empowerment**

Political empowerment of women is crucial to the development and progress of the nation. In many countries, women remain acutely underrepresented in decision-making positions. In politics, wo-

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men's participation is increasing but at a slow pace. There are examples of women political leaders who had to struggle for their existence in the field of politics, facing gender discrimination and other oppression, but due to their strong determination and courage, they came out with great success.

Not only in the field of politics, but in every field, a woman has to face challenges to show her talent. Gradually the mindset of people is changing and they are realizing the fact that women are efficient administrators, excellent managers, and committed and sincere workers as well. To be successful, the important factors are intelligence, intuition, sensitivity, and patience, which women have in abundance.

### Spiritual Empowerment

Spiritual empowerment is the basis of all the other kinds of empowerment discussed above. We live in two worlds — the outer or physical world and the inner, spiritual world. If the inner world is strong, it can manage the outer one. But if the inner is weak, it cannot handle the outer. Spiritual empowerment means being aware of one's inner self with all its potentialities. For spiritual empowerment, no external agencies are necessary.

Today, women are empowered externally, but internally there is spiritual bankruptcy. This is the basic cause for divorces, mental diseases, suicides, frequent break-up of relationships, not being in good terms in the office, and so on. Spiritual empowerment does not mean attaining self-realization or sainthood. It is knowing

who we are and remembering our divine origin irrespective of gender. All is One.

In educational, political and professional careers, equal opportunities will definitely make women more efficient, affluent, competent, independent, daring and accomplished, no doubt, but these cannot make them truly empowered unless their inner divine qualities are unfolded — qualities like patience, tolerance, courage, determination, self-confidence, creativity, sensitivity, and empathy. These are necessary for a woman to be truly empowered.

The UN theme of this year's International Women's Day is: "Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a Covid-19 World." Woman has that inner strength to accept challenges, ignore discrimination and opposition, and rise above as change-makers to build a new post-Covid world of equality and peaceful coexistence of all human beings, irrespective of their physical appearance.

Women are symbols of silent power (*śakti*). They have the amazing power of holding everything in balance, the outer and the inner, family and society, household chores and official work. This is their uniqueness. Also, they are the embodiment of love, compassion, and empathy.

What a woman needs is to spend some time with her own self and try to discover her hidden wings, which she was not aware of all these years. It is like searching for a necklace that is around her own neck. This would make her realize why she has been crawling for so long when she has such beautiful wings to fly freely in the vastness of the sky! ✧

# The Ageless Wisdom

CECIL MESSER

**M**EDITATION is like a jewel of many facets with each surface reflecting different colors depending on the viewpoint. Noble intentions and altruistic actions form the medium through which rays of meditation light are refracted and transformed into the rainbow-like beauty of insight or wisdom.

Coming up the gentle slopes of a life-altering journey, one may enter a special land cultivated under the auspices of the *ageless wisdom* of Theosophy. We gaze in wonder upon the vast fields of different ways of approaching the spiritual life. Ancient wisdom may or may not be ageless depending on whether or not it meets the criteria of *the freshness of truth*. Just because something is old and revered by many does not necessarily mean that it is true.

The word “Theosophy” stems from the Greek *theosophia*, or *divine wisdom*. The spectral band of Theosophy represents a nonsectarian approach to integrating religion, science, philosophy, and esotericism. Truths revealed from perennial sources are said to originally spring from the roots of spirit and form the core of all religions. Theosophy is not a religion but

a referent to *religion* itself. Theosophists declare there is no religion, no doctrine, and no body of thought higher than truth regardless of the age of its scriptures, the dominance of its culture, or the multitude of its adherents. Theosophy is not primarily concerned with afterlife phenomena, magic, clairvoyance, astrology, or related metaphysical topics. Although these are valid subjects for specialized inquiries, they easily become sidetracks into the barren regions that surround the garden of wisdom. Theosophical ideas may be studied and understood intellectually, but the truth in them can only manifest in one’s heart as the fruits of meditation and right living.

The Theosophical Society (TS) was formed in New York City in 1875 by the seminal Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (aka HPB and Helena the Theosophist) and others to promote the keystone concept of forming a nucleus of a universal brotherhood of humanity. Its motto is: *There is no teaching higher than truth*. The TS is widely credited as being the first East/West nexus organization of this era to illuminate the deep inner side of all religions and to advance concepts such as reincarnation and

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karma into our modern vocabulary. Theosophy advocates the practice of meditation, study, and service as the key components of living the life of altruistic spirituality. It also acknowledges the importance of cultivating special virtuous qualities, (that is, the *pāramitās*), in support of meditation practices. In his commentary on HPB's *The Voice of the Silence*, the esteemed Christian bishop and clairvoyant C. W. Leadbeater contends that one cannot fruitfully practice meditation in the absence of these qualities, nor can one perfect them without it.

Echoing the perennial advice given by sages that a measure of generosity is especially vital for the neophyte aspirant, one of HPB's spiritual teachers suggests (abstracted from a private letter):

Beware then, of an uncharitable spirit, for it will rise up like a hungry wolf in your path, and devour the better qualities of your nature that have been springing into life. Broaden instead of narrowing your sympathies; try to identify yourself with your fellows, rather than to contract your circle of affinity.

The influential works of Annie Besant, the famous British women's rights activist and second president of the TS, are representative of a general theosophical view of meditation. She advocates control of the mind and regular meditation as qualifications for leading the spiritual life. She also recommends training the mind by constantly concentrating on lofty ideas without allowing the mind to wander. After the mind can readily maintain

concentration or one-pointedness for an appropriate period of time, the next stage is to drop the object and to maintain the mind in this attitude of fixed attention. She feels that meditation is "the opening out of the soul to the Divine and letting the Divine shine in without obstruction from the personal self".

Although the TS has no official doctrine on meditation, it traditionally publishes literature on the subject and suggests practices representative of their collective viewpoint. In a pamphlet, *The Art of Meditation*, the editors summarize a view of meditation as: perfect stillness — silence of body, speech, and mind. To find this stillness, one learns the art of allowing thoughts and emotions to arise without letting them control us. We cannot force the stillness, "but we can withdraw our consciousness from its restlessness. Meditation is our deepest natural state — our pure consciousness."

Radha Burnier, a past president of the Theosophical Society, expresses the necessity of observation in building the foundation for meditation by comparing the human consciousness with a lotus bud. She says: "By careful watching and listening, the power of consciousness unfolds itself. It begins to blossom, which means it becomes more open to what life is telling. It is sensitive in its apprehension of what exists, and sensitivity is necessary to discover what lies deep down . . . the hidden truth. To learn to awaken the consciousness, so that its present hidden potentiality flowers into a state of absolute plenitude, is meditation." ✧

# The Self and Reincarnation in the Light of Theosophy — II

ERICA GEORGIADES

## The Self in the Theosophical System

The viewpoint on the self, in the light of Theosophy involves the notion of a self with numerical identity. Its existence is transitory and dependent on differentiation, which is a process linked to māya (illusion). In the theosophical system, the self is represented as threefold: the lower, higher, and divine ego/self.<sup>1,2</sup> The lower self, also known as *kāma-manas*, or the desire-mind, is the source of personal identity,<sup>3</sup> elusive and transitory. The mind has a dual aspect, that is, lower and higher. The lower mind, linked to desires (*kāma*) is elusive because it has a sense of separateness or “independent existence”.<sup>4</sup> It is the mortal and finite aspect of a person.

The vehicle of the lower self is *kāma-rūpa*, the form of desire, or the “subjective form created through the mental and physical desires and thoughts in connection with things of matter, by all sentient beings, a form which survives the death of their bodies”.<sup>5</sup> The *kāma-manas* is the mortal and nonreincarnating aspect of the individual. In this manner, personal identity is the lower self, a sort of bundle of sensorial perceptions derived from

impressions, the fictional self that Hume described so well.

*Manas*, the mind, has a twofold aspect, the higher *manas*, or higher ego linked to the spiritual soul and the lower *manas*, linked to *kāma-manas*. The higher *manas* is the source from where the feeling of “I” (self-awareness), non-related to personal identity, springs. In fact, H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) says that the higher ego can be compared with the *kāraṇa-śarīra*, the seeds of both the subtle and more material body. She says that our individuality is located in the plane of *sūtrātman* (*Sk.*), “*Lit.*, ‘the thread of spirit’; the immortal Ego, the Individuality which incarnates in men one life after the other, and upon which are strung, like beads on a string, his countless Personalities.”<sup>6</sup> *Sutrātman* is “*The thread of radiance which is imperishable and dissolves only in Nirvana, reemerges from it in its integrity on the day when the Great Law calls all things back into action. . . .*”<sup>7</sup>

The higher self, also known as higher *manas*,<sup>8</sup> is the reincarnating aspect of the individual. It is from the higher self that the lower self is derived. It has no sense

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of personhood or personal identity; it is the divine aspect of the being, also referred to, in the theosophical system, as “individuality”.<sup>9</sup> In this vein, the sense of personhood is derived from the lower self — this personal lower self springs from the impersonal higher self, which is impersonal awareness.

In short, the human constitution includes *ātman*, an impersonal and universal principle;<sup>10</sup> also called by HPB as the Divine Self, “the inseparable ray of the Universal and ONE SELF. It is the God above, more than within, us”;<sup>11</sup> a “Divine essence which has no body, no form, which is imponderable, invisible, and indivisible, that which does not *exist* and yet *is* . . .”<sup>12</sup> Its vehicle is *buddhi*, wisdom, discernment, the spiritual soul, a direct emanation of *ātman*. The two principles form what is known as the Monad. *Manas* is the locus of individuality, it is the higher self from *ātman*.<sup>13</sup> The fusion of *manas-buddhi* is the divine ego.

The process involving reincarnation in the physical world is described by HPB:

We must argue upon what you mean by “I” or “Ego”. We distinguish between the simple fact of self-consciousness, the simple feeling that “I am I”, and the complex thought that “I am Mr Smith” or “I am Mrs Brown”. Believing as we do in a series of births for the same Ego, or reincarnation, this distinction is the fundamental pivot of the whole idea. You see, “Mr Smith” really means a long series of daily experiences strung together by the thread of memory, and forming what he calls “himself”.

But none of these “experiences” are really the “I” or the Ego, nor do they give Mr Smith the feeling that he is himself, for he forgets the greater part of his daily experiences, and they produce the feeling of *Egoity* in him only while they last. We theosophists, therefore, distinguish between this bundle of “experiences”, which we call the *false* (because so finite and evanescent) *personality*, and that element in man to which the feeling of “I am I” is due. It is this “I am I” which we call the *true* individuality; and we say that this “Ego”, or individuality, plays, like an actor, many parts on the stage of life.<sup>14</sup>

### The Unreality of This Universe

According to HPB, the causes of existence are not only related to biological factors but metaphysical ones.<sup>15</sup> For instance, the desire for sentient life is expressed in everything “from an atom to a sun, and is a reflection of the Divine Thought propelled into objective existence, into a law that the Universe should exist”.<sup>16</sup> The leading cause of desire for sentient life is a result of *nidāna* and *māya*.<sup>17</sup>

In *The Secret Doctrine*, HPB uses the words “ignorance” and “illusion” as synonymous when referring to “*māya*”. She says that *māya*<sup>18</sup> results from the manifestation of the Absolute. However, the “Absolute [itself] can have no manifestation.”<sup>19</sup> Manifestation is merely a shadow, a reflection periodically emanating from the absolute, and as such an illusion resulted from differentiation. The only reality is the essential

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unity of all things. This reality is the ever-nonmanifest Absolute:

Māya is everywhere, and in every *thing* that has a beginning and an end; therefore, every *thing* is an *aspect* of that which is eternal, and in that sense, of course Māya itself is an aspect of SAT, or that which is eternally present in the universe, whether during Manvantara or Mahāpralaya. Only remember that it has been said of even Nirvāna that it is only Māya when compared with the Absolute.<sup>20</sup>

Maya is the perceptive faculty of every Ego which considers itself a Unit separate from, and independent of, the One infinite and eternal SAT, or “Be-ness”.<sup>21</sup>

In this vein, māya is an aspect ever-present in the manifested universe, and its expression is differentiation. The only reality is the non-manifested Absolute, which is an essential unity. The idea that there are distinct personalities, selves, egos, is also a result of māya:

As we agree, that all existence, in fact, the whole world and the whole of its evolutionary process, its joys and evils, its gods and its devils, are *Māya* (illusion) or erroneous conceptions of the true reality, how can it appear to us worthwhile to assist and promote this process of misconception? *Answer:* Precisely, because the term *māya*, just like that of “*ajñāna*” in your own words — expresses only a *relative* notion. The world . . . “its joys and evils, its gods and devils,” and men to boot, are undeniably, when compared with that awful reality, *everlasting eternity*, no better than the productions and tricks of *māya*,

illusion. But there the line of demarcation is drawn.<sup>22</sup>

. . . everything that bears a shape was created, and thus must sooner or later perish, *i.e.*, change that shape; therefore, as something temporary, though seeming to be permanent, it is but an illusion, *Māya*; for, as eternity has neither beginning nor end, the more or less prolonged duration of some particular form passes, as it were, like an instantaneous flash of lightning. Before we have the time to realize that we have seen it, it is gone and passed away forever; hence, even our astral bodies, pure ether, are but illusions of matter, so long as they retain their terrestrial outline.<sup>23</sup>

In other words, in the theosophical worldview, it is māya that produces suffering. There is only one reality; we are all “one indivisible Unit, drops in the ocean of Being, not to be distinguished from other drops. . . . It is this sense of separateness which is the root of all evil.”<sup>24</sup> As in the macrocosm, what is manifest is a shadow of the eternal non-manifest Absolute, the same occurs in the microcosm, that is, *ātman*, is our non-manifest divine essence whose vehicle is *buddhi*. The higher mind is what reincarnates, the lower mind linked to *kāma* (desire) is a transitory shadow of that nonmanifest divine aspect. The only reality is the Absolute we cannot know anything about. Everything manifest is but a shadow of the great unknown and mysterious root, source of all things. In this manner, the self (lower or higher)

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as everything manifest are illusions. However, HPB says that they are illusions only in comparison with the highly metaphysical notion of an Absolute. They are very much real otherwise.

### The *Nidānas*

If both the manifested universe and personhood are considered illusions from the point of view of the nonmanifested divine essence linked to them, the *nidānas* (karmic agents) also are an illusion. HPB explains that the twelve *nidānas* are the causes producing effects under the law of karma. The *nidānas* (Sanskrit: *pratitya-samutpāda*) meaning “dependent arising”, is a chain of phenomena referred to as “great causes of misery” leading to rebirth in the wheel of *samsāra*. According to HPB, it is *māya* that awakens the *nidānas*,<sup>25</sup> the constituents of human nature, and twelve in number:

1. *Jāti*, rebirth, with a sense of separated self, arising of mental phenomena.
2. *Jarāmarana*, aging and death.
3. *Bhava*, becoming (behavior serving craving and clinging).
4. *Upādāna*, the clinging to life.
5. *Trishnā*, love, whether pure or impure
6. *Vedana*, or sensation; perception by the senses; the fifth *skandha*.
7. *Sparśa*, the sense of touch.
8. *Chadāyatana*, the [six] organs of sensation.
9. *Nāmarūpa*, personality, that is, a form with a name to it, the symbol of the unreality of material phenomenal appearances.
10. *Vijnāna*, the perfect knowledge of

every perceptible thing and of all objects in their concatenation and unity.

11. *Samskāra*, action on the plane of illusion.

12. *Avidyā*, ignorance.

HPB says the following regarding the link between *nidāna* and *māya*:

*Nidāna* means the concatenation of cause and effect; the twelve *Nidānas* are the enumeration of the chief causes which produce the severest reaction or effects under the Karmic law. Although there is no connection between the terms *Nidāna* and *Maya* in themselves, *Maya* being simply illusion, yet if we consider the universe as *Maya* or illusion, then certainly the *Nidānas*, as being moral agents in the universe, are included in *Maya*. It is *Maya*, illusion or ignorance, which awakens *Nidānas*; and the cause or causes having been produced, the effects follow according to Karmic law.<sup>26</sup>

### The Formation of Personal Self — *Tanhā, Upādāna and the Skandhas*

In *The Voice of the Silence*, *tanhā* (from Pāli) is defined as “the will to live’, the fear of death and love for life, that force or energy which causes the rebirths”.<sup>27</sup> This “desire to sentiently live” is consummated by *upādāna* (from Pāli and Sanskrit), the fuel for *tanhā*.<sup>28</sup> Both *tanhā* and *upādāna* are produced by the *skandhas* (Sanskrit). For instance, KH says that *tanhā*, is “energy, the resultant of human (or animal) action, which, out of the old *Skandhas* produces the new group [aggregates] that form the new being and

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control the nature of the birth itself”.<sup>29</sup>

In short, the *skandhas* are aggregates that form the personal self every time it reincarnates. They are entirely linked to the lower self, and have no relation to *ātman*. KH defines them as “the elements of limited existence”.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, he says “The old being is the sole parent — father and mother at once — of the new being. It is the former who is the creator and fashioner of the latter.”<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, he adds:

It is the group of Skandhas that form and constitute the physical and mental individuality we call man (or any being). This group consists (in the exoteric teaching) of five Skandhas, namely: *Rupa* — the material properties or attributes [form]; *Vedana* — sensations [feeling]; *Sanna* — abstract ideas [sensory and mental cognition]; *Sankhāra* — tendencies both physical and mental [mental formations]; and *Viññāna* — mental powers, an amplification of the fourth — meaning the mental, physical and moral predispositions [awareness of objects and differentiation]. We add to them two more, the nature and names of which you may learn hereafter. Suffice for the present to let you know that they are connected with, and productive of *Sakkayaditthi*, the “heresy or delusion of individuality” and of *Attavada* “the doctrine of Self”, both of which (in the case of the fifth principle, the soul) lead to the *māya* of heresy and belief in the efficacy of vain rites and ceremonies, in prayers and intercession.<sup>32</sup>

Every time a person reincarnates a group of new *skandhas* is formed. The

new *skandhas* are not related to the past personality, for instance, the *skandha rupa* (form) physical body disintegrated with the previous physical body. There is a link, however, between the new and old *skandhas*. HPB explains this link as follows:

They are and yet they are not — a fresh metaphysical and occult mystery for you. They are destroyed as the working stock in hand of the personality; they remain as *Karmic effects*, as germs, hanging in the atmosphere of the terrestrial plane, ready to come to life, as so many avenging fiends, to attach themselves to the new personality of the Ego when it reincarnates.<sup>33</sup>

. . . the higher Self, the Spiritual Ego, or that which is eternally reincarnating under the influence of its lower personal Selves, changing with every rebirth, full of *Tanhā* or desire to live. It is a strange law of Nature that, on this plane, the higher (Spiritual) Nature should be, so to say, in bondage to the lower. Unless the Ego takes refuge in the *Ātman*, the ALL-SPIRIT, and merges entirely into the essence thereof, the personal Ego may goad it to the bitter end. This cannot be thoroughly understood unless student makes himself familiar with the mystery of evolution, which proceeds on triple lines — spiritual, psychic, and physical.<sup>34</sup>

In this manner, the lower-self (personal identity) disintegrates when someone dies, and a new set of *skandhas*, remaining as karmic effects, are attracted to the new reincarnating self.

(To be continued)

## The Self and Reincarnation in the Light of Theosophy — II

### Footnotes

1. The terms “ego” and “self” are used interchangeably.
2. H. P. Blavatsky (HPB), *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. XII, “E. S. Instruction No. III”, “The Philosophical Rationale of the Tenet”, p. 631.
3. HPB, *Theosophical Glossary*, “Kamarupa”, p. 172.
4. HPB, *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. XII, p. 631.
5. HPB, *Theosophical Glossary*, “Kamarupa”, p. 172.
6. HPB, *Theosophical Glossary*, “Sūtrātman”, p. 314.
7. HPB, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. II, pp. 79–80.
8. HPB, *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. XII, “E. S. Instruction No. V”, “Lower Manas or Kāma-Manas”, p. 709.
9. HPB, *Theosophical Glossary*, “Ego”, p. 111.
10. HPB, *The Key to Theosophy*, section VII, “On the Various Post-Mortem States”, “The Physical and Spiritual Man”, <[theosociety.org/pasadena/key/key-7.htm](http://theosociety.org/pasadena/key/key-7.htm)>
11. HPB, *The Key to Theosophy*, section IX, “On the Kama-Loka and Devachan”, “Definite Words for Definite Things”, <[theosociety.org/pasadena/key/key-9.htm](http://theosociety.org/pasadena/key/key-9.htm)>
12. HPB, *The Key to Theosophy*, section VII, “On the Various Post-Mortem States”, “The Physical and Spiritual Man”, <[theosociety.org/pasadena/key/key-7.htm](http://theosociety.org/pasadena/key/key-7.htm)>
13. HPB, *Theosophical Glossary*, “Ātman”, p. 43.
14. HPB, *The Key to Theosophy*, section II, “Exoteric and Esoteric Theosophy”, “The Difference between Theosophy and Spiritualism”, 1888, pp. 33–34.
15. HPB, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. I, stanza I, śloka 7, p. 44.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. HPB, *Transactions of Blavatsky Lodge*, p. 29
19. Ibid.
20. HPB, *Transactions of Blavatsky Lodge*, p. 30.
21. Ibid.
22. HPB, *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. XI, “What Shall We Do for Our Fellow Men?”, pp. 474–475.
23. HPB, *Isis Unveiled*, Vol. 1, p. 290.
24. HPB, *Transactions of Blavatsky Lodge*, p. 29.
25. HPB, *Transactions of Blavatsky Lodge*, p. 29.
26. HPB, *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. X, p. 326.
27. HPB, *The Voice of the Silence*.
28. *The Mahatma Letters*, Second Edition, Letter XVI (Letter No. 68, chron. ed.), p. 112.
29. Ibid., p. 110.
30. Ibid., Letter XXV (Letter No. 104, chron. ed.), p. 200.
31. Ibid., Letter XVI (Letter No. 68, chron. ed.), p. 111.
32. Ibid., p. 111.
33. HPB, *The Key to Theosophy*, section IX, “On the Kama-loka and Devachan”, “A Few Words about the Skandhas”, p. 154.
34. HPB, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. II, stanza V, śloka 18, p. 109

**The transformation toward eternal life is gradual. The heavy gross energy of body, mind, and spirit must first be purified and uplifted. When the energy ascends . . . then self-mastery can be sought.**

Lao-Tzu

# Gandhi: Perfectibility and Moral Learning — I

JAMES TEPFER

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect.

Jesus

Of all the rest of humankind, make them thy friends who distinguish themselves by their virtue. Always give way to their mild exhortations and take example from their virtuous and useful actions. Refrain, as far as you can, from spurning thy friends for a slight fault, for power surrounds necessity.

Pythagoras

Blessed are those who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

Psalms 1:1

**M**AHATMA Gandhi was wholeheartedly devoted to the service of God and the family of man. Because of this, he was able, over the course of his long and fruitful life, to transform himself from an unknown, timid, but well-intentioned, lawyer into a man of recognized moral genius, boundless courage, and transforming social vision. The catalytic agent of this alchemical transformation was

his unconditional vow to uplift the lives of others through concrete acts of truth and love. In time, Gandhi became — through much trial and error — a wise magician of the human heart.

As a deep thinker and a courageous reformer, Gandhi was always Promethean, forward-looking, and eternally optimistic about the human potential for good and for continuous growth in truth and non-violence. Indeed, his life was so prolific, so varied, so dynamic, and so full of both deep satisfactions and prolonged suffering for others that it could be readily characterized in a number of different ways: sublimely heroic, visionary, redemptive, tragic, and Christ-like.

None of the above ways of encapsulating Gandhi's life, however, would have appealed to him. He disliked personal hyperbole and refused to see himself in either dramatic, tragic, or exalted terms. Like the Dalai Lama, Gandhi saw himself as a simple, sincere seeker of God who rendered unconditional service to man. Furthermore, he regarded himself as one following in the footsteps of millions of decent human beings across continents

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and throughout diverse eras. He felt his virtues were universally present in others and his faults common to many. He was, in a sense, Everyman and thus he became a beacon light for all those yearning for self-redemption through service to God and humankind.

Nonetheless, if we feel compelled to characterize Gandhi's life in terms that might prove helpful and instructive to us as moral learners, he could best be characterized as one who consciously consecrated his life to the quest for moral and spiritual perfection. If so, then we could learn and benefit immeasurably from his lifetime of dedicated service to others — one that ultimately helped to bring political freedom and dignity to vast numbers of human beings across the globe.

From this all-inclusive perspective, Gandhi's mistakes and his faults would be as instructive to us as were his virtues, wise judgments, and successes as a social reformer. Erroneous actions as well as right ones would equally contribute to our understanding of the complex moral dynamics of living for a transpersonal ideal intended to inspire and intelligently influence individuals for the collective good.

As an intuitive dialectician, Gandhi understood that the life of a rational altruist was one of repeated approximations to a self-chosen ideal. In this regard, he understood the distinction between Absolute and relative truth as well as the parallel distinction between perfection and perfectibility. Perfection, like Absolute Truth,

is always at a distance. It ever — and forever — exceeds full realization. Perfection is like a mountain whose beckoning peaks continually recede regardless of how high we climb. In the words of Alphonse de Lamartine: "The ideal is only Truth at a distance." While truth, or perfection, is always at a distance, relative degrees of realization are, nonetheless, deeply meaningful. They enlighten the mind and purify the heart.

There is, then, an immense significance in ascending to higher and higher altitudes of perfection in Truth and non-violence. One's vision is expanded and one's experience enriched by virtue of the lessons learned through the persistent exertion needed to gain mental and moral altitude. Perfectibility becomes a deep joy, just as reaching a higher plateau in mountain climbing can be exhilarating. And, what is more, the prospect of ascending to even greater heights and expanding our present mental horizon is motivationally compelling — especially when our aspirations are altruistic.

Gandhi discovered that the earnest quest for truth and love-in-action was one of continually "dying into a new life". Intelligent service, as he discovered, was a conscious life of patient learning, painful unlearning, and redemptive self-discovery. It was a life of scrupulous devotion to duty that called for the ready acknowledgement of mistakes, and, most significantly, encouraged humble self-correction. The dignity of deliberately "correcting one's course" grew out of his metaphysical conviction that the moral

law (*karma*) was ultimately redemptive rather than punitive to the true learner. Sustained efforts to put right one's moral wrongs were intrinsic to the path of God-realization. In a word, his life was one of dynamic, hard-won intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth toward a consciously pursued, abundantly rich, and ever-receding ideal that was universal and inclusive.

We might now ask: "What, in our own times, is the prevailing global image of Gandhi — especially among the destitute and those struggling for social and political justice?" To the teeming millions, his global image is still an uplifting one. The numinous nature of his legacy still manages to inspire the troubled modern mind with hope and confidence in "the better angels of its nature".

His well-known commitment to non-violent resistance to social and racial injustice has inspired — and continues to inspire — many mature leaders and thoughtful individuals across diverse cultures. This is true despite the atavistic tendency of the morally confused in every culture to resort to violence — fuelled principally in our century by media hyperventilation over unresolved, historical injustices.

While Gandhi's name still evokes serene images of peaceful protest, his current influence on collective consciousness is clearly subtler than in previous decades. He is in the revolutionary background these days rather than the confused, anomic foreground. But, while temporarily obscured, his image is still

nonetheless potent. This is because, in a Jungian sense, his character as well as his achievements remain a cherished memory in the "collective unconscious" of the multitudes.

His image is, in some magical way, still a healing balm to those decent, thoughtful individuals who consciously choose Promethean suffering and undaunted hope over mindless violence and an existential, Sisyphus-like despair. Such noble souls, such quiet dissenters, believe, like Gandhi, "that the best is yet to be" and they never underestimate the ability of the indomitable human spirit to rise out of its own ashes and give birth to a more just tomorrow.

The cognitive content of Gandhi's still-radiant image is what he taught and embodied in the realm of civil disobedience and non-cooperation with evil. He made non-violent, civil disobedience a viable alternative to reformers everywhere; thus he undoubtedly saved many conscientious rebels and reformers from both guilt and despair.

(Only the sociopath does not feel some degree of guilt or shame in resorting to violence against the perpetrators of injustice. We are not, as some believe, consumed by an overpowering desire for revenge.) Few thoughtful, socio-economic reformers (and even impatient revolutionaries) can easily dismiss non-violent, civil disobedience as a feasible means of achieving lasting social uplift.

It is not possible in our very topsyturvy global village to completely slip into the sleep of forgetfulness of the

achievements of intrepid forerunners. Indeed, non-violence has entered into our social consciousness to such a degree that when the dust of violent protest and revolutionary fervor has settled and hoped-for ends lie unrealized, we are forced to go back to the beginning and ask ourselves: “Why didn’t we take guidance from a Gandhi or a King in the first place?” No serious proponent of political and social transformation can easily dismiss non-violence as a potentially feasible as well as viable moral principle to affect positive social and political change.

Gandhi was an “objective idealist” (one who rationally and creatively marries universal ideals to the ever-changing particulars of socio-economic issues). For this reason, he realized that his quest to realize truth and non-violence within the expansive orbit of his far-ranging responsibilities called for unfailing vigilance and periodic self-appraisal.

While his own conscience was his ultimate critic, he invited constructive criticism from friend and foe alike. As an active contributor to society he felt that one must be open to the questions, criticisms, and viewpoints of others. Much of his personal correspondence addressed criticism of his views, actions, and proposed programs. And, what is more, he repeatedly presented viewpoints in his own weekly publications that differed significantly from his own.

Gandhi, we might say, believed in “thinking out loud together”. What is more, he was well aware of his imperfections (and

those of dedicated colleagues) and thus he wished for no disciples or “Gandhians”. Self-correction was, to him, imperative to one whose life was consecrated to social reform. Flattery and flatterers were useless, if not dangerous. His autobiography is ample testimony of a man dedicated to a life of continual self-testing and of striving to measure the meaning of life in terms of how much he had truly helped the lowest and the least, the overlooked and the outcastes of society.

Despite Gandhi’s global standing and his genuine openness to all viewpoints, his social philosophy, personality, and actions have come under increased questioning in the past decade — especially in 2015, the centenary celebration of his return from South Africa to India. This is to be expected and is understandable. Each new generation needs to rediscover the achievements of past social revolutionaries. There are always new lessons to be learned (or relearned), and even increased focus on overlooked foibles and peccadillos can be instructive.

However, criticisms of Gandhi that have surfaced in certain journals, personal websites, and social media are often bitter and at best ignorant. They are written by the disillusioned few who neither study Gandhi’s thought nor his life thoroughly nor acknowledge his universally recognized social and political achievements. And, unfortunately, as the kaleidoscope of global values and cultural perspectives has shifted in the past few decades, many Gandhians now unexpectedly find themselves on the defensive. It appears that,

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like so many heroes and heroines of decades ago, he does not now satisfy the populous criteria of unblemished, moral purity and unwavering “political correct-ness”. Secular puritanism is the new religion of the spiritually disenfranchised, and it has acolytes in various guises throughout the globe.

According to his most severe critics, Gandhi’s image is too idealized and is, in some sense, an imperfect mirror of his real personality. There is some truth in this criticism but its moral meaning is misunderstood. All archetypical images of the historically revered lend themselves to the eventual culling out of minor, moral faults and tend toward the mythical. But their quasi-mythical purity is also the source of their potential to inspire, encourage, and even heal those who suffer injustice in one or another form.

Furthermore, sterling moral exemplars of social justice provide us with “counterpoint models” to the self-destructive propagandists of hate, revenge, and anarchic leadership. Humanity needs living examples of men and women who are spiritually and morally heroic, self-critical, and yet loving and generous too.

If, at times, we the direct or indirect beneficiaries engage in exaggerated praise of our heroes and heroines, it

does much less harm than if we either damn them by faint praise or make a religion out of brandishing their faults and limitations — thereby obscuring not only their larger, virtuous character but concealing our own cynical views about human nature and positive human potential. All in all, it is a disservice to the mass of struggling humanity to engage in “image crippling” of someone like Gandhi, whose integrity and concern for others tower over so many contemporary political and cultural leaders across the globe.

Ironically, it is important to recall that Gandhi himself would be the first to defend his critics’ right to find fault with his views or his life. He was not concerned with self-image (positive or negative) but with truth and just action. For this reason, he would, and did, wholeheartedly respond to whatever criticisms he felt merited response. He believed that constructive appraisal is the heartbeat of the genuine seeker of truth and the conscientious proponent of non-violent social reform. He believed that pertinent criticism helps the ardent devotee and the courageous reformer to turn himself to the beckoning pole star of his ideals and to realign his actions according to the correctives of just criticism.

*(To be continued)*

**A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance, nor wish it to prevail through the power of the majority.**

Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience”

# Theosophical Work around the World

## Science at Play by Anoop Jaiswal

The Secretary of the Theosophy-Science Centre at the Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai, India, Mr Anoop Jaiswal has sent the following report:

I have a deep fascination for the natural sciences, especially Physics, since my schooldays. I do not know whether this is due to some innate reason or not, but I distinctly remember that some simple yet spectacular demonstration by a school teacher left an indelible impression. And though I could not pursue a career in science, my involvement with it did not abate. My pursuit of the subject remained as serious as ever and whenever I got an opportunity I tried to share my understanding with various college and school students.

Over the years I came to realize that not much can be taught to anyone by anyone. The teacher at best can only be a helper and guide. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. The teacher's effort should be to arouse the curiosity of the student — especially the young ones — towards the subject. In the field of natural sciences this can be achieved by introducing the subject with some fun and frolic. The students should get an opportunity to see and do science. And if they could relate

their studies with their surroundings, their day-to-day activities, it makes the subject more meaningful.

With this understanding, I started looking for simple activities and experiments which can introduce the basic concepts of science through a playful activity or demonstration. To this end I found that many of the toys, with a little modification, were excellent tools for the purpose. In the last few years I was able to collect and fabricate scores of toys, which have the capacity of introducing even complex concepts in science in an entertaining yet gripping manner.

Another fascinating area was performing some of the famous experiments of science which brought a significant change in human understanding of the physical world. The available technology of today makes the repetition of such experiments quite easy and well within the means of any school or college. The impact of such demonstration on young minds is far beyond expectation.

Last but not least, nothing captures the attention of a student better than a good story. The world of science, from Archimedes to Einstein, is full of joyful, exciting, and mysterious stories. A good storyteller can bring much life to the classrooms.

Armed with these ideas and some simple tools I have been visiting various

### Theosophical Work around the World

schools and colleges in and outside the state of Tamil Nadu, making presentations and demonstrations primarily with the aim of raising the students' curiosity and attracting them to observe, think, and experiment.

To this end I have been supported by a number of school teachers and professors of institutions like Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras), which has been running an outreach program on similar lines for school children. I have covered over 125 schools and colleges in the last few years. Each program takes about 2–3 hours and can accommodate over 200 students. The response of the students and teachers has been highly encouraging.

Under the aegis of the Theosophy-Science Centre, Adyar, we organized two

workshops — one for students drawn from about 10 schools from Chennai and another for school teachers drawn from about 25 schools in and around Chennai.

The pandemic brought a complete halt to these activities. It was on the advice of some senior professors of science from IIT Madras that I decided to take it online. A Youtube channel under the banner of the Theosophy-Science Centre has been launched with the link “Science at Play by Anoop Jaiswal”. The videos are of 6–7 minutes duration, covering various themes. The first and ongoing theme is “The Science of Motion”. The presentation covers topics in school textbooks and more. It is hoped that it would not only complement the school education, but encourage children to explore beyond. ✧

**My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. . . .**

**It is enough for me to reflect upon the marvelous structure of the universe and try humbly to comprehend an infinitesimal part of the intelligence manifested in Nature.**

Albert Einstein

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