

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: The Adyar Buddhist shrine, located in a coconut grove by the Adyar River, is near the TS international Headquarters building. It was built in 1925 during Annie Besant's presidency under the direction of C. Jinarajadasa. Photographer: ©Richard Dvorák: <dvorak.photography>.

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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.

The Theosophical Brotherhood in Today's World

TIM BOYD

THE theme for this Russian National Congress is a deep one — both complex, but also quite simple. We are coming together to consider the importance of the theosophical Brotherhood and how to build it in today's world. We should begin with the idea that in joining the Theosophical Society (TS) often we come with certain expectations. Whether it is the TS or our other relationships, we come to it with a need within us. It is important for us to recognize something basic: that membership in the TS does not change us — we change ourselves. However, the influence of the TS cannot be underestimated. In essence, what we do is we choose an environment in which we try to grow. We choose an environment, and then we respond to its influence.

There are some people for whom their choice of environment is a battlefield. They feel that war and fighting is their need. For others the environment they choose is a cave, where they can be silent and introspective. In choosing to associate ourselves with the TS, its members, and its long lineage of wise people, we make a choice to put ourselves in the presence of an Ageless Wisdom. If we

are open and aware, then it will inevitably have some influence on us. There is an expression that we can lead a horse to water, but cannot make him drink. We can be in the presence of wisdom, but remain unaffected *if* we are unaware. There are countless examples of people who died right next to a river, not knowing that the water was so near. So just wisdom in itself is not enough. Wisdom is always present everywhere, but are we receptive?

A part of the idea for the formation of the TS was to create an environment in which certain qualities could be called out — an atmosphere in which individuals could unfold some of the deeper aspects of their being for the benefit of humanity, in which spiritually mature individuals could participate in the work, and in which people could become mature in their inner life. As highly as we may regard ourselves, we, as a humanity, are very undeveloped — really a child-like humanity. There is an expression that gives an example of this: “No tree is so foolish that its branches fight among themselves.” But as human beings we continually live and act from the conviction that somehow we are separate

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from one another. As much as we speak of it, we do not fully grasp the idea of Oneness, Unity, and Brotherhood.

One of the important aspects of a maturing spirituality is an awareness that at every moment we are choosing, and we are responsible for those choices. In the *Bhagavadgītā* one of the discourses of Lord Krishna is about action and inaction. Even if we believe ourselves to be not acting, to not act is action. Everything we do or not do influences the greater environment. That awareness is the beginning point. Our actions produce results, but our actions are produced first by our motivation, our intentions.

In the beginning portion of H. P. Blavatsky's (HPB) *The Secret Doctrine*, she talks about three fundamental propositions. The third of them describes our "obligatory pilgrimage" of incarnation and action, results and motivation. She makes the point that in this process of maturing, there are steps along the way, and that as long as we are unaware, all of our actions are determined by what she describes as "natural impulse". We are pushed and moved by the environment that surrounds us. Much like leaves blowing in the wind we find ourselves moving according to forces that are outside ourselves. She makes the point that at a certain moment in our unfolding something changes.

With maturity we become active by what she describes as "self-induced and self-devised" effort. Our movement and our activity in the world become guided by internal rather than external forces.

It is only at a point such as this that something like a theosophical Brotherhood can begin to have any meaning to us. None of us are involved with the TS by accident or chance. Something like the Ageless Wisdom would have no attraction to anyone who was not receptive to what this Wisdom can give. Even though very often we come for what we can get, with time we discover that the only way that we really can receive is when we learn how to give, when we learn how to influence the environment we have chosen.

Many of us find ourselves attracted to the Wisdom, but mistake it for knowledge. There is no doubt that the Ageless Wisdom tradition is rich in terms of the knowledge with which we can acquaint ourselves. The pursuit of knowledge is something that can occupy a lifetime(s). It is inexhaustible — endless. It is also exceedingly valuable and necessary along this way, but Ageless Wisdom is something very different from ancient knowledge, no matter what that knowledge may be.

When we make the choice that we will have some level of relationship with the TS and its work, what is it that we are choosing? Whether we become aware of it sooner or later, what we choose is to make an attempt at Brotherhood, Unity, Oneness. The TS's founding was viewed by its inner Founders, the Masters of the Wisdom, as a necessary experiment for the betterment of the world, with the hope that it would attract people who had the capacity to actually come to some under-

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standing of Oneness. It has been a very difficult experiment. Along the way we have found ways to frustrate the intentions of those Founders. As important as our individual unfoldment may be, the real point of the TS is to create a usable instrument for those Great Ones who stand behind this movement.

In terms of the importance of the theosophical Brotherhood and what it is we can do to bring it about in today's environment, I can offer just a couple of thoughts. Our work within the TS in many ways is not that different from the work we do in what we call "ordinary life". If we are awake, we have the capacity to observe and correct behaviors. So, first of all, in our theosophical work we have to be willing to make mistakes. Mistakes are so important.

H. P. Blavatsky, above all others, made numerous mistakes that were pointed out by the Mahatmas, by Col. Olcott, and by herself, but her mistakes were made in the service of the Ageless Wisdom, in the service of others. One of the words that comes up again and again in the advice from the Mahatmas is that the most important thing is that we "TRY". The only people who make no mistakes are those who do not try. However, they make the greatest mistake — not trying.

Every moment that we live we are involved in an experiment — that of unfolding a deeper, mostly hidden life. With *every* experiment there are certain risks involved. If we want adventure with no risk, we go to Disneyland. We

can experiment with expressing the fundamental principle of Unity.

One of the ways in which HPB described what Theosophy *is* was that it is altruism first and foremost. So in this effort to bring a wisdom into the world and to address the universal suffering of all human beings we have to be willing to move beyond our normal limits, and to know that we may fail many times, but we are supported by a Brotherhood within which we live and move. Often we fall down in our attempt at a theosophical Brotherhood by not being as generous with the mistakes of others as we would like others to be with our mistakes — the Golden Rule.

There is great value in not taking ourselves so seriously. Most of us have certain aspects of our identities that we treasure — that we take pride in and protect — but in the big picture, none of us are that important. Think of it this way, we have lived in many bodies, in many places, over countless periods of time. Even at this moment we are participating, like cells, in the organism which we call humanity, composed of seven billion other beings similar to us. As individuals, we are not so important.

Our influence is elevated when we arrive at a recognition that this apparently individual separated self that we value so much, really does not exist as an isolated, independent entity. It is an expression of something greater. With this realization there is a possibility for the Ageless Wisdom to make itself known through us, and through the TS.

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A Taoist teacher asked a question, and then gave the answer. The question was: “Why are you unhappy?” The answer was: “Because 99.9 percent of your thoughts, activities, and feelings are focused on yourself, and there isn't one.” Perhaps the realization of the non-substantial boundaries we place around ourselves is something distant for us, but

Q: You talked about experiments and acceptance of mistakes, but there is a question which we discussed several times during our Congress, and I would like to hear your opinion: “How should we deal with those people whose experiments and mistakes ruin and destroy others' efforts — our personal efforts or efforts of a group of people?”

A: In our desire to be brotherly very often we are willing to overlook facts that are in front of us. One of the facts about this work is that all of us are functioning on different levels of unfoldment and understanding. To the minds of many people within the TS — because this Ageless Wisdom is so vast — they think it is everything and anything, which is incorrect. There is the expression that “Theosophy is everything but everything is not Theosophy.” Often some aspect of the Wisdom Tradition becomes attractive to an individual, and also becomes colored by that individual's temperament and limitations.

After He had his enlightenment, the Buddha lived for another fifty years and produced a vast body of teaching. At the

in the meantime there is work to be done.

Unity, harmony is the basis of all strength. That is the field in which we need to work. These are just a few thoughts. There is no formula for theosophical behavior, as there is no formula for life or living, but our goal is to *find* that avenue toward a deepening understanding of Wisdom, Unity, and Brotherhood. ✧

end of his life He condensed his teachings to just three things: “Do no harm, do good, and purify your minds.” In the TS's history, these cases that continually present themselves of individuals who willfully or unconsciously do harm to the TS, we have to apply that idea — do no harm.

Where the harm is being done, we sometimes have to interrupt that process by various means. In Russia, as everywhere else, I am sure you have a number of things that are problematic. As international President, you can imagine what I deal with. To some it might seem surprising, or counterintuitive that the greatest problems I have encountered within the TS have been with people who are either very intellectually knowledgeable about the theosophical teachings, or those who have a devotion to some personalized idea about Theosophy and the theosophical work.

This is not an issue of casual members with personal ambitions. Often the deeper problems have been with those who have acquainted themselves with theosophical teachings, but have not

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acquainted themselves with themselves. These are not small things we are talking about. There is no formula for how to approach it. The main idea is: do no harm and, where it is possible, do not allow harm to be done.

Q: As International President you travel a lot, give a lot of talks in many places, communicate with many theosophists and many local theosophical societies, so in which society and in which country, in your view, is the idea of Brotherhood realized in the best way?

A: In a certain sense, this is an unfair question. It is like a question we may ask our mother or father: "Which is your favorite child?" In the TS world, everywhere an attempt is being made — in every country. In some places some aspects of it are more developed, in other places different aspects are developed. In no place is it fully realized. My hope is that if I am asked the same question in future years, I will be able to say, without doubt, that "it is the TS in Russia".

Q: We listened and read the translation of your talk recently to the Inter-American Federation, where you described the process of creating the Mission Statement, which is very interesting and important. And the question is actually about the formula of the very Mission, because there is this word "realization" which could mean two things: understanding, or making something happen in life, in reality. So which one is it in the Statement?

A: The experience of the coming into

being of that Mission Statement was one of the high points in my years within the TS. It was an example of unity in action. There were more than thirty people involved in the final stage of the process — sitting together around the table in Naarden, the Netherlands. The experience was one where personal preferences disappeared, allowing for interaction that brought something quite sublime into being.

The Mission Statement of the TS is very compact. In English it is twenty-four words. I can remember very well the moment when that last word was presented and the silence that pervaded the room, the quality of the light that was shining in, and the sense of expansion that was universally felt. It was remarkable and gave some small glimpse of the possibilities of this theosophical work.

In the Mission Statement initially the word "realization" was not included. It was "an ever deepening *understanding* of the Ageless Wisdom, spiritual self-transformation, and the unity of all life". The idea was that "understanding" by itself might be perceived as personal and static; but that the inclusion of realization related to the path that we are on. Understanding leads to realization, the actual experience of what this Ageless Wisdom is about.

You have to be aware that within the Mission Statement everything is connected to everything else. Realization does not stand alone as a quality or as an experience. So it is "an ever-deepening understanding and realization of . . ."

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and then it is three things: a realization of the Ageless Wisdom; a realization of spiritual self-transformation; and a realization of the unity of all life. This Mission of the Theosophical Society points us toward an ever deepening experience of these three dimensions of the Ageless Wisdom.

I especially appreciate this question because it arises out of the intent of the Mission Statement. The idea in producing

it was first of all that we fool ourselves if we believe that any words we put together can capture the fullness of this exalted Mission, but we have to do something with words. So the intention was that something could be provided in the most compact form possible, that would be able to expand endlessly in our own thought and meditation. I am grateful for this question because it indicates that this work is having its effect. ✧

“The Illumination must come from within. The misuse of knowledge by the pupil always reacts upon the initiator; nor do I believe you know yet that in sharing his secrets with another, the Adept by an immutable law is delaying his own progress to Eternal Rest . . . A price must be paid for everything and every truth, and in this case — we pay it. . . .”

These are only a few of the many hints contained in the [Mahatma] letters. They are found on almost every page, without attempt to dogmatize or to impose the personal will of the Mahatmas. They give us a glimpse of those immemorial laws by which, paradoxically, we must live if we would be free. These laws do not belong exclusively to yesterday, to today, or to tomorrow, but to all time. It is we alone who can transmute them into today's wisdom by that alchemy of the spirit which is inherent in every one of us and by which those whom I have been quoting have reached the stature of the Elder Brothers of Humanity. It is they, indeed, who make the past contemporary and the *now* forever.

Virginia Hanson
*An Introduction to The Mahatma Letters:
Today's Encounter with the Wisdom of the Ages*

Practical Theosophy and Radha Burnier

DEEPA PADHI

I WOULD like to start with the words of Radha Burnier, former International President of the Theosophical Society (TS) and the Theosophical Order of Service (TOS), a great scholar, and an excellent orator. She said:

Our studies must have practical value, they must express themselves in our relationships, thoughts, and attitudes to one another, and should be an example of how the whole world can be a family in which the more able helps the less, in which there is mutual encouragement and support for our mental, moral, and physical difficulties.

With these words she has expressed, in short, what practical Theosophy is. We know that Theosophy has two aspects — theoretical and practical. Theory deals with the wisdom, and the practical aspect is for the benefit of humanity and the world. Theosophy offers a solution which is universal, for humanity as a whole, not for any particular section or group or individual.

Radhaji used to say that the challenges we face outside are our own mental crea-

tions. We divide ourselves into countries, nations, religious communities, groups of different types, and identify ourselves with one group. Because of our selfish, egocentric nature, we attach sentiments to that group, stand alienated from other groups, and sometimes go against other groups, communities, and nations.

There are cases of violence against women, racial and colour bias, cruelty to animals, and exploitation of Nature. We do not realize that all these divisions, fragmentations, and negative feelings are nothing but our own mental projections. It is our mind that is the culprit. In fact, there is only Oneness — One humanity, One life, One consciousness. The basic truth of Theosophy on which are based the other teachings is the truth of Unity. The Ultimate Truth is One, without a second.

The TS takes the initiative for a global view and has an important responsibility to bring about a change in the perception of things, which consequently will also bring a change in our relationship with others and in our day-to-day activities.

Dr Deepa Padhi is international Vice-President of the Theosophical Society and President of the TOS, Odisha Region, India. Excerpt from Dr Padhi's "Radha Burnier Memorial Lecture", given on Dr Burnier's death anniversary, 31 October 2021, organized by the Indian Section.

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Appearances are deceptive. The world appears as multifarious and multi-coloured. But that is not the Truth. We need to go deep into things to know the hidden Truth. We should know that a divisive, fragmented mind cannot deal with the problems we are facing today in society as well as in the whole world.

Knowing well that deforestation would cause great harm to the environment, we still destroy, because people want luxury, comfort, instant pleasure, and profit. This happens because we have the wrong idea of ourselves. Unless we know who we really are, what the purpose of our life is, we cannot do the right thing. In fact, Theosophy provides the necessary perspectives. The theosophical understanding of humans is very important from a practical point of view, because when we truly understand who we are, all our relationships with the outer world will change for the better, and that would be of immense practical value.

Selfishness is the root cause of all our sufferings. Selfishness creates separateness. Our destructive and negative activities emanate from the selfishness of our mind. Therefore, the removal of selfishness is of utmost importance. In the words of Radhaji: “The fundamental change is therefore from selfishness, which is also self-centeredness, self-preoccupation, and so forth, to a state of sympathy, harmony, and unity, where other people’s well-being is realized to be of as much, if not more, importance than one’s own.”

The underlying cause is not at the

physical but at the psychological level. When humanity transcends the divisive mind and perceives things in terms of unity and universal brotherhood, the problem of the world will definitely be solved. It is therefore necessary that to be theosophical, our activities should, either directly or indirectly, help humanity to awaken.

Very beautifully Radhaji had said: “In order to fulfill the purpose for which the TS was founded, members should not only have hunger for the Ageless Wisdom, they should also have love for humanity.” An adept had rightly said: “He alone can gain their secrets, who has the love for humanity at heart, who is capable of grasping thoroughly the idea of a regenerating practical brotherhood.” We very often talk about “love” but, we cannot know what love is until we feel it within us for others, when it is totally unselfish and universal.

According to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, love and compassion are not luxuries, they are necessities. Wisdom is not possible without them.

Practical Theosophy implies that one must be capable of helping the world and its inhabitants. One may be very knowledgeable, but that knowledge would be of no effect, no value, unless it is converted into action and helps humans and non-humans. In the words of Radhaji: “It is not Theosophy at all because it is not wisdom.”

René Descartes, the French philosopher and mathematician, elevated the status of human beings as the masters

and possessors of Nature, because they have the power to think, which distinguishes them from other living forms. This sort of wrong thinking was responsible for creating an erroneous world view, where humans are separated and placed superior to Nature. This obviously led man to establish dominion over Nature. From this sense of autonomy, grew the psychology of self-appropriation and thereof, the tendency to live at the cost of Nature even though it amounts to cruelty to animals and plants.

On the contrary, being the highest creations and most developed of all creatures on Earth, humans have the bounden duty and responsibility to be considerate and compassionate towards less developed species like animals and plants, and even inanimate beings like mountains, rivers, and the earth. Theosophy believes that every being and thing in the manifested universe has life and consciousness, differing only in degrees, as all come from the same source — Universal Consciousness.

As the saying goes: “God (Consciousness) sleeps in minerals, awakes in plants, moves in animals, and thinks in human beings.” Now scientific experiments have conclusively proved that animals not only have intelligent stimuli but, in certain cases, they exhibit clear signs of sympathy, empathy, and love. Even plants feel pain and respond to love. When plants are cut they release ethylene gas like human beings shed tears when they are in pain.

Theosophy believes in the interde-

pendence and interconnectedness of all beings and things in the world. One should understand that the life of an invertebrate is as important as that of a human being. Human beings are dependent on invertebrates, as they provide their life-support system. If they disappear from the Earth, human beings cannot live more than six months, but if human beings disappear, there would not be any change in them or in Nature. But life should be defended for its intrinsic value, not for its utility value. Humans and non-humans are parts of the one whole.

It is time that human beings understand their place and role in the whole, the universe. Therefore, the urgent task before us is to overcome this wrong perception of ourselves as superior and take responsibility and care of the less developed animals and plants, like we take special care of our physically and mentally disabled children.

In all her writings and talks, Radhaji attempted to reflect the relationship between humans and non-humans in Nature. She was very compassionate towards animals like dogs, cats, mongooses, birds, and squirrels. They all found a safe shelter in her home. They used to spoil the house making it dirty, but she had no problem, as she had realized that helping and caring for these life forms is more valuable than keeping her house spick and span to keep up to societal standards.

She was actively involved with service-oriented organizations in education, animal care, environmental issues, and so

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on, in which she had genuine interest. She was the chairperson of the Besant Education Fellowship, Varanasi, a member of their board from 1959, and Chairperson since 1980 of the Olcott Memorial School, having over 700 underprivileged school children.

“Before the soul can see, the harmony within must be attained,” said Madame H. P. Blavatsky. When there is harmony within, it is expressed in cooperative action. In this context, I would like to narrate an incident that took place in 2003, when Radhaji had come to attend the Annual Conference of the Utkal Theosophical Federation (UTF) in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Outside the meeting venue, members had removed their footwear and placed it in a disorderly manner. Radhaji noticed that and shared her thoughts with me after the meeting. She said that there is an orderliness and harmonious pattern in the macrocosm and there is a conscious design and intent behind this orderliness. We must try to maintain this orderliness — even at the microcosmic level — in all our daily activities, outer and inner. Otherwise there will be chaos and disharmony.

On another occasion, when she was on the dais, a member walked up to her with a beautiful flower bouquet but handling it very roughly, almost crushing the flowers. She thanked him and suggested that the flowers be handled gently. Every one of our actions reflects the state of our mind. In this case, it reflected a disorganized and confused mind. Every one of us needs to discover the practical

dimensions and relevance of every fundamental theosophical principle. Whenever she went in India and abroad, she spoke on the relevance of teaching Theosophy in today’s world, as “the philosophy behind Theosophy must remain relevant to contemporary social issues”.

Radhaji used to say that *māyā* (illusion) is not in natural creations like trees, animals, or the earth, but in the eyes of the perceiver who looks at these as objects for possession and exploitation. It is said: *yathā dr̥sh̥ti, tathā s̥r̥sh̥ti*, meaning: “The world is as you perceive it.” We are facing a crisis of perception. Therefore what we need is a fundamental change in our thoughts, perception, and values.

She led a simple life, which was perhaps the result of her equable mind. Simple living is encouraged in Theosophy. It helps the individual in getting more time to be with oneself. Most of our time is wasted on acquisition and maintenance of unnecessary things. We came empty-handed and will go with nothing in hand. Our wealth and properties will ultimately go to the community. A theosophist must know how to control “artificial desires”. As Radhaji used to say: “Greed is sometimes like a small seed which appears dead from outside. But with stimulation, it germinates, grows, and destroys.”

Personal transformation cannot be done alone by the self. The need for “others” is very important, because it is through the other selves, through relationships, that our development is possible. Theosophy

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is the philosophy of togetherness, of inclusion. Love, compassion, sacrifice, empathy — all emerge from togetherness or inclusiveness.

Radhaji laid a lot of stress on the regeneration of the human being, which is the essence of all theosophical work. Regeneration is a total change, a new birth within. It is unloading of all accumulated prejudices, false notions, wrong perceptions, negative thoughts about others, and replacing everything with a fresh, positive, and unselfish mind.

She used to stress on being in the Now. The mind should always be in the present, in the Now, neither in the past nor in the future. To be in the Now means to be focused, alert, and aware. Now is the real moment as our action takes place only in the Now. Our being is in the Now. Past and future are only projections of the mind. They do not exist in reality. J. Krishnamurti also said the same thing: “experiencing” is real, because it is in the “now”, not “experience” which is past.

She was a theosophist in the true sense of the term, as stated in *The Key to*

Theosophy: “Theosophist is who Theosophy does”, not thinks, not studies, not feels, but does. “Altruism is an integral part of self-development.” As theosophists, we need to look beyond ourselves, even beyond our difficulties and pain, and lend our hands to help others.

Radhaji had modeled herself as a practical theosophist by living Theosophy every moment of her life. She should be our inspiration. What we need to emulate from her life is to translate our studies and teachings into everyday action, and to be in close relationship with other life forms. There should be absolute harmony in our thought, speech, and action. We need to realize that people will not follow our teachings, speeches, lectures, or advice, but will follow our example, our actions and interactions with others. Each of us should be conscious of our day-to-day actions, our behavior and relationship, with other humans and non-humans around us. We need to engage ourselves selflessly in the service of humanity and other forms of life for a peaceful coexistence in a better new world. ✧

Theosophists and would-be theosophists are all united by a common devotion to the Regeneration of Man. They may differ in their convictions, interests, or approach. The teachings of the Buddha, Jesus, Blavatsky, Besant, Krishnamurti, or some other teacher may inspire some and not others. But there is a strong common bond, namely profound concern for the progress and perfection of humanity, not merely at the material and intellectual levels, but morally and spiritually.

Radha Burnier
Human Regeneration

The Adepts in America in 1776

AN EX-ASIATIC [WILLIAM Q. JUDGE]

THE following suggestions and statements are made entirely upon the personal responsibility of the writer, and without the knowledge or consent — as far as he knows — of the adepts who are in general terms therein referred to.

The reflecting mind is filled with astonishment upon reviewing the history of the rise of the United States of North America, when it perceives that dogmatic theology has no foundation in any part of the Declaration of Independence or Constitution for the structure which it fain would raise and has so often since tried to erect within and upon the government. We are astonished because those documents were formulated and that government established at a time when dogmatism of one kind or another had supreme sway.

Although the Puritans and others had come to America for religious freedom, they were still very dogmatic and tenacious of their own peculiar theories and creed; so that if we found in this fundamental law much about religion and religious establishments, we would not be surprised. But in vain do we look for it, in vain did the supporters of the

iron church attempt to lay the needed cornerstone, and today America rejoices at it, and has thereby found it possible to grow with the marvellous growth that has been the wonder of Europe.

The nullification of these efforts made by bigotry in 1776 was due to the adepts who now look over and give the countenance of their great name to the Theosophical Society (TS).

They oversaw the drafting of the Declaration and the drawing of the Constitution, and that is why no foothold is to be found for these blatant Christians who desire to inject God into the constitution.

In the Declaration, from which freedom sprang, “*nature and nature’s god*” are referred to. In the 2nd and 3rd paragraphs the *natural rights of man* are specified, such as *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*. The king is spoken of as being unworthy to be “the head of a *civilized nation*”, nothing being said as to whether he was the head, or worthy to be, of a *Christian* one.

In appealing to their British brethren, the Declaration says the appeal is “made to their *native justice and magnanimity*”.

Mr William Q. Judge (13.4.1851 – 21.3.1896) was one of the three main Founders of the TS in 1875. He was a great leader of the TS in America. Reprinted from the *The Theosophist*, Oct. 1883.

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All reference to religion and Christianity or God's commands are left out. This was for the very good reason that for 1,700 years religion had battled against progress, against justice, against magnanimity, against the rights of man. And in the concluding sentence the signers mutually pledge each other to its support ignoring all appeals to God.

In the Constitution of 1787 the preamble declares that the instrument was made for union, justice, tranquility, and defense, the general good, and liberty. Art. VI says no religious test as a qualification for office shall ever be required, and the 1st Amendment prohibits an establishment of religion or restraint of its free exercise.

The great Theosophical Adepts, in looking around the world for a mind through which they could produce in America the reaction which was then needed, found in England, Thomas Paine. In 1774 they influenced him, through the help of that worthy Brother Benjamin Franklin, to come to America. He came here and was the main instigator of the separation of the Colonies from the British Crown. At the suggestion of Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, and other Freemasons, whose minds through the teachings of the symbolic degrees of masonry, were fitted to reason correctly and reject theological conservatism, he wrote "Common Sense", which was the torch to the pile whose blaze burned away the bonds between England and America.

For "Common Sense" he was often publicly thanked. George Washington wrote on 10 September 1783 to Paine: "I shall

be exceedingly happy to see you. Your presence may remind Congress of your past services to this country, and if it is in my power to impress them, command my best exertions with freedom, as they will be rendered cheerfully by one who entertains a lively sense of the importance of your works." And again in June 1784, in a letter to Madison, Washington says: "Can nothing be done in our assembly for poor Paine? Must the merits and services of 'Common Sense' continue to glide down the stream of time unrewarded by this country? His writings certainly have had a powerful effect upon the public mind. Ought they not then to meet an adequate return?"¹

In the "Age of Reason", which he wrote in Paris several years after, Paine says: "I saw, or at least I thought I saw, a *vast scene opening itself to the world* in the affairs of America; and it appeared to me that unless the Americans changed the plan they were then pursuing and declared themselves independent, they would not only involve themselves in a multiplicity of new difficulties, but shut out the prospect that was *then offering itself to mankind through their means.*" Further on he says: "There are two distinct classes of thoughts: those produced by reflection, and those *that bolt into the mind of their own accord.* I have always made it a rule to treat these voluntary visitors with civility, and it is *from them I have acquired all the knowledge that I have.*"

These "voluntary visitors" were injected into his brain by the Adepts, Theosophists. Seeing that a new order of ages was about to commence and that there was

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a new chance for freedom and the brotherhood of man, they laid before the eye of Thomas Paine — who they knew could be trusted to stand almost alone with the lamp of truth in his hand amidst others who in “times that tried men’s souls” quaked with fear — a “vast scene opening itself to Mankind in the affairs of America”. The result was the Declaration, the Constitution for America. And as if to give point to these words and to his declaration that he saw this vast scene opening itself, this new order of ages, the design of the reverse side of the US great seal is a pyramid whose capstone is removed with the blazing eye in a triangle over it dazzling the sight, above it are the words “the heavens approve”, while underneath appears the startling sentence “a new order of ages”.

That he had in his mind’s eye a new order of ages we cannot doubt upon reading in his “Rights of Man”, Part 2, “Introduction”, “no beginning could be made in Asia, Africa, or Europe, to reform the political condition of man. . . . She [America] made a stand not for herself alone, but for the world, and looked beyond the advantage she could receive.” In chap. 4, “The case and circumstances of America present themselves as in the beginning of a world. . . . There is a morning of reason rising upon man, on the subject of Government, that has not appeared before.”

The design “of the seal” was not an accident, but was actually intended to symbolize the building and firm founding of a new order of ages. It was putting into form the idea which by means of a “voluntary visitor” was presented to the mind of Thomas Paine, of a vast scene opening itself, the beginning in America of “a new order of ages”. That side of the seal has never been cut or used, and at this day the side in use has not the sanction of law. In the spring of 1841, when Daniel Webster was Secretary of State, a new seal was cut, and instead of the eagle holding in his sinister claw 13 arrows as intended, he holds only 6. Not only was this change unauthorized, but the cause for it is unknown.² When the other side is cut and used, will not the new order of ages have actually been established?

More than is claimed for the Theosophical Adepts than the changing of baser metal into gold, or the possession of such a merely material thing as the elixir of life. They watch the progress of man and help him on in his halting flight up the steep plane of progress. They hovered over Washington, Jefferson, and all the other brave freemasons who dared to found a free Government in the West, which could be pure from the dross of dogmatism; they cleared their minds, inspired their pens, and left upon the great seal of this mighty nation the memorial of their presence. ✧

Endnotes

1. *Writings of George Washington*, 1782–1785, vol. 10, p. 393. Series ed. Jared Sparks, Boston, Little Brown & Co. 1853. See Jared Sparks’ *Correspondence of the American Revolution*, etc., vol. IV, pp. 71–73.

2. See the U.S. State Department archives.

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

The Guardian Wall and Sound

I HAVE often referred to the fact that the members of the Brotherhood are continuously acting as a Guardian Wall shielding, protecting, humankind from dangers of cosmic and terrestrial character. What do you suppose has been the method used by these great Ones? What I shall here say may sound very strange to some of you, but will sound very familiar to others. Hearken: our Masters and Elder Brothers “sing” these dangers away from us, through the *ākāśa* [astral plane or Light] they do it by *Sound*. . . . The singing may be utterly soundless to our ears, but it is a song which the mystics spoke of charming, or “sounding” the evil away.

What are these dangers? Do you think for a moment that they are only material? No; they are spiritual, intellectual, psychical, astral, physical. They are dangers of many kinds, of a cosmic kind, reaching our Earth from outside, from other planets and dead planets of the Solar System, our Moon in particular, and the so-called Eighth Sphere or Planet of Death.

Indeed, there are in constant circulation along the Circulations of the Solar System, Rivers of Lives having as much right to be as we have right to be; but inimical to us in our present evolutionary state, or dangerous at least, which, if they could enter our Earth’s atmosphere and impinge upon us, would wipe out the human race overnight: not a single human being would be left alive upon the Earth when morning came. This is just an instance.

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

We humans are pilgrims not only on our Globe D, this Earth, but on and in our own Planetary Chain. Please note this carefully: we are not for ever and unto eternity chained to Earth, nor linked to our Planetary Chain. We are transients here, although our transiency of sojourn is of exceedingly long time-period when judged by human standards. Consequently, there are dangers arising even in this Planetary Chain, and therefore in our own Globe D of it, which can be and are highly dangerous, highly inimical, to man's well-being, could they, were they allowed to, impinge upon us without a shield or barrier of some kind. These are the terrestrial dangers, and they are of many kinds and on all planes.

One of the greatest dangers that the human race is facing in our own era, in these days in which we now live, is the psychical crazes which are sweeping over the world, distracting men's minds and diverting them from the thoughts of spirit, of spirituality. This is a psychical danger, and it is fraught with tremendous perils *because* it can mislead human souls. There is the danger.

Remember that we are protected by song, by sound; and the most powerful sounds are those which are inaudible to human ears. The sounds which the human ear can take in, on account of its great imperfections, are but a small part of the octaves of vibration. Sound is but a form of radiation. Radiation is but a form of sound. We humans call it sound. It was no vain way of speaking that of some of the ancient European peoples, when they told us that their ancient magicians sang the storms away, sang diseases away, sang men into health and sanity, sang men into goodness and wisdom. [Some traditions use it to heal animals as well, such as the Mongolians use violin music to heal trauma in camels.]

Gottfried de Purucker
Hierarchies and the Doctrine of Emanations, pp. 72–73

“Drawn into the Vortex of Probation”: Edmund W. Fern’s Case

PEDRO OLIVEIRA

*Few men know their inherent capacities — only the ordeal of crude chelaship develops them.*¹

*You laugh at probations — the word seems ridiculous as applied to you? You forget that he who approaches our precincts even in thought, is drawn into the vortex of probation.*²

T. SUBBA RAO, in *Esoteric Writings*, presents an interesting view of occult and spiritual development:

This philosophy recognizes two paths, both having the same end, a glorified immortality. The one is the steady natural path of progress through moral effort and practice of the virtues. A natural coherent and sure growth of the soul is the result, a position of firm equilibrium is reached and maintained, which cannot be overthrown or shaken by any unexpected assault. It is the normal method followed by the vast mass of humanity, and this is the course Śankarāchārya recommended to all his sanyāsis and successors. The other road is the precipitous path of occultism, through a series of initiations. Only a few specially organized and peculiar natures are fit for this path.³

His view draws attention to the two paths envisaged by the Occult Philosophy:

a steady natural path of progress and the path of occultism, which involves tests and challenges which perhaps many people are not prepared to undergo. The essence of such tests is the utter exposure of the personal nature in us — the self — and the accompanying necessity for the individual undergoing such tests to look at his or her own personal nature squarely in the face. This process is called by the Mahatmas “probation”.

In their everyday existence, many people tend to take their sense of self for granted, both as a necessity as well as a normal feature of their lives. Our sense of identification with the self is nothing but complete and we live to tend to its whims and cares, its likes and dislikes, and its many desires. It is only when serious crises happen — a loss, an argument which has turned violent, a deeply personal interest thwarted by opposing forces, an irrational impulse for revenge — that we realize,

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partially, that the self was not that cosy, affable entity which we nourish. According to the teachings of the Buddha, the self is indeed like the stranger that arrives in the middle of the night in a household and kills the householder.⁴

Both Madame Blavastky as well as the Mahatmas suggested that a number of individuals in the early history of the Theosophical Society (TS) were attracted to “the vortex of probation”, and not many succeeded. As will become evident later on in this article, by putting aspiring chelas or disciples on probation the Mahatmas were trying to ascertain if they could indeed be used in their work in order to further the work of the TS. One of them defined this work thus:

The situation is this: men who join the Society with the one selfish object of reaching power making occult science their only or even chief aim may as well not join it — they are doomed to disappointment as much as those who commit the mistake of letting them believe that the Society is nothing else. It is just because they preach too much “the Brothers” and too little if at all *Brotherhood* that they fail. How many times had we to repeat, that he who joins the Society with the sole object of coming in contact with us, and if not of acquiring at least of assuring himself of the reality of such powers and of our objective existence — was pursuing a mirage? I say again then, it is he alone who has the love of humanity at heart, who is capable of grasping thoroughly the idea of a regenerating practical Brotherhood who is entitled to the possession of our secrets.

He alone, such a man — will never misuse his powers, as there will be no fear that he should turn them to selfish ends. A man who places not the good of mankind above his own good is not worthy of becoming our chela — he is not worthy of becoming higher in knowledge than his neighbor.⁵

In her notes to the chronological edition of *The Mahatma Letters*, Virginia Hanson, a respected, lifelong student of the Letters, had this to say about Mr Fern:

Edmund W. Fern was serving as secretary to [A. O.] Hume and probably living in his home. He was somewhat of a psychic and the Mahatmas considered that he might have some valuable potential for the transmission of messages. He joined the Theosophical Society and was elected secretary of the Simla Eclectic Theosophical Society. The Mahatma M. took an interest in him and accepted him as a chela on probation.⁶

Let us consider how the process of probation went for Mr Fern, according to the Mahatmas:

A chela under probation is allowed to think and do whatever he likes. He is warned and told beforehand: “You will be tempted and deceived by appearances; two paths will be open before you, both leading to the goal you are trying to attain; one easy, and that will lead you more rapidly to the fulfilment of orders you may receive; the other more arduous, longer; a path full of stones and thorns that will make you stumble more than once on your way; and, at the end of which you may, perhaps,

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find failure after all and be unable to carry out the orders given for some particular small work, — but, whereas the latter will cause the hardships you have undergone on it to be all carried to the side of your credit in the long run, the former, the easy path, can offer you but a momentary gratification, an easy fulfilment of the task.” The chela is at perfect liberty, *and often quite justified from the stand point of appearances* — to suspect his Guru of being “a fraud”, as the elegant word stands. More than that: the greater, the sincerer his indignation — whether expressed in words or boiling in his heart — the more fit he is, the better qualified to become an adept. He is free to, and will not be held to account for using the most abusive words and expressions regarding his guru’s actions and orders, provided he comes out victorious from the fiery ordeal; provided he resists all and every temptation; rejects every allurements, and proves that nothing — not even the promise of that which he holds dearer than life, of that most precious boon, his future adeptship — is able to make him deviate from the path of truth and honesty, or force him to become a *deceiver*. (Letter #74, ML-30, p. 222)

Consider the above-mentioned words in relation to what happened in Mr Fern’s probation in the quote below (a *dugpa* is a person who follows the left-hand path, seeking power and influence to dominate others):

Fern was tested and found a thorough *dugpa* in his moral nature. We will see, we will see; but very little hope left notwithstanding his

splendid capacities. Had I hinted to him to deceive his own father and mother he would have thrown in *their* fathers and mothers in the bargain. Vile, vile nature — yet irresponsible. Oh ye Westerns, who boast of your morality! May the bright Chohans keep you and all yours from the approaching harm is the sincere wish of your friend. (Letter #89, ML-46, p. 278)

The Mahatmas, according to their own words, use the process of probation to expose the personal, coarse nature of candidates to chelaship:

Fern is in the hands of two clever — “dwellers of the threshold” as Bulwer would call them — two *dugpas* kept by us to do our scavengers’ work, and to draw out the latent vices — if there be any — from the candidates; and Fern has shown himself on the whole, far better and more moral than he was supposed to be. Fern has done but what he was ordered to do; and he holds his tongue because it is his first duty. (Letter #75, ML-53, p. 232)

Probationary chelaship helps to magnify whatever was lurking within the candidate’s mind:

His letter of penitence and remorse to M. — which he sends you to keep — is not sincere. If you do not watch him closely, he will mix the cards for you in a way that may lead the Society to ruin, for he swore a great oath to himself that the Society will either *fall or rise* with himself. If he fails next year again — and with all his great gifts, how can such an incurable little Jesuit and liar help failing? — he

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will do his best to pull down the Society with him — as regards belief in the “Brothers” at least. Try to save him, if possible, my dearest friend; do your best to convert him to truth and unselfishness. It is a real pity that such gifts should be drowned in a mire of vice — so strongly engrafted upon him by his early tutors. Meanwhile, beware of ever allowing him to see any of my letters. (Letter #92, ML-54, pp. 288–289)

Although an educational process, chelaship involves a relentless testing and drawing out of a candidates inner and moral nature in order to see if he or she can succeed in integrating their consciousness on the basis of both stability and unselfishness:

Take another case, that of Fern. His development, as occurring under your eye, affords you a useful study and a hint as to even more serious methods adopted in individual cases to thoroughly *test* the latent moral qualities of the man. Every human being contains within himself vast potentialities, and it is the duty of the adepts to surround the would-be chela with circumstances which shall enable him to take the “right-hand path” — if he has the ability in him. We are no more at liberty to withhold the chance from a postulant than we are to guide and direct him into the proper course. At best, we can only show him — after his probation period was successfully terminated — that if he does this he will go right; if the other, wrong. But until he has passed that period, we leave him to fight out his battles as

best he may; and have to do so occasionally with higher and *initiated* chelas such as HPB, once they are allowed to work in the world, that all of us more or less avoid. More than that — and you better learn it at once, if my previous letters to you about Fern have not sufficiently opened your eyes — we allow our candidates *to be tempted* in a thousand various ways, so as to draw out the whole of their inner nature and allow it the chance of remaining conqueror either one way or the other. (Letter #92, ML-54, p. 299)

The mastery of self is the goal as well as the most difficult struggle to be undertaken:

The victor’s crown is only for him who proves himself worthy to wear it; for him who attacks Mara single-handed and conquers the demon of lust and earthly passions; and not we but he himself puts it on his brow. It was not a meaningless phrase of the Tathagata that “he who masters *Self* is greater than he who conquers thousands in battle”: there is no such other difficult struggle. If it were not so, adeptship would be but a cheap acquirement. . . . What may seem present bad faith may in the end prove the truest, most benevolent loyalty. Let time show who was right and who faithless. One, who is true and approved today, may tomorrow prove, under a new concatenation of circumstances, a traitor, an ingrate, a coward, an imbecile. The reed, bent beyond its limit of flexibility, will have snapped in twain. Shall we accuse it? No; but because we can, and *do* pity it, we cannot select it as part of those reeds that

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have been tried and found strong, hence fit to be accepted as material for the indestructible fane we are so carefully building. (Letter #92, (ML-54, pp. 299–300))

The process of probation will show what the candidate will be capable to do “under different and every kind of opportunities”:

The option of receiving him [Fern] or not as a regular chela — remains with the Chohan. M. has simply to have him tested, tempted and examined by all and every means, so as to have his real nature drawn out. This is a rule with us as inexorable as it is disgusting in your Western sight, and I could not prevent it even if I would. It is not enough to know thoroughly what the chela is capable of doing or not doing at the time and under the circumstances during the period of probation. We have to know of what he may become capable under different and every kind of opportunities. (Letter #74, ML-30, pp. 227)

The Mahatma alludes to Mr Fern’s probation as well as to his character:

Fern is under such a probation; and a nice mess they have prepared for me between them two! As you already know from my letter to Hume, he did not interest me, I knew nothing of him, beyond his remarkable faculties, his powers for clair-audience and clairvoyance, and his still more remarkable tenacity of purpose, strong will, and other, etc. A loose, immoral character for years — a tavern Pericles with a sweet smile for every street

Aspasia, he had entirely and suddenly reformed after joining the Theosophical Society, and M. took him seriously in hand. It is no business of mine to tell, even yourself, how much of his visions is truth and how much hallucination, or even perchance — fiction. (Letter #75, ML-53, p. 231)

One of the important points regarding the probationary stage is to bring people together “into the closest relationship in order to bring out their mutual virtues and defects”:

I may tell you no news if I say that it was Mr Hume’s attitude when the *Eclectic* was formed that caused our chiefs to bring Mr Fern and Mr Hume together. The latter reproached us vehemently for refusing to take in as chelas — himself, and that, sweet, handsome, spiritual and truth-aspiring boy — Fern. We were daily dictated laws, and as daily taken to task for being unable to realize our own interests. And it will be no news, though it may disgust and shock you, to learn that the two were brought into the closest relationship in order to bring out their mutual virtues and defects — each to shine in his own true light. Such are the laws of Eastern *probation*. Fern was a most remarkable psychic subject, naturally — very spiritually inclined, but corrupted by Jesuit masters, and with his sixth and seventh Principles completely dormant and paralysed within him. No idea of right and wrong whatever; in short — *irresponsible* for anything but the direct and voluntary actions of the *animal man*. (Letter #101, ML-57, pp. 343–344)

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During the history of the TS a number of Theosophists were put to the test of confronting their own personal nature and, in spite of many difficulties and inner struggles, were able to emerge from such tests with an abiding and unshakable dedication to the cause of Theosophy. They became pillars in the Theosophical edifice. Perhaps every sincere worker in the Society may face

similar tests, like many others before, now or in the future.

In his first letter to C. W. Leadbeater, in 1884, Master KH wrote, before accepting him as a chela in a second letter:

Like the “true man” of Carlyle who is not to be seduced by ease, “difficulty, abnegation, martyrdom, death are the *allurements* that act” during the hours of trial on the heart of a *true chela*.⁷ ✧

References

1. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, chron., ed. Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, Theosophical Publishing House (TPH), Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines, 1993, letter #110, p. 371. (All letters quoted in this article are from the same source unless otherwise noted.)
2. Letter #131, p. 435.
3. Rao, T. Subba, *Esoteric Writings*, TPH, Adyar, Chennai, 2002, pp.112–113.
4. Grimm, George, *The Doctrine of the Buddha — The Religion of Reason and Meditation*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1982, p. 144.
5. Letter #33, pp. 100–101.
6. Letter #73, p. 218.
7. *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, First Series, TPH, Adyar, Madras, 1973, p. 29.

However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The fault-finder will find faults even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours, even in a poorhouse. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man's abode; the snow melts before its door as early in the spring. I do not see but a quiet mind may live as contentedly there, and have as cheering thoughts, as in a palace.

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Beauty, the Arts, and Spirituality — II

GRACIELA RICCI

4. Beauty in the invisible world

The beauty of the invisible world can be perceived not only through various artistic, musical, and literary expressions, but also simply through spiritual research, if this is carried out properly. Let us turn to Plato who was the initiator of a movement towards the intelligible. For Plato, absolute beauty can only be perceived by the mind. According to him, the beauty we see in the world is only a dream which refers to the absolute reality that is present in the world of archetypes (compare with the myth of the cave).

Therefore, for Plato true Beauty resides somewhere else and is in direct contact with Truth. Poets or artists, who see things that others do not see, become the mediators through whom human beings can have access to the beauty which is expressed in their works and conceals true Beauty. Bodei says: “Deities (the muses in particular) soak the poet’s soul and the souls of those who are listening to him so that they are themselves deified: this is the etymological meaning of *enthousiasmos* (enthusiasm).” (Bodei 2017:93)

Plotinus drew from this platonic con-

cept; in his *Enneads* (I, 5 and V, 8) he “describes the departure of the soul from the sensible world and its movement towards the intelligible world” (*ibid.*, 100), which represents the dimension proper to the soul. For Plotinus it is important to become internally beautiful in order to contemplate oneself’s “inner form” and be “the sculptor of a statue that must become beautiful”, which means “to remove what is unnecessary from ourselves . . . to make it bright”. (*ibid.*, 101)

These words take us to the very core of our topic about beauty in spiritual research: both Plotinus and Theosophy present a similar message which concerns our work as individuals and groups. On this topic Danielle Audoin said: “It is all about becoming the teaching itself, in other words, not to conceive of an ‘I’ on the one hand and ‘the teaching, Theosophy’, on the other. If we do not become Theosophy itself, this one will be nothing more than an additional burden which will contribute to further complicate our life instead of facilitating it.”⁸ [Therefore] “Joining the Theosophical Society (TS) is the starting point of a journey, at times hard, of a quest, a mission; it is the

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beginning of one's theosophical work towards one's awakening to the comprehension of the Unity of Life."⁹

Audoin's words show the importance that the TS can have in the lives of each of us, if only we were able to understand that it is on us to make a starting move, even if it is just a very timid one, towards the Unity of Life. We can find that starting point within the TS but then, as Master KH said to Leadbeater: "*You* hold your future in your hands." As a matter of fact, it would be very immature to think that someone else could do the work for us.

Going back to Plotinus, if we manage to contemplate our own inner form, and create harmony and beauty, also through empathic resonance during group study, we are on the right track, and spiritual research becomes not only true and good but also beautiful, and our harmonic vibration can spread all over the world. Quoting Plotinus: "We encounter beauty when, once purified, we turn our backs towards the world of senses and venture on the path towards the One . . . the reign of the intelligible, which is everywhere and has no boundaries . . . Then, a beauty that is not lazy manifests itself as plenitude and blossoming of being which connects to the One." (Bodei 2018:101)

But why did Plotinus mention a beauty that is not lazy? If we look at our own actions in everyday life, even as students of Theosophy in our groups, I reckon that we can all well understand why the word "laziness" applies. Since practicing any art requires a hard and prolonged discipline, becoming beautiful on the inside

also demands a rigorous and strict discipline; unfortunately, our physical, astral, and mental bodies are set in their ways and lazily tend to follow their habits. I am sure that each one of us is somehow aware of their weak points, but it is definitely more relaxing to go out for a walk or stay in and watch TV than to try to modify our neuron patterns, focusing our attention on the objective of self-knowledge.

The problem is that our brain is always looking for patterns within the chaos of our thoughts and builds mental models which influence our ethical and aesthetic direction. For this reason, our thoughts repeat themselves and our erroneous beliefs — as a result of our negative emotions — keep on determining our behaviour. The more our thoughts repeat themselves, the more our fixed structures model our brains, which become crystallised, and the experiences and false beliefs embedded in our body are bound to cause some illness, because we become our beliefs. . . .

Moreover, when we are faced with looking at our not-so-beautiful inner aspects, it becomes difficult for us to be aware of our disharmony; it is far easier to notice what is wrong in others than to look at the beautiful image that we have created of ourselves in the mirror and break it down. Annie Besant used to say: "The teachings that have been given to the world by Kapila and Shankaracharya, by Pythagoras and Plato, by Valentine and Plotinus, by Bruno and Paracelsus, by Boehme and H. P. Blavatsky, must not

be recalled with intellectual incompetence or through irresponsible chattering.”

Something greater is demanded of us when we present ourselves to the world to explain Theosophy. “Our lives will preach Theosophy better than the tongue of any speaker, however skilful or eloquent. For there are but few speakers, while there are many who live, and their lives may preach more eloquently than any skill of tongue.”¹⁰

Besant encourages us to become “living Theosophy” and to incarnate the Presence of what we essentially are. But in order to incarnate Theosophy beautifully, we must have a mind that is always awake and alert; it is the distraction which is at the basis of our laziness that makes us unaware: this is a warning that we should better not overlook. We are immersed in a hectic life, which makes us forget about our essence, and incessantly pushes us towards the various cultural and technological advancements, and this happens also within the TS. Even though these advancements are pursued in order to achieve a greater efficiency and excellence, this process actually hides a lot of frailty because our mind and body are not prepared for this acceleration.

Nature implies some laws which should be complied with and that we have unfortunately left aside because of the fast digital communication technology of the past few years. This technology has shattered our attention. Our constantly being connected to the virtual world has led us to live unconsciously in a state of constant alarm, which causes us to be only

superficially attentive. Nevertheless, if we want to thoroughly enjoy the deeper meaning of a text, the joyous beauty of a work of art or, simply, of a sunset, slowness and silence are required; a silence that is not only physical but also of the senses (what yoga calls *pratyāhara*), of breathing, an emotional and mental silence. Our brain is made to enjoy beauty and harmony in every moment through a slow, deep, and silent attention; an attitude which is progressively being forgotten. Some years ago I noted down some of Susanna Tamaro’s words, which I would like to share with you here:

Human ethology has been subverted for what concerns our behaviours, the stages of our life, our everyday rhythms, and the slow flow of our thoughts. . . . Attention is the cornerstone of our life, but in order for it to exist in its fecund creativity, it needs rooting, depth, a univocal direction. . . . Without deep attention, a writer cannot write a book, a poet cannot create a poem, a scientist cannot make a discovery. Without deep attention even human relationships break apart, because what builds human relationships is only love, and love is nothing more than a form of prolonged attention in time.¹¹

Love is such an easy short word to say but it is so hard to live in every moment! Today, Tamaro’s claim is not only still true but I would say that things have gotten even worse: couples split up as soon as they face the first difficulty because there is no time for tolerance; friendships have become shallow because there is no

time to build a long-lasting relationship; within our groups all decisions and answers need to be immediately communicated via email or WhatsApp messages, urgently and relentlessly. But my question to myself and to you all is: what urgency are we talking about and what for? In our frantic way of living, we too often forget that, when compared to the Infinite, we are nothing but a tiny grain of sand. Art, music, literature, the beauty of every kind of research — not only spiritual research — require slowness, slowness and depth, and these can only be offered by that pause we take in the middle of our daily routine, and by silence, both external and, above all, internal.

5. Conclusion

We shall now ask ourselves: “Where has our inner silence gone?” That silence which is the Origin of all sounds and allows us to perceive the Presence that we essentially are, and to experience that Brotherhood which we have a right to as part of the One Life; because we are all divine sparks, but we are incapable of perceiving these sparks for lack of attention and awareness. All the superficial buzzing around us is burying us in a total lack of attention, while attention should instead be the cornerstone of our life. It is our attention that can make us aware of the fact that we could look at Life through the infinite ocean of our conscience and not from the limited perspective of our small ego.

It is through total attention that we can prevent our neurons from repeatedly

activating the same thought patterns which tie us to the cycle of fixed beliefs and cognitive explanations. When we read, for instance, Krishnamurti’s writing, if we are attentive, something mysterious happens, but instead of enjoying it in silence we are often inclined to analyze it in a group. In the latter case the explanations — or the comments — immediately cancel the magnetic-spiritual bond created among what is being read, the reader, and the other listeners. This is how the direct perception of Beauty and the empathic resonance of the group are blinded by cognitive explanations.

So, do we want to discover the role of Beauty in spiritual research? Let us get used to speaking a little less, to pondering each word before speaking it, to using digital resources (the Internet, Facebook, WhatsApp, and so on) a little less, to moving less frantically, to dedicating ourselves to public relations a little less, and to meditating deeply. Let us learn how to resonate empathically with others and to contact our deep Self beyond the mental level, because it is not just through words and social gatherings that we are able to understand who we are essentially, and who the person in front of us is. Social encounters are useful, but they do not suffice.

It is attentive listening without selfish motivations that can reveal the “you-I” relationship in its deeper essence. Therefore, all together, we must commit to organizing group meetings that are authentic encounters among many Souls who love Truth and Light, so that they can be

real study meetings, focused on getting to know one another, and not on useless criticisms of others' actions. We should always remember that what is really decisive is not what human beings desire with their personalities rather than what the Spirit inside them wants. We should also remember that judgments belong to the world of form, while a wise comprehension illuminates all.

As it is well described in "The Golden Stairs", only with "a clean life, an open mind, a pure heart, an eager intellect, an unveiled spiritual perception, a brotherliness for [all]", and with an attentive awareness of thought, word, action, and emotion, will Beauty be able to emerge and transform our worldly being into a work of art. Until that moment, the Unity of Life will remain a wonderful ideal but not something that we truly experience. Therefore, without haste, everyone at one's own pace, let us give up a desire a day and add one more spiritual aspiration, so as to embrace the TS Mission Statement: "To serve humanity by cultivating an ever-deepening understanding and realization of the Ageless Wisdom, spiritual self-transformation, and the unity of all life."

I would like to end with a poem by



Jorge Luis Borges, the famous Argentinian blind writer and poet, who until the end of his life looked for Beauty in each word he used, in a humble attempt, despite all the international awards he received, to understand the nature of his inner reality and the meaning of his life in the world.

The Art of Poetry

To gaze at a river made of time and water
And remember Time is another river.

To know we stray like a river
And our faces vanish like water.

To feel that waking is another dream
That dreams of not dreaming
and that the death

We fear in our bones is the death
That every night we call a dream.

To see in every day and year a symbol
Of all the days of man and his years,
And convert the outrage of the years
Into a music, a sound, and a symbol.
To see in death a dream, in the sunset
A golden sadness — such is poetry,
Humble and immortal, poetry
Returning, like dawn and the sunset.
Sometimes at evening there's a face
That sees us from the depths of a mirror.

Art must be that sort of mirror,
Disclosing to each of us its face. . . .¹²

Endnotes

8. Danielle Audoin, *Conosci te stesso*. In *Rivista Italiana di Teosofia*, Jan. 2019, part 1, p. 7.
9. ———, "Cosa possiamo attenderci dalla Società Teosofica?" In *Rivista Italiana di Teosofia*, 8-9.2018.
10. Annie Besant (1995), in Danielle Audoin, "La vita teosofica". In *Rivista Italiana di Teosofia*, 4.2016.
11. Susanna Tamaro, "I tempi delle nostre vite e l'attenzione perduta", *Corriere della Sera*, 6.6.2013.
12. Jorge Luis Borges, *L'artefice*, O.C., Milano: Mondadori 1984, vol. I, p. 1247.

Beauty, the Arts, and Spirituality — II

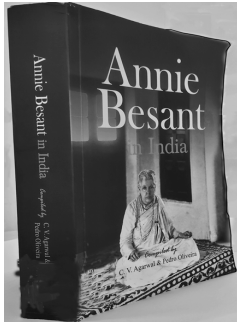
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**It is better wither to be silent, or to say things of more value than silence.
Sooner throw a pearl at hazard than an idle or useless word;
and do not say a little in many words
but a great deal in a few.**

Pythagoras

Books of Interest



ANNIE BESANT IN INDIA, compiled by C. V. Agarwal and Pedro Oliveira. Olive Tree Publishing, Australia, 2021, paperback, 590 pp., AUD 40.00.

To read *Annie Besant in India* is to share something of the extraordinary journey of discovery that Dr C. V. Agarwal and Pedro Oliveira as compilers have been on, traversing the mountains and valleys of both her public and private life. It is well known that Annie Besant distinguished herself as a speaker, writer, and agitator for social justice both in Ireland and England. Her unstinting work for self-rule in India has also earned her a place in the history annals. In 2015 an image even appeared on Google India celebrating her 168th birth anniversary.

It is perhaps less understood, however, why she chose a life working for the Theosophical Society (TS) rather than simply maintaining her position in the political sphere. What is unique about this publication therefore is that it serves as an invaluable record of her deepest spiritual aspirations for humanity as a whole, and for India in particular.

The quote in the Introduction from a telegram received by then President of

the TS, C. Jinarājadāsa, during a Golden Jubilee celebration of Annie Besant's public work, is beautifully apposite. The assertion that "Annie Besant made history" is proven time and again throughout the book. Moreover, the way in which her ideals are fundamental to the story of her life is well demonstrated. In its entirety, this biography goes a long way to understand her commitment to help those who suffer, her ability to persevere in the face of difficulty, especially personal attack, and her willingness to challenge the status quo when the welfare of others was at stake. Such moral courage clearly stood her in good stead during the turbulent years within the Society itself and the division that followed. A strong defense of Annie Besant from the outset is upheld by rigorous and extensive research; readers may weigh the evidence for themselves.

It is interesting to note that the writing of this biography has its own history and could be considered a story within a story. It owed its beginnings to J. Krishnamurti, when he asked past President of the TS, Radha Burnier, to write a biography of "Amma". As Mrs Burnier was constantly hampered by lack of time, Dr C. V. Agarwal was asked to conduct the research. The compilation of the first four chapters, which include Mrs Besant's formative years before arriving in

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India, is therefore largely attributed to him.

When Dr Agarwal passed away in 2009, Pedro Oliveira, of the TS in Australia, was “handed the baton” and we have this author to thank for the final publication of the book. The title, *Annie Besant in India*, was chosen by Radha Burnier before her passing in 2013. This was not only for pragmatic reasons, as an entire biography would have been unwieldy, but also to acknowledge her outstanding work for “Mother India”.

Each chapter is well titled, and most are prefaced by an ordered timeline of significant activities and achievements. Additionally, an overall summary, “A Besant Diary of Principal Events”, is provided in Appendix 1 of the book.

In the opening of the First Chapter, “An Enduring Dedication”, the historical context of her birth in London in 1847, highlighting the attitudes and moral issues of the times, is well drawn. Some insight is also afforded into what was happening in India during the period known as the British Raj. Most pertinent to the theme of the book, however, is the early summation of her character. Hers was a “kind, intelligent, and compassionate nature” which responded to the troubles of those around her with “energy, determination, and selflessness”. All this despite difficult family circumstances, an ill-suited marriage which resulted in the loss of custody of her children, and intense opposition to her work for the poor and oppressed. Much of this chapter is derived from Annie Besant’s own auto-

biography, which covers her personal journey until 1891. For those interested in reading this book as well, the full reference for *An Autobiography* is provided in the notes on p. 19.

Mrs Besant joined the TS in 1889, after having written a review of *The Secret Doctrine*, and ended some 17 years of selfless political activity two years later. There is a very touching description of her meeting with Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (HPB) for the first time. Her journey from Christianity to atheism, and from secular, social reformism to Theosophy, was one of upheaval and struggle. Yet she had no doubt that in finding Theosophy her “weary search” was over and that “it is better to live in a universe you are beginning to understand than in one which is full of problems never to be solved”.

The compiler notes that Annie Besant began speaking and writing for the Society soon after joining. The approaching death of HPB brought about the need for a successor, and she was instructed by HPB to tour America as her “agent and representative”. Other tours included England, India, Australia, and New Zealand, all closely recounted in Chapter 2. That it was also a time of a devastating internal crisis which resulted in secession, is also addressed, and the controversy is presented in more detail in Appendix 3. Through it all, the records show that her commitment to the TS endured. She writes: “Since I joined the Society in 1889, I have never had a moment’s regret for having entered it.”

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Lecturing and writing was often undertaken along with a relentless touring schedule, and indeed it was to become a feature of her work for the TS until she passed away in 1933. A list of publications by Annie Besant is given in Appendix 2, which, if “not exhaustive”, shows nothing less than an astonishing literary output. Regarding public talks, Colonel H. S. Olcott wrote admiringly of the enormous impact of her lectures everywhere and describes her speeches in India as the “most splendid series of discourses” he had ever listened to. Educational and social reform in India were for Annie Besant the natural extension of her work for the TS and the Central Hindu College (CHC) in Benares (now Varanasi) was formed accordingly in 1901. This is the segue into Chapter 3, “Education through Timeless Values”.

Archives from a wide variety of sources show the unique approach to Indian education that Annie Besant upheld. She recognized that there was a need for Indian youth to be educated not just intellectually, as in the English tradition, but morally as well. Materialistic Western education had become predominant, and the effect was to turn Indians away from their own spiritual heritage. Far from being divisive, however, she sought to draw India and England together, and envisaged a system of education where religious training and “universal learning” were of equal weight. A tolerance of and appreciation for other creeds and faiths was also central to the Hindu revival she espoused, and at the same

time she reawakened Indians to the spiritual truths embedded in Hindu scriptures and to the inner significance of the rituals.

These views were clearly leavened by the altruistic ideal of Universal Brotherhood, on which the TS was founded, and which continues to be at the heart of the Society today, along with its practical counterpart, service. Once the CHC was established, she was able to garnish support for a Hindu school for girls and ultimately a national university. Yet although her work was supported at the highest levels, including by the Maharaja of Benares and the Viceroy of India, the Earl of Minto, opposition grew. The story is meticulously documented and once again Mrs Besant was to resolutely continue in whatever capacity she could. The Hindu University recognized her labours in the educational field by conferring on her the Degree of Doctor of Letters in 1921. Chapter 3 concludes with a comprehensive list of the educational institutions founded or inspired by her and other theosophists.

In 1907 Annie Besant was elected President of the TS and her hopes are summed up succinctly in the title of Chapter 4, “President of the Theosophical Society: Theosophy Is for All”. An outstanding contribution to the TS was made by speaking and writing in more accessible ways, and thus spreading Theosophy far and wide. Many noteworthy events are covered in this chapter, some further exemplifying the extent of internal troubles she had to

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endure. This is balanced by numerous lasting achievements, especially and including the establishment of the Theosophical Publishing House at Adyar. The Theosophical Society Order of Service begun in 1908, and later renamed the Theosophical Order of Service (TOS) also continues to this day. A series of moving and informative letters, written for the Golden Jubilee celebrating 50 years of her public life, is a highlight.

In Chapter 5, “Krishnaji and the World Teacher Movement”, archival references concerning the coming of a great religious teacher provide the background to J. Krishnamurti’s adoption and upbringing at Adyar. Mrs Besant’s declaration that Krishnamurti would be a vehicle for the World Teacher had its detractors within the Society and eventually led to the secession of the German Section. Yet her insight would eventually prove justified. Through his remarkable speeches and writing, Krishnamurti began to attract many followers, even to the extent that an unwelcome spiritual authority grew around him and he felt compelled to dissolve the Order of the Star in the East. Through it all, his devotion to “Amma” never wavered.

One of the strengths of *Annie Besant in India* is the way in which the compilers allow the voice of their subject to shine freely. The next four chapters are derived solely from her book, *India -- Bond or Free? -- A World Problem*. Chapter 6, “Her Vision for India: The Means of India’s Regeneration” is from a lecture she delivered in 1895, two years after

her arrival in India. In his tribute to her, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru notes that “between her thought and her action there is very little distance”. This is exemplified in the proposal laid out here, as much of which she envisaged came to pass in one form or another. The need for a spiritual revival before a material one is emphasized in Chapter 7, “India’s Awakening”. It consists of a lecture given in 1910 in which she advocates unselfishness and wisdom to be at the root of action and for “a nucleus of wise and steady thinkers in order that a popular movement may find its way aright”.

Annie Besant’s crowning glory in the political sense may be said to be her dedicated work towards Swarāj, or Self-Rule; and in Chapter 8, “Home Rule for India”, the nuances of this struggle are once more apparent. In an excerpt from her book, she acknowledges her coworkers for constitutional reform and reiterates the importance of being law-abiding. She records a “whirlwind” of orderly and constructive support during her internment, which resulted in her peaceful liberation. Mrs Besant was elected President of the National Congress in 1917, but her hopes for a steady and peaceful road to change were not realized at this time, and the chapter closes with an essay poignantly entitled, “The Breaking Up of United India”.

Undaunted, in 1913 Mrs Besant and a small band of theosophical workers committed themselves once more to the “steady advance” of religious, educational, and social reform. Chapter 9,

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“Commonwealth of India Bill: A Foundation for the Future”, is drawn from the appendix of her book. In it she recounts how this grew to the practical framing of a “Constitution for India by Indians” and thus her singleness of purpose and organizing talent would come to fruition once more.

In 1933, when she was in her 86th year, she departed from this world. In the final Chapter, letters of tribute describe the many facets of her character that shone as one great “Diamond Soul”. They show that she was as tender as she was forthright, and as compassionate as she was steadfast in her goals. Above all, she gave herself absolutely to the helping of humanity. In her own words, having glimpsed the “glory and the beauty of the Life that knows no difference and recognizes no separation”, she could do no other.

Early in the book, in a quote selected

from the preface to her autobiography, we find what is to all intents and purposes Annie Besant’s apology for writing about herself. It seems, to her credit, that she would have none of the self-centeredness that might accompany such an exercise. These are noble sentiments indeed, but it may also be said that the sympathetic biographer has no such restraints.

C. V. Agarwal and Pedro Oliveira champion their subject unhesitatingly, presenting not only the facts of her life and work, but also those innermost qualities which enabled her to become a shaper of history, rather than merely a spectator in it. Hers was a life so full of spiritual vitality and accomplishment that doing Annie Besant justice is no small task, as the length and breadth of the book attests. A “bird’s eye view” it may be, but a thorough one, and we thank the compilers for it.

MICHELLE OSBORNE

Grand, verily, shall be the day, splendid the dawning, when young and old shall be bound together by one aspiration, one spirit of devotion . . . when friendliness and goodwill shall spread over the length and breadth of India, . . . and when all shall act in brotherly cooperation for the regeneration of the Motherland.

Annie Besant

1906 Anniversary Address in the Central Hindu College, Varanasi

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