

Freedom of Thought

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

Freedom of the Society

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

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



THE THEOSOPHIST

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Editor: *Mr Tim Boyd*

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Cover: Buddha, the Conqueror, painted in 1925 by Nicholas Roerich, who was born in 1874 in Russia, and died in 1947 in India. He was a scenic designer and writer in addition to being the creator of over 7,000 works in oil, gouache, and tempera, many of which were inspired by various religions.

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THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

Founded 17 November 1875

President: Mr Tim Boyd

Vice-President: Dr Deepa Padhi

Secretary: Ms Marja Artamaa

Treasurer: Ms Nancy Secrest

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

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

Secretary: secy.hq@ts-adyar.org

Treasurer: treasury.hq@ts-adyar.org

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Fourth Pillar of Practice

TIM BOYD

ONE of the somewhat paradoxical goals of spiritual practice is to become less self-centered. The results of practice might be described as becoming “unselfed”. Expressed in simple terms spiritual practice focuses on diminishing the limiting influence of the personal self by shifting the center of awareness to a Greater, or Universal Self. It is paradoxical because in order for this shift to take place there has to be an initial commitment of the unrefined personality to the process — a commitment to a future exaltation that to the personal self looks a lot like extinction.

In its early stages one has no grasp of what it might mean to diminish the personal self, much less to extinguish it. Most people who come to a practice do not arrive at it with the idea of becoming less. The normal wish is to acquire more — more peace, freedom from suffering, renown, knowledge, love, understanding, better relationships, better mental and physical health, and for some, more material wealth. One of the ironies of spiritual practice is that all of these desires can, and, for many, do, find fulfillment.

In the business world there is a marketing principle stated as “It’s the ‘I’ in what you buy”. Simply put, the products and services to which we are drawn

capture our interest because of how they make us feel. In the advertising world much of the focus is on appealing to emotional needs and desires. In our time it has become a “normal” approach to living — normal in the sense that there is a broad consensus that material, or even psychological possessions can give satisfaction and happiness. “What’s in it for me?” is the prevailing, if unacknowledged, question for many — at least initially. This is a common state of mind that people bring when they begin the attempt to find clarity and peace. It is something J. Krishnamurti described as the workings of our “beastly little mind”.

I have great admiration for the genuine spiritual teachers who have appeared in our world, and for those among us now. It is a difficult task they willingly undertake — to utilize our undeveloped mind and personal desires as catalysts that lead to our progressive unfoldment into a Greater Life in which the personal imperceptibly transmutes to the Universal.

The difficulty real teachers face is a “How to . . .?” question. How to move us from small personal beginnings to a deeper state which they would describe as “Reality”. In the *Bhagavadgītā* Krishna makes the profound statement that “By whatever path people approach me, on

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that same path I meet them.” This is not a point of view that conforms to our usual “spiritual” imaginings. For the normal, spiritually engaged individual it is clear that spirituality is only accessible along certain lines that promote “purity”. While this is the general rule for most of us, when we examine the lives of the truly great spiritual people, we find that those who were considered the most debauched, immoral, negative, and impure became not merely their disciples, but in many cases the most revered and respected teachers in their traditions.

For Saint Francis his interaction with the “Prostitute of Damietta” led to her conversion and sanctification. One of the more notable disciples of the Buddha was a man who was known as Angulimala. The name speaks about the inner potentials of even the most extreme and “evil” among us. Angulimala was a mass murderer who collected the fingers (*anguli*) of his victims, and strung them into a necklace (*māla*). Although few of us find ourselves in such extreme conditions, the point is that the realization of our deepest, truest nature is possible at every moment, regardless of our sense of limitation.

So, how do we participate in the unfoldment process we call “practice”? In “The Three Pillars of Practice” (see the April issue) I outlined three fundamental components of such a practice: (1) Study, (2) Meditation, and (3) Service. I also expressed my preference for a more nuanced description than those three single words convey. For me these three pillars of practice are:

1. Elevation of the Mind,
2. Experimenting with Quiet, and
3. Conscious Compassionate Activity.

I find this more accurate in describing the inner condition of the practitioner.

In terms of spiritual practice “study” involves more than the intellectual activity of collecting information. We proactively extend the “upward” reach of the mental aspect of consciousness. If we are honest and have some understanding of what genuine meditation is, we recognize that only on rare occasions are we actually in a state of meditation, but in our “meditation practice” we are always engaged in experimenting with the varying depths of quiet. Service in terms of spiritual practice is not dependent on specific actions, but the cultivation of a conscious self-rooting in compassion and those internal and external activities that express it.

Over time I have come to the conclusion that there is a fourth pillar of practice. Before applying a name to this pillar, let me ask a question: What value would you place on an activity that requires no movement or special training; that has the scientifically proven capacity to boost physical, emotional, and mental well-being; that can reduce stress and depression; that can promote longer life and greater happiness; that elevates the same endorphins, hormones, and neurochemicals as meditation; and that you fully understand and utilize right now? And all of these qualities only address its personal and immediate effects. This fourth pillar also functions at a deeper, spiritual level by rewiring the synapses of the brain,

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by broadening one's perception of compassion, of the unity and interdependence of all life, and by moving one toward a direct perception of reality — a genuine wisdom. Might this be something worthy of your consideration?

The word for this fourth support of spiritual practice is "Gratitude". In the normal meaning of the word, it is regarded as a strong feeling of thankfulness and appreciation to someone, or something, for the help or kindness received from another. It is the mood or emotional response that comes over us when we acknowledge some benefit that has flowed our way. It is also normal that much, if not most of the good, we experience goes unacknowledged, unrecognized, and unappreciated. We receive it as if in a vacuum and go on about our business as if it is our right.

Gratitude, like Love, Compassion, Harmony, Patience, Meditation, Generosity, spans a spectrum of ways it presents — from a self-centered mood to a state of being, from an individual act of thanks to an experience of integration in the life of a Greater Whole. A biblical statement of the scope of Gratitude is "In all your ways acknowledge him and He will direct your path". Whether one regards "him" as God in the sense of an overarching, all powerful external being, or as an omnipresent, indwelling presence within which all things "live, move, and have their being", depends on our belief and conditioning. But regardless of belief, it is the act of recognition and acknowledgement that activates the direction of

one's path. Making it conscious is crucial.

One of the difficulties we face as people, certainly as members of the Theosophical Society, is that we are predisposed to complexity — so much so that simplicity can be suspect. In a field of study in which we acquaint ourselves with teachings on the birth and unfoldment of both Humanity and the Cosmos, with an array of sevenfold stages of consciousness and development and with occult forces, cycles, agencies, and agents of limitless unfoldment, the self-evident fact of complexity can become our default lens for seeing the world.

However, the truth of complexity cannot be allowed to diminish the more potent truth of simplicity. Across traditions love is seen as the most vital expression of elevated consciousness. Even though love enfolds the entire range of human experience it is radically simple. Love, whether the limitless love of the world savior or avatar, or the love between husband and wife, parent and child, student and teacher, is one thing.

Like many things in our time, expansive realities become diminished by an insistence that they conform to our personal needs and desires. The great wit and thinker, Voltaire, made the comment, "In the beginning God created man in his image, and man has been trying to repay the favor ever since." So, Yoga is reduced to a series of exercises and postures promoting health; Love becomes lust; Kindness is mistaken for weakness; Peace becomes suppression of war; God becomes "Him" — a bearded, elderly white man,

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angry at his creation. There is nothing so pure that it cannot become tainted by the touch of the untransformed human mind.

Gratitude of any scope is beneficial, but it takes on a different quality in the context of spiritual practice. In much non-Western practice the role of the teacher is strongly emphasized. “Guru devotion” is the term for the acknowledgement and gratitude to one’s teacher for their irreplaceable role in one’s unfoldment. In the Lam Rim practice of Tibetan Buddhism, the opening words beginning any practice session are, “Following a kind master, foundation of all perfections, is the very root and basis of the path. Empower me to be mindful of this and make every effort to follow well.” This expression of thankfulness is considered to be essential, so important that without it, productive practice is not possible.

An ordinary Google search gives long lists of the benefits to body and mind that flow from the practice of gratitude. Everything from how to practice gratitude, how to keep a gratitude journal, how to do a gratitude meditation, how gratitude affects the brain, biology, and relationships, the value of daily lists, gratitude workshops, and more show up in even the most cursory search. It can be a little off-putting to see how it has blossomed into a mini-industry, complete with all the commercial trappings. However, it has become so highly valued for a reason. It meets people at their level of need.

In the medical community there is great concern today for what doctors describe as an “epidemic of loneliness

and isolation”, particularly in urban environments. The sense of being disconnected from others and from the natural world is affecting physical health and a sense of well-being. It is the nature of gratitude that it is completely focused on connection to others, and to a more expansive shared life. Every cause for thanks can come to be seen as originating from this ever-present Life that channels its blessing to us through others. With every acknowledgement of thanks, the reality of connection is affirmed. This has been demonstrated to have a healing effect — healing in its true meaning of restoration of a sense of wholeness. With a deepening practice, fragmentation, disconnection, longing, and inadequacy diminish. Over time the experience of interconnection with its accompanying awareness of interdependence take root.

In *The Voice of the Silence* the seven *pāramitā-s*, or Perfections, are presented. The seventh is *prajñā*, or Wisdom. It is said that even if the other *pāramitā-s* are undeveloped a connection with wisdom can illumine. But what is wisdom? From the perspective of the *pāramitā* traditions, wisdom is not simply extreme knowledge, or great depth of study. It is the perception of reality. This perception is attained by contemplation along two lines. The first is often named “emptiness”. The idea is that nothing has any inherent, or essential nature — they are empty. Sometimes the example of a chair, or a tree, or a car, or any other object is used, and the question is asked: “Where in that object is the essence that makes it what it is.” One is

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encouraged to examine and try to identify its essence. With a chair its essence is not the wood, or plastic, or metal that composes it. It is not the number of legs it has, its shape, or the thought in someone's mind. When you look closely there is no essential "chair" there. What we see as one thing is made of infinite components.

The second truth of "reality" is called "dependent arising". In a nutshell it is the idea that everything is dependent on an infinite number of other things and conditions for its existence. "Interdependence" is the nature of things. Thich Nat Hanh preferred the term "Interbeing" to emphasize how intertwined we and all others are. It is along this line that gratitude can become a powerful practice to move us toward wisdom. If you boil it down, gratitude at any level is the recognition of interdependence. Anywhere we look with a discerning eye the presence of an infinite number of things reveals itself. In the words of the poet, William Blake:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

Every bite of food we eat requires the sun, air, water, hundreds of people to plant, harvest, ship, and sell it, insects to prepare

the ground and pollinate the plants, countless lives that have gone back to the earth and become part of the soil, and on and on; it is endless. Perseverance in the process of seeing and appreciating, moves us to the wisdom that we, and all things, are dependent on each other.

When I graduated from university a very wise and simple man named Sandy Mack gave me a book as a present. He was a profound spiritual teacher for a number of reasons — his accumulated wisdom, humility, extensive knowledge, and the ease with which it expressed in his life. It was an excellent small book, but his inscription is what has stayed with me all these years. When you graduate, the normal salutations you receive congratulate and praise you, and speak about the life ahead. Mack's inscription said:

Please know that the Life Current is now flowing from the Alpha and Omega to all beings in creation, and you are one of them.

Our specialness does not derive from accomplishments or accolades, but from our own realization that just like "all beings in creation", the current of the One Life is unceasingly flowing to and through us. This realization is the height of Gratitude. And it all begins with "Thank you". ✧

**If the only prayer you said in your whole life
was "thank you", that would suffice.**

Meister Eckhart

Pointers toward an Aquarian Civilization

JAMES TEPFER

“[The] universal Aquarian diffusion of the true ideal of spiritual science and lifelong learning will enable human beings to awaken a vibrant sense of universal justice, universal compassion, and universal concord.” — Raghavan Iyer, *Hermes*

IN the previous Piscean Age early Christian philosophy stressed the “horizontal” dimension (Love) in Christ’s teachings and not the “vertical” one (Truth). There was a deliberate emphasis on the leveling impulse of love, its creative expanse, and its inclusive qualities. It was believed that the power of pure love can only be realized when it is resolutely enacted, when it is intelligently expressed, when it is given voice, when it is shared. This led — as it did in Buddhism — to universal missionary activity. The latter was seen as a sacred obligation. It was viewed as bringing the teachings of Christ to “strangers in strange lands”. Missionary efforts, whether institutionally mandated or individually inspired, became a divine offering, or love-in-diffusion.

Unlike Buddhist missionaries which were for the most part respectful of other religions, oriented toward teaching via dialogue and concerned with individual exemplification, most Christian mission-

aries were too much focused on belief, inordinately zealous, too dismissive of non-Christian religions, and blindly committed to stressing the false doctrine of “salvation by proxy”. However, those exceptional catholic missionaries, such as Father Damien, who spread Jesus’s gospel of unconditional love with genuineness and courage, evoked in the receptive heart, hope and heavenly visions which became the signature of each one’s spiritual authenticity.

Christ’s message was truly sacred because it expressed and evoked the finest, most holy feelings embedded in the compassionate heart of Man. Faith and the power of love were the cleansing agents of all sincere devotees who embraced the New-Testament way of life. Despite the later horrors of the Spanish Inquisition, unconditional love was the hallmark of the Piscean mentality — found in villages as well as in exceptional monasteries.

In the Aquarian Age — as one would

Dr James E. Tepfer is an associate of the United Lodge of Theosophists (ULT) in Santa Barbara, CA.

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understand it from the seminal writings of Shri Raghavan Iyer — the emphasis will be on the “vertical” (as Truth) and, as such, elevate the “horizontal” (as Love). In other words, the inner quest for spiritual truths will be paramount. The love of universal ideas will be the natural tropism of the mind. The gestation of spiritual insights will call for the progressive transformation of the mind from its preoccupation with materialistic desires and appetites to an uplifting focus on more humane and unselfish aspirations. The cultivation of the “altruistic mind” then will be the predominant focus of Aquarian society. It will be a vitalizing presence in all Aquarian institutions.

The alchemical agent of the mind’s moral elevation will be the radiant fire of the immortal soul — the soul being the repository of all spiritual knowledge. There will be a concerted effort in Aquarian cultures to marry the intellectual with the spiritual, the mind with the luminous efflux of the immortal, all-knowing soul. The consummation of this betrothal will be the birth of revelatory insights into the quintessential characteristics of the cosmos and man. Thus, in many Aquarian societies there will be fearless spiritual mountain climbers seeking to discover encompassing perspectives and enriching vistas that complement the infinite horizontal reach of the feeling of divine love which the Piscean Age encouraged and is vital in every age of the zodiacal dial.

Paradoxically, empirical science could well be important in the Aquarian civilizations of ensuing centuries because it

is progressively tending in the direction of becoming more self-critical, inwardly agnostic, and surprisingly open to the spiritual. Why will it possibly change so radically? Because it is highly likely that science will continue to encounter new mysteries that it simply cannot solve with its limited methodologies and its implicit materialistic assumptions that posit a “happenchance” cosmos bereft of any internal, guiding intelligence. In today’s scientific community there are those who admit that the established laws of physical Nature are so complex and delicately balanced that it is perfectly sensible for a scientist to entertain the possible existence of what the mathematical physicist Freeman Dyson termed a “cosmic mind”, governing and mysteriously integrating everything in Nature through the mind of man.

Furthermore, the recognition of the inescapable fact of consciousness as a constant of the cosmos still has to be faced. And it could well be that philosophy will necessarily become a copartner with science in the effort to conceptualize an emerging mental and material topography which promises to be revolutionary and could through analogy and correspondence — unexpectedly validate the revelatory experiences of mystics, initiates, spiritual philosophers, and intuitive scientists of every culture known to man.

Contrary to what one might expect, the increasing agnosticism of science will not necessarily lead to an increase in the nihilism and atheism that we often witness in society-at-large. Rather, this deeper agnos-

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ticism of science will hopefully encourage a wholesome self-questioning in every field of knowledge. This salubrious contagion of intellectual “self-distancing” could come about as a result of pioneering scientists “turning within” in order to define with greater precision science’s own built-in knowledge parameters. When they do, they will perhaps be thrilled at the prospect of a deeper unknown that exists beneath and beyond the known physical and mental universes. Such a discovery will undoubtedly be both humbling and encouraging.

The best and most perceptive scientists would conceivably “turn without” to contemplate and examine ancient philosophical perspectives that long ago acknowledged the existence of the intelligent, shape-moving force of consciousness.

More importantly perhaps, many scientists in the Aquarian Age will come to recognize and accept the truth that the unbounded spiritual can illuminate and guide the mind of Man — but without the loss of free will. And perhaps the “very best of the best” scientists will independently discover what spiritual teachers have always known and taught; namely, that the spiritual, the intellectual, and the experiential are dynamically integrated.

They will come to recognize what the Gnostic Christians claimed: that while faith is necessary in the quest for Truth or God-realization, the ultimate goal is knowledge. Analogically speaking, faith is the space between steps on an ascending staircase, and knowledge the steps themselves. Both are necessary to ascend

into higher ontological levels of reality.

The innate vertical momentum of Truth will thus “wake up” the neuroscientists of the future to the likelihood that Nature and Man must be seen as tiered, as multi-leveled. Neuroscientists, in particular, will come to understand that there are plateaus in the human mind as well as in the Himalayas; that there are subsequently, different orders of experience, perception, and rationality; that the love of Truth — the highest love — eventually awakens spiritual intuition which transcends rationality as it is the pure perception of the “thing itself” and the gradual realization of the reality of Deity in Man and Nature.

Thus, it could well be that mystics and metaphysicians would feel at home in the scientific communities of the Aquarian Age. And philosophy too — the royal discipline — would, as previously noted, no longer have to be the reluctant servant of science. Rather, philosophy would be the happy guide of human investigation into the unknown that points to the existence of untapped, creative forces that lie latent not only in Nature but in Man.

Aquarian civilization will stress in its educational centers the myriad possible connections between spiritual ideals, universal concepts, and ever-evolving human and social circumstances. Moral logic will therefore become as important as the logic of reason. There will be an unapologetic emphasis in Aquarian civilizations on universal justice, compassion, and concord. For this reason, there will be among

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men and nations multiple allegiances that ultimately transcend geopolitical borders. There will be fidelity to one's conscience, loyalty to parapolitical principles that potentially harmonize relationships within one's society, a strong sense of responsibility for the actions of one's particular nation, and an abiding commitment to all global efforts to alleviate various forms of physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. Thus, the Age of Aquarius could conceivably usher in what has been rightly called an "empathic civilization"; a civilization rooted in truth, compassion, and non-violence.

From the standpoint of the depth psychology we find in Buddhism, Hinduism, and, by implication, mysticism in general, it could well be that in the future, daily meditation will be as natural as taking a shower to cleanse one's body. And meditation (or the cleansing of the heart and mind through focus on spiritual ideals) will no longer be something unique to Eastern philosophies or to Christian and Sufi mysticism. Indeed, meditation combined with service to others will constitute the twin pillars of spiritual and moral health.

As a consequence, pathological loneliness and a host of cognate mental illnesses will gradually diminish as a sense of inner fullness increases. Furthermore, as skillful meditation becomes more widely practiced, the demand for medications and drugs will wane and lose their appeal. Psychotherapy will be transformed into moral therapy and truthful and trusted friends will replace the need

for expensive therapists. Most significantly, altruism will awaken in true practitioners of meditation whose minds enter into the light of the immortal soul and thereby are able to release divine Love which heals as well as purifies.

In the Aquarian civilization of tomorrow, people might well learn the art of thoughtful and compassionate silence. This spiritual reticence will be natural because there will be a pervasive feeling of reverence for the omnipresent divine. Society will be sanctified and blessed by unusual souls whose very presence will be an embodiment of the inspired mind and whose every utterance and gesture will constitute a teaching. Unlike the past two thousand years, individuals with true spiritual gifts, will not be hounded, idolized, or catered to. They will be encouraged to use their unique talents for global good. And, lastly, human love will be rescued from lust and possessiveness and will flow omnidirectionally to suffering sentient beings everywhere.

In the societies of future centuries, men and women will become skilled in the practice of true friendship within the sacred circle of marriage — that most troubled of all civilizing institutions in modern industrial cultures. How so? Because true lovers will discover the importance of the Ganesh principle. They will grow to appreciate that "less is more": less speech, more silence, less outer professions of love, more inner cherishing. In other words, those committed to the higher possibilities of the marriage bond will learn from the ancient Chinese not

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to engage in the excessive verbalization of love — which, itself, is the pure joy that the soul feels when in the presence of the beloved.

The power of conjugal love will be expressed in many ways but rarely verbally. Love, admiration, and reverence will move spontaneously from the pure heart and express themselves through the glow of sweetness in the eyes, through tenderness of touch, through gentleness of gesture, through a respectful tone of voice, and through acts of spontaneous kindness and deliberate forgiveness. And when the word “love” is whispered at the appropriate time in the ear of the beloved it will echo the celestial. And it may well be that the listening gods above will be so moved by that powerful simple act that they will bow in admiration before such purity of feeling and sanctity of expression.

It could well be that there will be a rebirth of three ancient truths that will become the pillars of the Aquarian Civilization: the actual existence of Enlightened Sages on Earth, the vibrant presence of the mystery fires throughout history, and the governing macro and micro principles of cosmic and human harmony. The dynamic, regulating principle of harmony will most likely emerge out of science and be regarded as a transscientific principle, that is, it will be seen as applying to both Man and Nature. In science, it will be seen as a law that integrates, destroys, and regenerates the forces of Nature in endless cycles of intelligent activity.

In human terms, harmony (or *karma*) will be recognized as a unifying law that

is inseparable from the exercise of human, discretionary will. At the cultural and social levels, the tropism toward harmony (as opposed to chaos) will foster the synthesizing concepts of “unity within diversity” or “*e pluribus unum*”. It will redefine the role of Man not only *vis-a-vis* Nature but in terms of the human community and the globe as a whole. The creation of cultural unity and the importance of working with the cycles of history will enrich all portraits of human potential and point to the existence of spiritual knowledge which can only be inwardly discovered by taking vows and living the life of virtue.

All this will invariably point to the existential reality of Mahatmas as living, omniscient beings who not only inhabit the globe but are pivotal to all Promethean initiatives for universal uplift. The highly intuitive individual might also sense that the presence of such sages on the North American continent will be crucial to the distant civilization of millennia-to-come.

It is quite likely then, that men and women in the Aquarian civilizations will grow up revering all sages, spiritual exemplars, and heroes of past civilizations as well as unabashedly celebrating global pioneers in the present. The fortunate few in a mature Aquarian civilization will have been taught at an early age the sacred art of raising questions, and, most tellingly, of how to patiently think through a social issue, a math problem, a moral dilemma, or a family crisis. They will not be strangers to rethinking an idea, to musing and meditating in solitude, to learning from

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unexpected mystical flashes, to consulting their own inner genius and to summoning the better angels of their deeper nature. They will immensely enjoy the elevating dynamics of human interaction for the focused good of society. And finally, today's pathfinders, preparing for the high civilizations to come, will resonate to the closing stanzas of Longfellow's moving poem, "A Psalm of Life":

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act, — act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing over life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.

Such is one vision of the Aquarian Civilization of tomorrow. ✧

**What is a human being?
A magnetic field that vibrates
on its own nucleus and in proportion
with its existence with the entire universe.
And there are millions of magnetic fields.
Without your talking with somebody, you communicate.**

Yogi Bhajan

The Moral Dimension of Life

SVITLANA GAVRYLENKO

ENQUIRER: What is the object of this system [Theosophy]?

THEOSOPHIST: First of all, to inculcate certain great moral truths upon its disciples . . .

— H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*

WE correlate our actions in the physical world to consider all circumstances and possible consequences. Likewise, we must relate our actions to the divine moral law that pervades the entire universe. We see harmony and order in the Cosmos, we also know about the law of interconnectedness, interdependence of everything with everything (the so-called quality of totality).

The life of every being in the universe is designed to maintain this harmony and order, to serve as a small instrument and agent of the Great Intelligent Plan. Moreover, that part of this Plan, for which this being is responsible, is already embedded in itself from the beginning and is contained in what we call the divine spark, the higher principle. The human being has a special role in the Divine Plan of creation. After all, he is given the ability of self-knowledge and free will, which determines free choice. It is a person's freedom of choice that gives him the opportunity to develop and improve.

Humanity has gone through a long evolutionary path and achieved many things. Along with the great achievements of our civilization, we also have many problems that we face today. Most of these problems are directly anthropogenic and related to human free choice. Let us consider our own free choice. Every day from morning to night we choose something. At the same time, we are guided by certain priorities. Often our choices are driven by a strong emotional response, often by benefit, by receiving an advantage, encouragement, reward, or recognition.

Often we are guided by notions of expediency, common sense, social criteria, or even just a habit, an automatic reaction. The result is what it is. We have what we have. Are we satisfied with the current order of things? Do we think that something should be changed? Do we always realize how and where to start the changes towards a good, just, kind, and correct world, the world of the future of humanity? All spiritual teachings and teachers tell us

Dr Svitlana Gavrylenko is General Secretary of the Theosophical Society in Ukraine.

The Moral Dimension of Life

that such changes should begin with ourselves. Changing and improving yourself is the most difficult and urgent task.

Vertical social morality reflects the connections of PERSON — FAMILY — SOCIETY and is a fairly developed part of social life, supported by tradition and legislation, which has passed through thousands of years. It is much more difficult with cross-cultural communication, mutual coexistence of different traditions, beliefs, religions, worldviews. This is due to the recognition system, “self-foreign”, deep-rooted in the subconscious. Today, not only recognizing other people’s principles, but even considering them for discussion requires a person to rise to a meta-level, that is, to expand consciousness, which means a step forward in his moral evolution.

Many civilizations in the history of mankind reached a high level of material progress — had powerful sources of energy, produced wonderful devices and tools, reached heights in the technology of mastering the forces of Nature — but these civilizations lacked spiritual development and ended in self-destruction. It is the moral potential of humanity that must be realized in modern civilization so that the sad experience of the past is not repeated. After all, there is every reason to believe that we have come close to the edge or are rapidly approaching it.

We are now at a crossroads, and it is dangerous to move forward with current trends and perceptions. Now we face broader tasks than before, and therefore we need broader views and ways of think-

ing, we must learn to appreciate broader opportunities and perspectives. We may say, following the outstanding modern physicist Stephen Hawking, that we should consciously take care of our evolution, our future, the fate of the planet.

And here are the words of the eminent modern thinker Erwin Laszlo, the founder of the Budapest Club, which confirm this: “Our time has witnessed striking changes that have transformed the main idea — the idea that our world will continue to depend on what we, the people, think, say and do — from the field of banal truths to the field of scientific principles.”

The modern world has a lot of knowledge, but has lost its way in the search for good, goodness. Knowledge and good must unite in synthesis, they are inseparable in their unity, as one Divine Love and Wisdom. Morality is dynamic, it manifests itself in action, through action, but is not identified with action itself.

Today, morality is an urgent need of the hour and a key to reaching a new level of interpersonal, interstate, inter-ethnic relations, to a new level of civilization on the planet. The principles of cooperation and interaction, principles of coexistence today more than ever before, require coordination, agreement, expertise, and a regulation mechanism. It is morality that is the tool that helps to successfully overcome the acute crisis situations of today.

As you know, morality and ethics are an internal regulatory mechanism of external manifestation for a person and society. We can see ethics and morality

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in their fleeting, changing guises, where the same action can be respect or contempt, benevolence or a crime. But the existence of Morality with a capital letter is undeniable, which reflects the greatness of the cosmic laws of coexistence and co-creation, which inspire us with their harmony and beauty.

Morality includes evaluation categories. Superficially, this is done by the fact of the act itself, but this is a very relative and imperfect category. A deeper assessment is made based on the consequences of the act, which is also quite subjective and uncertain. An even deeper dimension is the assessment by intention, by the motivating circumstances that caused this or that action or inaction. And if this dimension of morality is controlled and improved by us, then goodwill will become the dominant factor of being, the energy of nourishment for man and society. After all, morality in life is manifested as love, understanding, forgiveness, harmony, mutual respect, and cooperation.

Humanity must make a conscious choice in favor of goodness, truth, and justice. But humanity consists of individual human beings, therefore conscious choice for humanity is possible only as a result of conscious choice of each individual person. Each person, having reached the moment of conscious moral choice, thereby symbolically leaves the gloomy cellars of life, at the entrance of which hangs the sign "Consequences", and passes into the majestic building of life called "Causes". Such a person ceases to

feel disadvantaged, oppressed, a victim, deceived, a cog in someone's machine, and begins to feel the power to decide for himself, to accept his responsibility, to exercise his divine rights to life, freedom, beauty, joy, work, and creativity.

Let us scan our life, habits, ideas, relationships with other beings through the prism of our moral law. If we include a moral dimension in our daily existence, we will be able to rise above ourselves, above our life's shortcomings. Moreover, we will do it not under the pressure of external circumstances, but exclusively under the influence of internal intention, internal motivating reasons.

At the same time, we will clear the passage for high spiritual influences, for the implementation of the Divine Plan, because it is our internal moral law that is the essence of our divinity. Therefore, we will become God's guide on Earth, with our hands and feet He will manifest himself in life. And we will receive new powers and opportunities in our activities, new inspiration in our creativity, new friends and like-minded people, and most importantly, a new understanding of the greatness of the divine plan and the grandeur of the tasks on which we must focus our efforts. So, the moral dimension of life brings us to the spiritual level of existence, or rather coexistence. And at this level, the real essence of that Unity is revealed to us, about which we were previously only intellectually aware.

Even during the First World War, the great scientist Volodymyr Vernadskyi, the founder of the Ukrainian Academy

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of Sciences, began to develop a scientific idea about natural productive forces. In general, this is the potential energy of the state, its basis, which must be treated very carefully. In his opinion, the natural resources of the land monopolized by humans, both minerals and so-called renewable resources, are not just plants, animals, forests, waters. The natural productive forces, “spiritual forces of humanity — its thought, will, and moral power — are undoubtedly the main determining conditions of national wealth.”

So let us discover our natural wealth, our moral forces, which are buried under the bark of selfishness, greed, fear, and aggression. They are inexhaustible and

eternal, and they are not so deep in our consciousness, because they are accessible even to a child. They contain the potential for the future glory of humanity, the basis of a new civilization, the possibility of an unprecedented internal disclosure of nations, countries, and continents. But the challenge is that each of us must start with ourselves. Let us listen to the advice of Master KH in *The Mahatma Letters* (ML-55):

Courage then, you all, who would be warriors of the one divine Verity; keep on boldly and confidently; husband your moral strength not wasting it upon trifles but keeping it against great occasions like the present one. ✧

The most important human endeavor is the striving for morality in our actions. Our inner balance and even our very existence depend on it. Only morality in our actions can give beauty and dignity to life.

Albert Einstein

Ancient Thought and Modernity: Monism and Panpsychism Today — II

ELTON HALL

“History doesn’t repeat itself, but it often rhymes.”

— Mark Twain

PANPSYCHISM means different things to different people. Some thinkers thought that Spinoza’s view, that God and Nature are identical, was a form of panpsychism. Rather, it is pantheism, the view that God is everywhere, in everything, or, in its most radical form, that everything is just God. Panpsychism does not have to take a position on whether or not there is a God, for it is, generally speaking, the view that everything is conscious or has a mental dimension to some degree. That means that just as everything is material, everything has some consciousness in it. Consciousness, in this philosophical stance, is as fundamental as matter, space, and time — pervasive and fundamental to all existence.

I do not really like using the word “consciousness” in this way, simply because the only consciousness that we understand in any direct way is our human consciousness. I prefer the word “mind”, and define “panpsychism” as the universal presence of mind throughout the universe. In this approach, we can say

that animals have minds, and plants do as well, and even that elements and atoms are “minded”, but we cannot equate that with anything we currently recognize as consciousness. We recognize that at least some animals, what we used to call “higher animals”, have consciousness in some form, but we do not know what that is.

In 1974, the American philosopher Thomas Nagel (born in 1937) published a paper titled “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”⁵ This essay has become famous for making the point that we can tell a bat is conscious but that we cannot know what it is like to have a bat’s consciousness. How does it perceive the world? It has poor eyesight compared to ours, and it can determine its place and its prey’s place in space through echolocation, using squeaks that bound off surrounding objects to locate both itself and the insect it is identifying and pursuing. Its world and our world overlap, but they cannot be the same. We have discovered many things about the animal kingdom — that some fish and other aquatic creatures can

Prof. Elton A. Hall is an associate of the United Lodge of Theosophists (ULT) from Ithaca, New York. Based on a presentation given at the Ukrainian Institute of World Culture in Dnipro (HPB’s birthplace) in Feb. 2024.

detect electric currents, that some birds seem to have compasses built in so that they can navigate long migration routes following the magnetic lines of the Earth, that some animals (especially dolphins and elephants) seem able to recognize reflections of themselves, that many animals have basic communication with others of their kind, and so on. We even know that plants have some form of communication, warning others of the same species when attacked or damaged, and following the sun and seasons to gather light and photosynthesize and withdrawing sap for hibernation in winter, long-known features of the plant kingdom.

But, as Nagel argued, we do not know how they perceive the world, that is, what world they live in. Though Nature is just Nature, their worlds are not our world. Without their capacities for perception, we have only our human perceptions and thoughts to employ in understanding the world. We can do tests to find out some details. For example, a number of mammals cannot distinguish between blue and green. Magnetic fields affect some animals but not others, and so on. But that is not experiencing the world the way other living forms do. Panpsychism is the theory that mind is everywhere, in all things, and that it is perception and thinking that varies, becoming able to reflect on its perceptions when found in human beings. This means that we can ask questions we may never be able to answer.

Beginning with his 1974 paper, Nagel has wrestled with the issue of perception ever since. In 2012, he published *Mind*

and Cosmos, his mature thinking on mind and nature.⁶ He does not reject the Darwinian explanation of evolution but argues that it, in its present form, commonly called neo-Darwinian evolution, is wholly inadequate to explain consciousness. He argues that the reductionism that drives physics, biology, and chemistry is the cause of this inadequacy. We have already seen reductionism in physics. It is the principle that we understand what something is by taking it apart, reducing it to molecules, then atoms, then sub-atomic particles, perhaps even vibrating strings. In this approach, consciousness becomes impossible to explain. How does consciousness arise from non-conscious stuff?

The oldest view that addresses this issue is called epiphenomenalism. This big word means that when non-conscious stuff is arranged in very complex ways, consciousness just appears, like fire giving off smoke. Just how this happens has never been explained, but such a view has a serious implication. Consciousness is just an illusion produced by complex material structures. What is real is the structure, and consciousness is just the shadow it casts, so to speak. It is nothing real in itself, any more than a soap bubble is anything but the chemical soap and momentarily trapped air that form it.

A more recent view holds that the laws of Nature are layered, or consist of a hierarchy. When the fundamental laws are at work, they produce complex objects and higher-level laws come into play. In the case of consciousness, when the fundamental laws of physics are working,

they give rise to chemical laws, which give rise to biological laws when chemicals are complexly arranged, and eventually, with suitable complexity, consciousness emerges. Again, just how this happens is not explained. In both the older version and this newer one, the implication remains the same: consciousness is nothing but the complex structure of the brain.

This is the reductionism that Nagel rejects — that nothing is real except matter, and only the ultimate particles are fundamental and therefore ultimately real. Everything else is secondary, derivative and, compared to the fundamental, a kind of perceptual illusion. They are an illusion in that they are the result of limitations of our capacities for perception, our senses — sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell. If we could only directly see whatever the ultimate building blocks of Nature are — subatomic particles or strings or whatever — we would see that this is all there is in reality.

Nagel's book is relatively small, just 128 pages, but his argument is clear and rather dense, so we cannot set it out here in any detail. Using the sciences as well as philosophical analysis, he insists that physical descriptions of conscious activity, such as thinking, are examinations from the outside. Paradoxically, such descriptions can only be made by a conscious being. For the reductionists, consciousness is required to show that consciousness is not real! Nagel offers a long argument in favor of what he calls “neutral monism”, which is the monism of Päs.

It is neutral in that it does not postulate some ultimate cause for its existence, such as God creating the world. It leaves such questions open.

In this view, Nagel says:

Consciousness . . . is not . . . an *effect* of the brain processes that are its physical conditions; rather, those brain processes are *in themselves* more than physical . . .⁷

Nagel is not opposed to reductionism of any kind, for taking things apart can tell us many things. But a reductionism that requires us to deny the existence of what we actually experience is faulty. Consciousness is real, and it is encountered in us and in the world, so we must account for it just as we account for anything else. We know that human beings are made of the same stuff as the Earth — chemicals, molecules, and so on. As Nagel points out:

But since conscious organisms are not composed of a special kind of stuff, but can be constructed, apparently, from any of the matter in the universe, suitably arranged, it follows that . . . Everything, living or not, is constituted from elements having a nature that is both physical and nonphysical — that is capable of combining into mental wholes.⁸

This view is reductionism in that it posits only the stuff we are familiar with, but it is not reductive in that it does not deny the existence of mental elements. Rather, it gives all matter some non-physical properties. This is what I have been calling “mind”, which is taken as a universal property of all matter. When arranged in various ways, this mind shows up as

consciousness. Whether matter has other properties that we have yet to learn about is another open question.

Nagel explores the possible views one might take of this redefined matter and how life and consciousness arise. What is clear is that the evolutionary tendency to develop subjective perspectives — consciousness in various forms — must have been present from the beginning of existence. It is also clear that this tendency is ineradicable: “One cannot have the mental without the physical aspect, or vice versa.”⁹ Once this view is accepted, as Nagel thinks it must be, panpsychism is the result.

The evolutionary tendency of everything in existence implies some form of teleology. Teleology is the idea that for something to be explained, some purpose has to be accounted for. Those with a philosophical background will recognize Aristotle’s final cause here, the concept, for example, that the purpose of the oak seed is to become an oak tree, not an elm or something else. Curiously, though purposes were banished from evolutionary theory, biologists cannot help but use terms of purpose in their explanations — “The liver cleanses the body of toxins”, “The plant grows to flower and reproduce” — all such statements imply purpose even as biologists deny any such thing. The reason why such expressions cannot be eliminated from biological explanations is because, in the monistic view, there is some kind of intentionality in Nature, both as a whole and in each of its parts. None of this means that things

have purposes that have been decided by choice in the way we choose. It does mean that Nature is purposive, even if only humans know it. Further, this understanding of Nature implies that outcomes have meaning, which means that value and meaning are not mere human conventions but are built into existence itself. We will say more about this in a few minutes. For the moment, we will note Nagel’s conclusion:

We should seek a form of understanding that enables us to see ourselves and other conscious organisms as specific expressions simultaneously of the physical and mental character of the universe.¹⁰

While Nagel is careful not to attribute conscious intention to the universe as a whole, though it has purpose, Philip Goff (born 1964) takes a bolder position. He is a philosopher with a focus on consciousness and has recently published a book titled, *Why? The Purpose of the Universe*.¹¹ Goff is a professor of philosophy in England who explores consciousness and the nature of reality. In his earlier book, *Galileo’s Error*, he made the case for panpsychism. His new small book (150 pages) sums up his conclusions.

Goff is concerned with a question we will return to shortly: Whether the universe has purpose or not, what are the implications for human life? He believes the universe does have purpose — that is, that there are teleological laws of Nature — and his argument comes from the opposite direction of Päs’s approach. Päs looks at the universe as a whole and is

convinced that it is One, meaning that the diversity we see is not foundational but secondary. Goff looks to the micro-world, the opposite pole of existence, as it were.

In order to understand what Goff is suggesting, we start with an easy example. No matter what philosophers might say, we experience ourselves as having free will. What this means in practice is that we find that we have choices or options in what we do. Coming to a fork in the road, we choose to go on the right-hand or left-hand branch. Having options, making choices, always occur within constraints. We cannot do just anything we might imagine. For example, if I want to travel from New York City to Los Angeles, I have choices I can make for getting there. I could fly, or take a train, or drive, or even walk — though the latter really makes no sense, given the distance between the two cities.

But there are constraints. I cannot fly to Los Angeles by flapping my arms wildly in the air. I cannot instantaneously teleport myself like the crews in *Star Trek*. Constraints limit my choices but they do not preclude them. It also seems that at least some animals make choices — the lion, chasing a creature that it would like to have for dinner, may give up the chase if it looks to be too hard to achieve. Or the pet dog which sometimes obeys commands, and sometimes not. We see choice as occurring within constraints, and we can take that idea into the quantum world.

Goff notes that in quantum theory, location of particles can only be predicted statistically. That is, a particle traveling

as a wave, might show up here or there when observed. These possible locations are analyzed statistically, providing a map of probabilities, indicating the probability of each place the particle might appear when observed. The fact that we can determine only the probability of a wave “collapsing” into a particle at one or another place is not the result of our limits of observation. Rather, it is the way things are. We should note that these statistical predictions have been subject to rigorous experiments for over 50 years, and never once have they been violated. They are the most thoroughly tested and certain of conclusions in contemporary science.

This indeterminism at the quantum level is suggestive to Goff. The wave has constraints, and these are given by the map of probabilities. But within those probabilities, where the wave collapses when observed is unknown until observed. What name shall we give to the process of collapsing into a specific result? Science has often drawn words from ordinary speech and given them specific scientific meanings. Perhaps the most famous is Newton’s use of the word “gravity”. It originally meant something like “seriousness” or “heaviness”, as in the gravity of a decision or the gravity of a person’s demeanor. For Newton, it was the name for the attractive force between masses of matter. Goff thinks the obvious word for the process of a wave collapsing¹² into a particle is “choice”. The wave has limited options, but it does have options, and we do not know which option will be taken until we observe the result.

We can call this process “choice”, for that is exactly what it looks like.

Goff notes that all the sciences have discovered that law-governed processes, from chemical interactions to biological cells to organisms, frequently deviate in small ways from what the laws of these processes dictate. Put another way, it seems that everything displays some degree of agency, from very little among atoms to a great deal with human beings. He speaks of proto-agency for particles that respond to the immediate set of constraints in which they find themselves.

Goff’s agency is this capacity plus some degree of experiential understanding. Animals, for example, learn from their experiences — when to dodge danger, when to hide, when to perform a trick for a treat, and so on. Finally, free will is the capacity to respond plus the ability to learn from experience plus the recognition of value, and hence the capacity to choose what is perceived as valuable even when it goes against one’s inclinations.

For Goff, this means “that the act of responding to one’s value judgements or conscious inclinations — whether one is a particle, a tiger, or a human being — is a *fundamental form of causation*.¹³ This form of causation is not, of course, recognized in science, even though, as we said before, biologists especially seem unable to describe what creatures do without speaking of purposes — the lion chases the gazelle for a needed meal. Given the reductionist view of science, everything can be reduced to the inter-interaction of particles, and speaking of the purpose

of the lion is only a higher-level way of talking of the interaction of particles. But if so, purpose can be traced all the way down in terms of options within constraints. Goff calls this view pan-agentialism, the view that agency or choice pervades every level of the universe. He writes:

... according to pan-agentialism, as complex conscious systems with experiential understanding begin to emerge, they bring into being new causal principles over and above the basic laws of physics. Physical entities are no longer just responding to the very basic inclinations imparted to them by the wave function. They are rather responding to their conscious understanding of reality, and their attractions to certain goals within that reality.¹⁴

Since choice as we know it requires consciousness, it is reasonable to think that the increasingly greater restraints placed on things as one regresses from human beings to species, to chemical interactions, to molecules, to atoms and even subatomic particles, mind is present, though in ever increasingly rudimentary forms. Pan-agentialism suggests purpose in the universe, but not just the purposes of individuals, whether particles or human beings. Rather, the universe as a whole seems purposive.

Since the universe is still evolving in ways we do not fully understand, we cannot assume that biological evolution has somehow reached its ultimate goal in present humanity. Even some early proponents of Darwinian evolutionary

theory realized that one implication of the theory is that new forms may emerge that surpass in mental capacity anything known to us. One even said that the beings of the future may be as far above us mentally as we are at present above the ant! Given that in the last thirty years, we have discovered thousands of planets orbiting thousands of stars, for all we know, life has evolved elsewhere to mental heights we cannot imagine.

One might reasonably say at this point that, interesting as all these ideas are, it is only philosophy, not science. This, of course, is the view that only science provides real knowledge — a view that can be, and has been, challenged throughout history. A very recent article in *Scientific American*¹⁵ discusses consciousness research in biology. Under terms like “embodied cognition” and “basal cognition”, researchers have been exploring evidence of mind — especially responses to change and choices in behavior — in living things without brains. Cut the head off a common flat-worm, and it will regrow a head, despite having lost its brain. It is as if mind is distributed throughout its body.

Damaged mitochondria in cells can heal themselves but also communicate to other mitochondria to be alert to damage — and those receiving the “message” also trigger healing processes.¹⁶ Single-celled creatures can find routes to sources of food and remember those routes in future searches. Brainless living creatures act as if they had brains when they do not. It appears that the brain is a very suitable

location for mind, but that mind can exist throughout an organism.

Pamela Lyon, a researcher in this area at the University of Adelaide in Australia sums up the picture of mind that is emerging in biology:

We think we are the crown of creation. But if we start realizing that we have a whole lot more in common with the blades of grass and the bacteria in our stomachs — that we are related at a really, really deep level — it changes the entire paradigm of what is to be a human being on this planet.¹⁷

If one searches the Internet, one can find many books and articles supporting various versions of monism, panpsychism, and teleology. We have only scratched the surface. The books we have referred to contain detailed lines of reasoning that demand careful thought. With just this sketch of these ideas, we can see a very suggestive pattern.

Monism in the form that Heinrich Päs accepts rather easily leads to the panpsychism of Thomas Nagel, and it is a rather short step from Nagel’s views to the purposive universe of Philip Goff. The universe seems to value consciousness itself, and so we can readily imagine the continued evolution of consciousness and understanding here, and perhaps elsewhere, in the universe for as long as the universe lasts.

One final thought: if the universe is purposive and evolving, what is our place in it? Species that cannot adapt to changing constraints — changes in climate, the

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impact of an asteroid, the shifting of continents — go extinct. If we are to flourish, we must cooperate with that universal purpose and value. This suggests that we need those deep ethical virtues that lie beyond mere moral rules. Rules are different from community to community, nation to nation, but the most profound ethical values are found in all the religions and philosophies of the world. Reverence for life, respect for diversity, integrity in

thought and deed, and, in light of the One, brotherhood and sisterhood among all humans, and, indeed, among all creatures and things that comprise our world. Being honest about what we do and do not know adds humility to this list. If the universe is, as Plato thought, one vast organism, then we are cells in that organism, and we have a beautiful and essential role to play. As Mark Twain saw, this is the rhyme, actually the song, of history. ✧

Footnotes

5. Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”, *The Philosophical Review*, 1974.
6. Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*, Oxford University Press, 2012.
7. *Ibid.*, page 57.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, page 63.
10. *Ibid.*, page 69.
11. Philip Goff, *Why? The Purpose of the Universe*, Oxford University Press, 2023.
12. “Collapsing” is another example of a common word being given a new meaning. The wave does not literally collapse. The wave changes form from a distributed probability to a specific point and place. In quantum physics, this is not just something we cannot observe becoming something we can see: it is a change of form. By the way, “wave” is also a repurposed common word in quantum science. It refers to a mathematical function and not something like an ocean wave.
13. *Ibid.*, page 69.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Rowan Jacobsen, “Minds Everywhere”, *Scientific American*, vol. 330, nr. 2 (February, 2024), pages 44–51.
16. The example of communicating mitochondria is not mentioned in this article.
17. *Ibid.*, page 51.

**Science is not only compatible with spirituality;
it is a profound source of spirituality.**

Carl Sagan

Why the Buddha Path?

CECIL MESSER

A WESTERN method of approaching the spectrum of ways to enlightenment is to study and reflect on the views of saints and sages, representative of philosophy, Theosophy, esotericism, science, and religion. This article explores a path to truth and liberation by entering the light of the Buddha's dharma teachings on the nature of reality. Not a religious path, but an inquiry into experiential approaches in our quest for meaning. This Buddhism is not a religion in the usual sense for it is not a system of beliefs and there are no supernatural elements marking its practice. This Buddha was not a Buddhist, but a rather extraordinary human who discovered a jewel of sublime truth and resolved to share it.

Two and a half millennia ago, in the northern part of India near the Himalayas, a prince was born to the queen and king of a small country. The king received an omen that this child was special and destined to become a teacher or holy man. Naturally, the father wanted his son to continue the royal lineage and follow him as king. So he devised a cage of material and psychological protection

around the boy. Confining him to a great palace — surrounded by vast gardens and lakes — with attendants catering to all his wants, the plan seemed to be working. The king was quite happy when his son married a beautiful princess and had a wonderful child. Nevertheless, an inevitable restlessness grew in the mind of the prince, so early one morning he had his most trusted attendant saddle his horse. He surreptitiously left the confines of the palace to explore the outside world and proceeded towards a nearby village.

Almost immediately, on both sides of the road, he encountered squalid little huts, each with several inhabitants. Many of the people appeared sick and miserable. A crippled old woman approached him and asked for food. He gave her what he had and continued his exploration. On the side of the road, in a ditch, he came upon a dead person covered with flies and vermin. Overwhelmed by these experiences of poverty, sickness, old age, and death, unbearable compassion arose in his heart. He was determined to find a way to end the suffering of all beings.

He left everything behind and became

Mr Cecil Messer, retired from the NASA Space Program Science and Engineering Team, presented spiritual teachings from various traditions for 12 years while residing at Krotona Institute of Theosophy, Ojai, CA. He resides in the North Carolina mountains.

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a wandering ascetic until he realized that was not the right way. He ultimately resolved to sit and meditate under the Bodhi tree and not leave until he understood the true nature of reality. Thus was his journey of awakening and attainment of full enlightenment. He became the Buddha, the enlightened one. We too may become liberated through the insights and teachings he eventually shared after his awakening.

Why rely on the Buddha's teachings? A long lineage of sages bear testament to his sane and scientific approach to dealing with the human condition. They directly recorded his teachings in writing and cross-checked them with the memories of other hearers. Confidence in him is enhanced by the Buddha's emphasis on the importance of questioning all teachings (especially his) and accepting none with blind faith. Even if we believe in the truth of a particular concept, nevertheless, it should be held tentatively and not considered to be the final word since all concepts are subject to change.

The Buddha taught that we should do no harm and to use ourselves as an example on how to treat others. Sages and religious figures throughout history have universally advocated this "golden rule" of harmlessness and virtue.

Many of the teachings given by the Buddha remain quite unique such as:

- We can tame our own mind.
- We are our own savior and master.
- All genders have equal capacity to attain enlightenment and teach the dharma.
- We can deal with the truth of suffering.

- We can know the truth of delusion that whatever we perceive or think is not necessarily valid or absolute because of the truth of impermanence.

A most compelling reason to trust the Buddha's teachings is his display of compassion for the suffering of others. Although he had achieved freedom from suffering for himself, he had doubts about sharing his insights with others. Upon leaving the Bodhi tree, he doubted:

I have found a truth that is profound, peaceful, free from extremes, luminous, uncompounded, like a nectar. But no matter to whom I utter this, people will not hear. Therefore, I shall remain in the forest without speaking.

Nevertheless, he decided to try and teach. Many Buddhists consider this to be the Buddha's first teaching. His reluctance to speak is based on his view that the truth of our life, phenomena, reality, cannot be defined, conceptualized, verbalized, or symbolized. All these attempts are limiting. Words themselves are mere symbols or pointers that easily transform into useless concepts and platitudes unless we have personally discovered the truth within. Let us be open-minded and carefully examine the teachings and the teacher. After a measure of confidence in the teachings and faith in the teacher has been established, we should still hold our truths lightly until certainty arises. Verification of this certainty is affirmed by the way we live and relate to others.

Guidelines from Perennial Sages

Virtuous qualities are a universal hallmark of the spiritual quest. Cultivation of

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these profound traits is essential to fully connect with the process of meditation. Many sages and religious traditions advocate special requirements for approaching the Divine:

Through **Moses** came the Ten Commandments, giving rules of conduct. From *Psalms* 46:10:

Be still and know that I am God.

In his Sermon on the Mount, **Jesus** proclaimed:

Blessed are the pure in heart
For they shall see God.

From his insight into Sufism, the esoteric dimension of Islam, the representative poet and mystic, **Rumi**, says:

Whether you love the One
or another human being,
If you love enough,
in the end you will come into the
Presence of Love itself.

Helena Blavatsky, the Theosophist, urges aspirants to climb the golden stairs:

A Clean life,
an Open mind,
and a Pure heart,
attain to the Temple of Divine Wisdom.

She affirms the existence of an Ageless Wisdom that informs the esoteric basis for the world's major religions.

The Chinese sage **Lao Tzu** says to those who wish to follow the Tao:

Like a lake without winds,
One must have a heart that is calm and quiet,
With great depth beneath it.

The Tao that can be expressed is not the Eternal Tao.

Nevertheless, something there is, formless yet complete.

In the beginning it existed.

Its name is not known,

But it is called Tao.

It is the Mystery of Mysteries.

From the **Confucian** sage, Mencius:

Try your best to treat others as you would wish

To be treated yourself,

And you will find that this

Is the shortest way to goodness.

From a **Jain** prayer:

Friendship to all living forms,

Delight in the qualities of the virtuous ones,

Unlimited compassion for all suffering beings,

Equanimity towards all who wish me harm,

May my soul have these dispositions now and forever.

From the **Sikh** sacred scriptures (Adi Granth):

The One God pervades all:

And seeing Him,

I am wholly in bloom.

The **Shinto** approaches the Divine heart of truth,

Through sincerity,

A pure heart,

And uprightness.

The **Hindu** sage Patanjali gave spiritual guidelines to attain the meditative state of mind. These emphasize:

Abstaining from harmful behavior and cultivating generosity and devotion.

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The dharma teachings of **Gautama Buddha**, the Enlightened One, are summarized in his Noble Eightfold Path and

lead to the wisdom of compassion and liberation from suffering for all beings.

These imperatives universally embody the truth that negative qualities cause suffering and a virtuous mind generates happiness. They are essential to our inquiry and furnish the requisite seeds to be sown in the garden of meditation. Plants harvested here will bear the fruit that benefits ourselves and others. Let us take to heart Jesus's "Parable of the Sower" and give great care in preparing this garden. Early in this process, having recognized and grown weary of our life drama and its entanglements, a warrior-like fearlessness will emerge.

Mental Afflictions

Impeding our journey are three major poisons that afflict our mind: Delusion, Attachment, and Anger. There are also three derivative poisons: Greed, Jealousy, and Envy. These mental obstructions are the immediate causes of our discontent.

1. Delusion is not recognizing the real nature of phenomena and ourselves. Without discriminating wisdom, we sink into the muck of ignorance wherein noxious seeds take root and sprout within our consciousness. These offspring masquerade in attractive guise and rarely appear as ugly or malodorous weeds. Witness our gullibility when confronted with charismatic politicians' contagious lies and the news media's self-serving sensationalism and misinformation. We feel helpless

in the face of the greedy and powerful government lobbyists. Exploitations of our delusion by the entertainment media panders to our baser fantasies and the advertisement industry's clever solicitations trigger unrestrained consumerism. Underlying these mundane delusions is our sense of separateness from others, the greatest delusion — viewing our existence as an independent self.

Our conditioned self-image is like a case of mistaken identity. Are we certain of who we really are, deep in our heart? Could we be a potential thief? If we were poor and hungry, would we steal food for our family? Are we capable of killing? If we saw a loved one being brutally murdered, would we want to kill the killer? Are we a liar? If we were a politician running for office, would we cheat to achieve our goal for the greater good of our country? If we were born into fortunate circumstances and have never known poverty, conflict, and temptation, is it certain that we are free of selfishness, greed, racism, violence, and immorality?

2. Attachment reveals itself as excessive desire in the form of obsessive longing to gain attractive things or as possessive love for my spouse, my opinions, and especially myself. Resistance to examining cherished beliefs guards our attachment to ego. Since we are our religious beliefs, we fear the light of scrutiny may deconstruct our sense of identity. We are so attached to outcomes that we become upset if things don't go our way. If our candidate loses the election, we and our country will suffer greatly. We are very reluctant to

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change our mind about liking or disliking anything because we are so comfortable with our delusions.

3. Anger is a most destructive force in our relationship with others. Feeling annoyed, impatient, or resentful are pernicious forms of anger. The effects of malice, the offspring of anger, range from estrangement to violence and outright war.

4. Greed is seen in its grossest form as the excessive accumulation of and reluctance to share our wealth with others. A subtle form of disguised greed is seeking praise or gratitude for apparently generous deeds. A rich person may donate a fortune to a charitable foundation but also wants their name emblazoned. They also want a tax deduction.

5. Jealousy is a combination of delusion, anger, and attachment. It manifests as paranoia, feelings of rage, and anxiety or fear of loss. Conditional love for another gives rise to the drama of jealousy. Real love is unconditional and its primary concern is happiness for the other.

6. Envy is a combination of the same three poisons as jealousy, but with a higher proportion of greed and attachment. We feel discontent because we don't have the good looks, intelligence, fine home, or fancy car of our co-worker. Envy's persona shows itself when there is a lack of feeling empathetic joy for the good fortune of another.

The seeds of these afflictions must be culled and burnt prior to the final harvest; otherwise, their spawn will continue to obstruct our liberation. Life involved in the constant pursuit of pleasure or power is hollow and devoid of

meaning, always in the shadow of dissatisfaction. Successes are enjoyed but failures may follow. Security is not guaranteed and fulfillment is never enough. Personal relationships are chronically tainted with disagreements. The ebb and flow of nice-sounding words become contrived and joyless. Indifference to the suffering of those outside our circle may lead to hardening of the arteries of compassion. Awareness of these observations informs and supports our motivation for undertaking this journey.

Virtuous Qualities

Two and a half millennia ago, the Buddha taught the *great perfections* (Skt., *pāramitā-s*), which, when perfected, uniquely mark a fully enlightened being. We may practice these six modes of behavior as a spiritual path to empower us to truly benefit all beings. They will bloom into a display of benevolence as our meditation practice deepens. The six *pāramitā-s* are: Generosity, Discipline, Patience, Enthusiasm, Mindfulness, and Wisdom.

1. Generosity is the quality of being kind and open-hearted. There are three kinds of generosity: directly sharing our material wealth with those in need. Wise ones say that the seeds of generosity are inherently present within each of us. Witness a young child's joyful, natural behavior when sharing candy with playmates. Because generosity is innate, these seeds can be nurtured and sprouted by training.

A second kind of generosity is giving protection from fear. Mothers naturally give this to their babies as do fathers to their

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family. First-class governments protect their citizens through health care, living assistance, and educational opportunity.

Third, and the greatest generosity, is to share spiritual teachings to the extent we are capable. Leading by example, most of us can teach a child about kindness and forgiveness. If we know more than another about the dharma, is it not our duty to share it?

What to do with the obvious fact that sometimes we are not generous? Let us germinate the seeds of generosity by giving away small possessions with no sense of pride or reluctance. Gradually, there will be no sense of reservation when giving away prized possessions. We may develop the habit of seeking out a homeless person to give food or money. Personally handing a gift to someone is more beneficial than mailing a check to a charitable institution. Obsessing that this gesture may foster laziness or enable addictions will cause us to discount the value of generosity. This may lead us to stray from the path and become lost in the morass of greed. Let us be grateful for our good fortune that makes giving possible.

2. Discipline is following right ethics and moral conduct. This also has three aspects. First is to do no harm. Similar to the ethic embodied in the Hippocratic Oath we resolve to never hurt any sentient being: human, animal, or Gaia.

A second aspect is to do virtuous actions that benefit others. Thus, karmic merit is accumulated in our life savings account.

Third is to take care of ourselves by cultivating virtue and practicing the

dharma teachings on meditation. This grows the self-esteem that brings happiness and well-being to those around us.

3. Patience elegantly and skillfully attenuates anger and forestalls the arising of malice. It prevents the escalation of malevolent situations which, ironically, we may have created. Patience calms by allowing time and space for the fangs of malice to withdraw. We may cultivate an attitude of forbearance towards the faults of others as well as our own problematic dramas. Jesus taught: “Love your enemy and judge not others.” Attend carefully to this precept because many of us have professed this for two thousand years and still haven’t got it.

4. Enthusiasm refers to a joyful and diligent attentiveness that is constantly mindful of the actions of our body, speech, and mind. Let us diligently protect our body from injury due to harmful drugs, unhealthy foods, hazardous occupations, and neglect of nurturing rest. We may allow our speech to become pleasant and non-injurious and our mind to become calm and clear. Let us take delight in wholesome actions and joyfully practice the dharma without procrastination.

5. Mindfulness refers to the quality of being calm, clear, and perceptive. Being aware of the action of speech, we tend to not lie, gossip, or slander. Mindful awareness leads us to speak kindly to and of others. Accomplishing this *pāramitā* leads to a mind of serenity, like a still forest pool capable of reflecting perfectly. This prepares the mind to be receptive to the truth born of wisdom.

6. Wisdom sees into the destructive

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effects of the mental afflictions such as maintaining wrong views, obsessively craving desirable things, and indulging in hatred towards others. When perfected, this virtue exhibits loving kindness, vast compassion, and transcendental awareness. Stabilizing the mind through the practice of mindfulness and insight meditation allows us to look into the nature of the mind itself and to see things as they really are. On attaining full realization, we can truly benefit others as well as ourselves.

The quality of generosity is particularly relevant to accomplishing our journey, for it prevents the constant stumbling and tripping over ego. Purification in the fountain of a generous heart is the preeminent qualification to begin right meditation practice. This action lightens our burden of ego-cherishing.

At our core we are a spiritual being; therefore, virtuousness is an innate part of our nature and can be unfolded, nurtured, and manifested. Virtue doesn't arise from nothing; it is latent as a seed within us. The four ghosts in Dickens's novel *A Christmas Carol* were able to transform the miser, Scrooge, into a generous philanthropist because the seed of generosity was present in his heart.

Practicing the *pāramitā-s* unfolds natural virtues and is analogous to filling our magical storehouse, our personal memory bank, with the seeds of transformation. This is not so much an act of accumulating but a process of deconstructing regressive habit patterns and making space for innate virtue to express

itself. Although seemingly fabricated at first, with practice they become integral and manifest as the "Four Immeasurables". With a wrong motive, fabricated virtues may become disguised forms of greed and self-aggrandizement or lead to complacency and self-satisfaction. The ambition to acquire virtue as a pious possession prevents us from harvesting it for the benefit of others. One whose motives arise out of profound compassion and the pure wish to help others, who then chooses the path to enlightenment, is called a *bodhisattva*. The great perfections arise when the narcissistic notion of self is abandoned — the ultimate sacrifice to spirit.

Long ago, during the fourth century CE, in a small Indian village, there lived a devout monk named Arya Asanga. He was obsessed with the wish to see the Buddha, so he left the monastery and went into solitary retreat in the mountains. There, through his diligence in practice, he hoped to connect with the Buddha. However, after practicing meditation for twelve years with no apparent success in attaining his goal, he became discouraged and decided to give up the retreat and return to his village. Along the way back, he chanced upon a bitch lying by the side of the road. She was emaciated, her hind-quarters rotting and covered with maggots. Experiencing excruciating pain, she growled and tried to bite anyone who came near. Asanga was conflicted with fear and an unbearable feeling of compassion. Nevertheless, he cut a piece of flesh off his own body and fed it to the starving beast. He then began to use a stick

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to remove the maggots but realized that would hurt them and that the only safe way would be to use his tongue. Asanga got down on his knees but was so repulsed by the rotting, writhing mass that he closed his eyes. Nevertheless, he stuck out his tongue to begin removing the maggots but only felt the ground. When he opened his eyes, the dog was gone; there in its place was the Buddha he sought. His twelve years of practice had dissolved his negative karma and obscurations sufficiently to see the dog's suffering. His compassion and kindness enabled him to see the Buddha.

Four Immeasurables

Unlike the development of the six *pāramitā-s*, which requires deliberate cultivation, there are four sublime aspirations that naturally and effortlessly emerge in parallel with the *pāramitā-s*, like the fragrance of flowers permeating the garden. Through our practice, we too may enjoy their unfoldment. Traditionally known as the Four Immeasurables, they are: Loving kindness, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity.

1. Loving kindness is the extension of unlimited, universal goodwill to all beings without discrimination, including the wish that they be happy and obtain the causes and conditions of happiness.

2. Compassion is the boundless wish that all beings be free from suffering and the causes and conditions of suffering.

3. Joy is the unbridled empathetic delight in the success, welfare, and happiness of all beings.

4. Equanimity is the universal sense of even-mindedness and impartiality toward all beings — friends and enemies alike, in all the vicissitudes of life.

Compassion and karma may manifest in many different forms. Witness the story of Androcles, a Greek slave, who escaped from his Roman master and ran away into the forest. While hiding beneath some fallen branches he heard the roar of an approaching lion. As it came into view, the lion was moaning in pain, raising his swollen and bleeding right paw imbedded with a large jagged thorn. Almost overcome with fear, Androcles, nevertheless, approached the lion and proceeded to carefully remove the thorn. Both of them laid down to rest together for the night. At dawn some Roman soldiers came upon them. They tried to run away but Androcles and the lion were captured and returned to their prisons. Years later, as punishment for trying to escape again, Androcles was put in the arena to be killed by lions as sport for the emperor. When the gate to his cage was opened, the solitary lion charged, growling furiously. Suddenly he came to an abrupt stop. He recognized Androcles and raised his magnificent right paw and began to purr and nuzzle him — the natural karmic result of compassionate action. ✧

Bear not false witness, slander not, nor lie; truth is the speech of inward purity. . . . Touch not thy neighbour's wife, neither commit sins of the flesh unlawful and unfit.

Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia*

The Myths of Materialism

TIM WYATT

Wealth and piety will decrease day by day, until the world is wholly depraved. Then property alone will confer rank; wealth will be the only source of devotion; passion will be the sole bond of union between the sexes; falsehood will be the only means of success in litigation; and women will be objects merely of sensual gratification. Earth will be venerated only for its mineral resources. *(Vishnu Purana)*

THIS quote from the ancient Hindu scriptures refers to the Kali Yuga or Dark Age. This is the era in which we now find ourselves enmeshed, and in which materialism reigns supreme as the world crumbles into decadence and destruction. Although written centuries ago, the sentiments above have a grim resonance in our modern world in which materialism predominates and allows no rivals.

These days materialism rules virtually everything. It effectively imposes a one-party state of governance on this planet. It dominates our entire view of reality and distorts our understanding of ourselves, the world, and the universe. It shapes our consciousness, controls our perceptions and moulds our behaviour. Above all, it creates its own faux mythology replete with superstitions, illusions, and prejudices: a jumble of mirages.

The mighty, blinding force of materialism continues to become yet more

bloated and influential. As a worldview its values — if indeed they can be ennobled by that word — appear unassailable. It fills up most of our bandwidth squeezing out the spiritual dimension. For a great many people the material world is the *only* reality.

Materialism is the most prevalent and persuasive of contemporary religions with its own gods, scriptures, rituals, and icons. And billions of devotees. It has its own clergy and places of worship. It has its own creed, affirmations, and prohibitions. It has its own denominations and sects, the chief one being scientism — the almost religious adoration of and acquiescence to questionable and limiting scientific methods.

Another close cousin and co-conspirator is an even more devotional denomination centred on the almost ubiquitous fetish-cult of technology. The tech, the preachers tell us, will solve all our problems — even

Tim Wyatt is an esoteric author, lecturer, and film-maker living in Yorkshire, England. His books are available from: <www.firewheelbooks.co.uk>.

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the ones it itself has created. Technology falsely promises that it will make us happy and more contented. While some technology is useful and life-enhancing, much of it is quite the opposite. We have developed sophisticated extermination-level weapons systems as well as those of mass surveillance, behaviour modification, and assorted forms of social repression.

Apart from nuclear weapons and algorithms that can read and censor us, there are bleak predictions that Artificial Intelligence may pose an even greater threat. A recent report from scientists at Oxford University and Google came to the grim conclusion that ever deeper romance with robots could spell the downfall of humanity as increasingly intelligent and powerful machines murder their creators.

Sinister groups resembling villains from James Bond movies advocate a sinister golden age of transhumanism. In this nightmare world, technology will enhance human potential by connecting our brains to cyberspace and allowing our bones and tissues to be enhanced by adding components manufactured from titanium and other exotic materials. In many ways this technological, dystopian agenda for humanity's future is the direct result of our quest for even more materialistic ways of living and thinking — an age in which technology finally hijacks the human spirit.

There is also a complete lack of morality underpinning materialism. Science unleashes its inventions on the world often without a moment's consideration as to

how these may impact when weaponised or commercialised. Materialism is not just about money although this is its life-blood along with its close cousins — wealth and possessions. However, the constant yearning for more money, wealth, and stuff becomes so pathological that morality is evaporated. Admittedly, greed, selfishness, the desire for profit, control, and power, along with other undesirable personality drives, are the timeless but ultimately corrosive components of the lower self. They have always shaped much human behaviour even in pre-materialistic days. But modern materialism has bizarrely transformed these vices into noble aspirations.

The material over-soul of the modern world has created another gigantic illusion — that of time itself. The supposedly rational, logical, left-brained and analytical conclusion is that time is a linear phenomenon flowing out of the past, running through the present, and trickling off somewhere into the future. This may be a convenient man-made device for coping with the realities of the physical plane. But it masks the truth that time is cyclical. Endless cycles and spirals of time prevail on those inner planes of being and in those higher elusive dimensions. Linear time does not exist in those realms — only an ever-present and enduring now.

Materially minded people are difficult to convince that there is another reality beyond the physical. They tend to reject all notions that there are invisible realms, hidden dimensions, mysterious

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forces, non-physical realities, and concealed kingdoms of Nature. They scorn the idea that everything from a particle to a super-cluster of galaxies is conscious, connected, alive, and evolving. Materialists believe that death of the body spells oblivion or else eternity in some vague, religiously inspired paradise or other. They cannot accept the fact that humans are souls in physical form who will be reborn again and live future lives determined by the ineluctable law of cause and effect, or karma. Not randomness, chance, or accident.

Materialists — and especially the devotees of scientism — utterly condemn the idea that the human mind cannot exist without the backup physical mechanism of a brain despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Indeed, they are deeply unhappy at having to define what consciousness actually is in the first place other than electrochemical reactions in the cerebral cortex. They propagate and promote the deeply fallacious view that the brain is more akin to a video storage device than a TV receiver.

Those who challenge the material view by embracing a deeper, spiritual and esoteric perspective are fully aware that mind and consciousness exist beyond and independently of the brain. Esotericists assert that the entire cosmos is nothing more than consciousness. Most scientists and their adherents insist that form produces consciousness. The esoteric perspective is, of course, the absolute opposite of that: it is consciousness which produces form and not vice versa.

Science and its often hubristic practitioners with their “we know everything” mantras may be able to stare deeper into space and closer into the quantum world than ever before. But there is a huge problem. They beg us to conform to their narrow and constricted material vision of the world. But the deep irony of all this is by their own admission they cannot see most of it because this universe is largely invisible to them. Ninety-something per cent of what should be there is apparently missing, they say. So, they are obliged to ascribe vague catch-all terms like dark energy and dark matter.

Another science-dominated enterprise is medicine obsessed by its “drug ’em and cut ’em” culture in which the two main options are surgery or imbibing the products of Big Pharma. The mainstream medical profession is almost wholly material in its outlook and it expends much energy ridiculing effective alternatives such as energetic healing, herbal remedies, homeopathy, acupuncture, meditation, and a host of other non-invasive therapies. This is because medicine is largely money-driven and not always altruistic. And this makes beneficent and holistic approaches to health unwelcome.

So, where and when did these modern notions about materialism actually begin? In historical terms it is a relatively modern phenomenon. For most of human history and indeed still amongst those retaining indigenous beliefs, the Earth is no less than a living, breathing, sentient being. She was and is still regarded by some as the Mother Earth Goddess herself who pledges to

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protect and provide for all her departments of Nature, but who instead winds up being gang-raped in the name of power and profit. It is only in relatively modern times that the Earth has been seen as nothing more than an inert lump of rock orbiting the sun once a year.

The first faint stirrings of modern materialism began to emerge three and a half centuries ago, coinciding with the Ages of Enlightenment and Reason and the appearance of modern science. In these post-Renaissance times, the printing press is developed, social reforms take place, and the Industrial Revolution progressively unfolds. New machine technologies emerge. The thinking of the day increasingly gravitates to the view that the universe is a giant machine whose clockwork mechanism ticks monotonously, predictably, and unchangingly. Nature can and must be conquered and her resources despoiled or squandered. And if her people can also be enslaved that is another tick on both the cost-benefit analysis and indeed balance sheets.

Commenting on this the pioneering biologist Rupert Sheldrake wrote:

The desacralization of the natural world was taken to its ultimate conclusion in the seventeenth century. Through the mechan-

istic revolution, the old model of the living cosmos was replaced by the idea of the universe as a machine. According to this new theory of the world, Nature no longer had a life of her own; she was soul-less, devoid of all spontaneity, freedom, and creativity. Mother Nature was no more than dead matter, moving in unflinching obedience to God-given mathematical laws.

Since the unfoldment of the Industrial Revolution from the mid-eighteenth century onwards the accretion of materialistic modes of life have coagulated even faster and thicker than the pollution much of this industrialisation has caused.

Perhaps since we are approaching the end of an era be it the Kali Yuga, the transition from the Age of Pisces, or indeed some other cycle, we should expect this unhappy love affair with materiality reaching a crisis crunch-time. It is this author's view that the final collapse of the material-only view of reality remains some way off yet. Material attitudes may even strengthen before they begin to decline. Whether that decline itself is progressive or sudden we have no way of knowing. But what we do know is that, just like Atlantis and other civilizations before and after it, this decline is inevitable. ✧

The chief difficulty which prevents men of science from believing in divine as well as in nature Spirits is their materialism.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky

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| 1905 | Cuba | ... Mr Fidel Carrazana Macías | ... Apartado de Correos 6365, La Habana 10600 | | teosocuba.1@gmail.com |
| 1987 | Dominican Rep. † | ... Mrs Magaly Polanco | ... Calle Santa Agueda 1652 Les Chalet Col San Juan Puerto Rico Apartado 23 00926 | | polancomagaly@yahoo.com |
| 1888 | England & Wales | ... Mrs Jenny Baker | ... 50 Gloucester Place, London W1U 8EA | ... <i>Esoterica</i> | president@theosoc.org.uk |
| 1907 | Finland | ... Mr Jean-Paul Silvan | ... Teosofinen Seura, Vironkatu 7 C 2, Fin 00170, Helsinki | ... <i>Teosofi</i> | ylisihteeri@teosofinenseura.fi |
| 1899 | France | ... Miss Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu | ... 4 Square Rapp, 75007 Paris | ... <i>Le Lotus Bleu</i> | tsfr.office@gmail.com |
| 1902 | Germany | ... Mrs Manuela Kaulich | ... Hauptstr. 39, 93138 Lappersdorf | ... <i>Adyar</i> | theosophie-adyar@gmx.de |
| 1928 | Greece | ... Dr Erica Georgiades | ... 25 Voukourestiou St., 106 71-Athens | ... <i>Ilisos</i> | info@theosophicalsociety.gr |
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| 1921 | Iceland | ... Mr Haraldur Erlendsson | ... PO Box 1257 Ingólfsstraeti 22, 121 Reykjavik | ... <i>Gangleri</i> | iceland.ts@gmail.com |
| 1891 | India | ... Mr Pradeep H. Gohil | ... The Theosophical Society, Kamachha, Varanasi 221 010 | ... <i>The Indian Theosophist</i> | theosophyvn@gmail.com |
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| 1902 | Italy | ... Mr Antonio Girardi | ... Viale Quintino Sella, 83/E, 36100 Vicenza | ... <i>Rivista Italiana di Teosofia</i> | sti@teosofica.org |
| 1997 | Ivory Coast * | ... Mr Pierre-Magloire Kouahoh | ... Yopougon, 23 Rue Princesse B. P. 3924, Abidjan 23 | ... <i>Sophia</i> | pm_kouahoh@hotmail.com |
| 1919 | Mexico | ... Mrs Juana Leonor Maldonado Ruíz | ... Ignacio Mariscal 126, Col. Tabacalera Mexicana, Mexico, D.F. 06030 | | teosofiaenmexico@gmail.com info@sociedadteosofica.mx |
| 1897 | Netherlands, The | ... Mr Wim Leys | ... Tolsraat 154, 1074 VM Amsterdam | ... <i>Theosophia</i> | info@theosofie.nl |
| 1896 | New Zealand | ... Mr Richard Sell | ... 18, Belvedere Street, Epsom, Auckland 1051 | ... <i>TheoSophia</i> | np@theosophy.org.nz |
| 1913 | Norway * | ... Mr Audun Solberg | ... Knapstadveien 8, 1823 Knapstad | | organisasjonssekretaer@teosofisksamfunn.no |
| 1935 | Orlando ▲ | ... Mr Carl Metzger | ... 1606 New York Ave. Orlando, Florida, 32803-1838, USA | | TheosophicalSocietyCF@gmail.com |
| 1948 | Pakistan † | ... | ... Jamshed Memorial Hall, M. A. Jinnah Road, opp. Radio Pakistan, Karachi 74200 | ... <i>The Karachi Theosophist</i> | bhagwanbharvani@hotmail.com |
| 1925 | Paraguay ▲ | ... Sr. Blas Osvaldo Añazco López | ... Eligio Ayala Nro. 1.833 e/ Mayor Fleitas y Gral. Aquino Asunción | | ramafaternidadSTparaguay@hotmail.com |
| 1924 | Peru † | ... Mr Julio Pomar Calderón | ... Av Republica de Portugal 152, Breña, Lima 5 | ... <i>Búsqueda</i> | sede-central@sociedadteosoficaenperu.pe |
| 1933 | Philippines, The | ... Mr Charlton Romero | ... Corner P. Florentino and Iba Streets, Quezon City, Manila | ... <i>The Philippine Theosophist</i> | philtheos@gmail.com |
| 1921 | Portugal | ... Mr Carlos Guerra | ... Sociedade Teosófica de Portugal, Rua José Estêvão, 10 B, 1150-202 Lisboa | ... <i>Osiris</i> | geral@sociedadeteosoficadeportugal.pt |
| 1925 | Puerto Rico † | ... Mrs Magaly Polanco | ... Apartado 36-1766 Correo General. San Juan, Puerto Rico 00936-1766 | ... <i>Heraldo Teosófico</i> | polancomagaly@yahoo.com |
| 2012 | Qatar ▲ | ... Mr Lijo Joseph | ... Crewing Officer, Teyseer Services Company P.O. Box 2431, Doha | | qatarblavatskyldodge@yahoo.com |
| 2013 | Russia * | ... Mr Svyatoslav Lipsky | ... Apartment 131, House 1135, Zelenograd, Moscow | ... <i>Teosoficheskoe Obozrenie</i> (The Theosophical Review) | secretary@ts-russia.org |
| 1910 | Scotland * | ... Mr Gary Kidgell | ... Christine Gear 32 Newmains Road Kirkliston Edinburgh EH29 9AL | ... <i>Circles</i> | garykidgell@hotmail.com |
| 1992 | Slovenia * | ... Mrs Irena Primc | ... Kajuhova UT 9, 3000 Celje | ... <i>Teozofska Misel</i> | irenaprimc3@gmail.com |
| 1921 | Spain | ... Mrs Angels Torra Buron | ... Av. Vall d'or, 85-87 08197 - Valldoreix (Spain) | ... <i>Sophia</i> | presidencia@sociedadteosofica.es |
| 1926 | Sri Lanka † | ... Mr D. A. L. Wanigasekera | ... 146 Anderson Rd, Dehiwala, | ... <i>The Sri Lanka Theosophist</i> | dumindawanigasekera@gmail.com |
| 1895 | Sweden | ... Mrs Birgitta Skarbo | ... Karla Plan 5 B, 11460 Stockholm | ... <i>Tidlös Visdom</i> | teosofiska.samfundet.adyar@telia.com |
| 1910 | Switzerland † | ... Mr Andrea Biasca-Caroni | ... Via Collina 19, 6612 Ascona, CH-6612 | ... <i>The Lotus</i> | info@teosofia.ch |
| 1997 | Togo * | ... Mr Kouma Dakey | ... S.O., A.R.T.T., BP 76, Adeta | | |
| 2013 | Ukraine | ... Mrs Svitlana Gavrylenko | ... Office 3, 7-A Zhylanska St., Kiev 01033 | ... <i>Svitoch</i> | org@theosophy.in.ua |
| 1886 | USA | ... Mr Douglas Keene | ... PO Box 270, Wheaton, IL 60187-0270 | ... <i>The Quest</i> | info@theosophical.org |
| 1925 | Uruguay * | ... Mr Ramón García | ... Javier Barrios Amorín 1085, Casilla de Correos 1553, Montevideo | | st.uruguay@gmail.com |
| 1925 | Venezuela † | ... Mrs Nelly Nouel | ... Romualda a Socarrás, Edif. de Oro Piso 12, Apto. 122 – Caracas | | nellynouel5@gmail.com |

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† Presidential Agency

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The Council of the European Federation of National Societies: *Chair*: Mrs Sabine Van Osta, Place des Gueux 8, B1000 Brussels. **sabinevanosta.be@gmail.com**Inter-American Theosophical Federation: *President*: Mr Enrique Reig, And. Nie 17 Villa Las Americas, San Andres, Cholula, Puebla, Mexico. **enriquereig@hotmail.com, fti.secretary@gmail.com**Indo-Pacific Theosophical Federation: *President*: Mr Gerard Brennan, 42 Melbourne Street, Concord, 2137, Sydney, Australia. **president@ipf-ts.org**Pan-African Theosophical Federation: *Chairman*: Mr Navin B. Shah, P.O. Box 14804.00800, Nairobi, Kenya. **<navinmeera@hotmail.com>**, Phone no.: +254 733-935525.

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