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***Cover*:** Pyracanthas, aka Firethorns, are valuable ornamental plants, grown in gardens for their decorative flowers and fruit, often very densely borne. They also provide dense cover for roosting and nesting birds, summer flowers for bees, and an abundance of berries as a food source. Photographer: Ariah Hayley, taken in Ojai, California, USA.

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THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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

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

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

Spirituality and the Practical World — I

TIM BOYD

BEFORE talking about "Spirituality and the Practical World", it would be good to establish a common vocabulary. Often, we use words assuming they mean the same thing to all of us. **Spirituality** and the **world** are not unknown words to us, but it does not hurt if we give them finer definitions.

"Spirituality" necessarily applies to the spirit. Yet what is **spirit**? We use the word frequently with certain meanings in our minds, but can we say what it really is? When we look to the theosophical teachings, one of the things that comes across is that "spirit" is a very big word. When we turn our thoughts to the Absolute, often we tie our concept of spirit to it. But the absolute, from H. P. Blavatsky's (HPB) point of view, has no possible description; it has no words that can contain it or define it; it is nameless, it is not active, nor is it inactive; it has no qualities, yet lacks none; it is not being, but is expressed more as **be-ness** — the potential for all states of being which arise from it. When we speak about spirit, the absolute is not, technically, what we are talking about.

Spirit and matter both are linked aspects of the Absolute, but if we really go into it, there is not a lot we know about either one of them. Let us start with matter. It has been approximately 400 years since the type of science that has become predominant in the world today had its beginnings. During this period, the material world, and only the material world, has been its focus. Every process and phenomenon that could be pointed to and named has been meticulously examined, studied, tested, and experimented with. Theories, explanations, and descriptions abound, so much so that faced with the authoritative voice of science, everyone tends to quiet down. For science, as we have come to know it, matter and the energies of the material world are its singular focus. It is a world which we feel we know better than all others, and which, for the scientific community, comprises all there is; in a word, the material realm is "reality".

But science today has some issues that it is facing, resulting from its own continually expanding knowledge base. Simply stated, the problem is that the totality of the scientifically known matter and energy comprising the material universe falls short of what *must* exist in order for the universe to behave as it does. There is not sufficient matter in the universe known to science to justify the manner in which galaxies are bound together by the force of gravity. Also, the

accelerating expansion of the universe cannot be justified by the energies known to science. The terms used to describe these missing components of matter and energy are creatively named "dark matter" and "dark energy". Because it cannot be seen, tested, or examined by any known means, except that mathematically it must exist, it is called dark. Others may correctly use the term "unknown".

If the missing matter and energy were a small amount, the problem might be solved with simple adjustments to formulae. But it is not small. The agreed upon difference between what is known and what is not, is 96%. In other words, only 4% of all that makes up the universe is known to science. So, what do you do when you realize that the bulk of what is described as the "real" world is completely invisible and unknown? That is just on the side of matter.

For **spirit** the same thing applies. The extent of it is not something that is in any way knowable at our stage of unfoldment. So, just as with contemporary science, what we end up doing is dealing with what we *do* know and trying to use that as a platform for our growing understanding. Thus, we may not be able to put our finger on what spirit is, but spirituality is another thing.

Annie Besant gave a very concise definition of **spirituality**. She said it is "the realization of Unity; the seeing of Oneness in *all* things". We can work with that definition. Basically, spirituality is an approach to spirit that presents us with a sense of unity, of Oneness, and it works in a couple of different ways. All of us hope and strive towards, and from time to time realize this sort of seeing. It unfolds in two ways: it can unfold unconsciously, due to what HPB describes as natural impulse; or it can unfold consciously.

In the unconscious approach we are pushed by Nature, we are impelled, blown here and there, and ultimately if we bounce around enough, we open our eyes and learn. In the United States there is a term for this way of learning — "The school of hard knocks". You could call it cultivation of consciousness through crisis. One idea that does seem to have some merit is that we as a human family often unconsciously create crises for ourselves through which we grow by having to respond to challenges.

There is a story in the Buddhist tradition about two children in a house that is on fire, burning down around them. They are playing a game, but they are so fixated on it that they are totally unaware of the raging fire. In order to save them from being engulfed by the flames, an enlightened being coaxes them out by showing some playthings that attract their attention.

To me the story speaks of the conditions that we are facing in the world now. When our Governor [Mr T. N. Ravi, Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu] was here with us speaking, he made it a point to enumerate many of the challenges that are facing us as a human family, the fires that are burning the house. As members of the TS, as people of consciousness,

we may look at it in a different way. In the world today we have all of these things, like climate change, fires burning uncontrollably, deserts growing — you know the list. Yet the response of humanity as a whole might be described as pouring more fuel on the flame while looking for technological solutions to the fires we are feeding. That is an example of the unconscious route to becoming aware of spirit — learning from the production of more challenges.

Of course, unconscious karma creation is not the only avenue to awareness. We can become aware of the presence and power of spirit by consciously creating the conditions that move us toward the recognition of Oneness. Commitment to a path, a practice, has its effects. In the world of theosophical thinking there are some things that we tend to take for granted. One of the things that we accept as an irrefutable given is consciousness and the primacy of consciousness. This, however, is not true for the scientific community.

In the community of scientists there is what is described as "the hard problem". That is what to do about **consciousness**. What makes it a problem is that it is not explainable in scientific terms. They can point to the synapses in the brain that register pain and pleasure; they can track the related chemical and electrical responses in the body. But the *idea* that we feel those material impulses as pain, joy, happiness, peace, or anger; that it is possible to connect with others in ways that are not biological or chemical, cannot be explained within existing scientific paradigms. That consciousness is involved is undeniable, obviously it takes consciousness to even analyze the problem. But it cannot be measured and quantified, and that is what is spoken of as "the hard problem".

In many ways spirit is similar. Like dark matter and energy for material science, for the spiritual scientist/practitioner spirit is not measurable. Yet we are aware of it, we experience it, and we know the reality of its existence. All of the world's spiritual traditions invite us to pursue a scientific approach to our own unfoldment. The idea is that we are here to experiment, not simply agree and comply, and that the religions and great teachers of the world have provided us with formulas, with experiments, and theories, about the inner life that are, as with anything scientific, testable and repeatable.

Take for example the short book by HPB, *The Voice of the Silence*. In it there is this little phrase: "Self-Knowledge is of loving deeds the child." It is beautiful, poetic, but it is also something that lends itself to experimentation. These great truths are spoken not just for us to sit and nod our head and say "yes", but for our own experimentation by which we either find it is true or not. So how do we approach an experiment related to "Self-Knowledge"? The experiment might go like this, in the laboratory of my own consciousness, I can identify what are "loving deeds", then incorporate them in my behavior, and persist in performing

them over a period of time. This should result in some answer to the question: Do loving deeds lead to self-knowledge? This is what all of the different aphorisms, slokas, and phrases that we quote from the Bible, the Quran, the *Bhagavadgitā*, and the *Dhammapada* ask us to test.

In the *Dhammapada* Buddha says that "All that we are is the result of what we have thought." Is that true, is it testable? He says that if you think an evil thought then you experience pain and that pain follows you like the wheel follows the ox that pulls the cart. It is a poetic, scientific formula: If you act with a pure thought then happiness follows you like a never-departing Shadow. It is beautiful but it is intended for us to determine from our own experience whether or not these things are true. So when it comes to spirit, even though we cannot put our finger on it, even though we are unable to grab it, we do experience it.

Many years ago I was in France and was invited to have lunch at a person's house that was situated right in the middle of acres and acres of sunflowers, which they grew commercially for the seeds and the oil. It was in the afternoon on a lovely sunny day. A typically French thing is that meals go on for a long time. When you are sitting for lunch the conversation at some point turns to what is the plan for dinner because the two mealtimes tend to run together — good conversation, course after course of different foods, it's wonderful! As nice as the meal and conversation were, the thing that really impressed me was not happening inside the house. As I sat there, periodically I would look out the window. I had known that sunflowers track the sun as it moves across the sky. But to see fields of sunflowers, as far as one can see, with every one of them following the pathway of the Sun, impressed me very deeply! To me it is a model of our experience and our approach to spirit. We know it is there and we lean toward it wherever we find it.

Some time ago I was fortunate to be with the Dalai Lama as he was talking to a group of people. It was shortly after the Tiananmen Square incident in China. He was saying that China was a country where for more than two generations any expression of spirituality or religion had been suppressed. The assumption was that having been denied an opportunity to express, it would wither and die. With the Tiananmen Square uprising what he witnessed was the outflowing of innate compassionate activity from the protestors toward their nation and its people. They were willing to stand in front of tanks to acquire a freedom for themselves and for others.

As human beings, it seems that compassion is hardwired in all of us. Wherever we look — family structures, societal structures — all evolve with the intent that the weakest among them are served and protected. In a family everything is sacrificed for the child. Nothing is held back. In any family that is deemed to be healthy and appropriately attentive to parenthood, the weakest among them is the one that attracts our deepest attention

and effort. The weak, the elderly, the sick, the poor, the hungry, these are the ones for whom, in healthy societies, structures are created in order to serve them. When we find that we are in a situation, either in a nation or in a family or in a world, where that is ignored or neglected, we feel unease. Throughout history the denial of this irrepressible compassionate response has been the cause of uprisings and revolutions. In many ways in today's world there is a sense of unease. There is an urge for correction and the re-establishment of our inner, natural values and practices that are spiritually oriented.

Compassion is described in several ways. In Buddhist practice compassion is defined as the desire to relieve the suffering of other beings, but I think it is more than that. We can examine what is happening internally when we find ourselves engaged in some compassionate activity. The normal feeling for everyone is a sense of the importance of "me" — a Buddhist term would be "self-cherishing".

But let someone become a parent, a spouse, or the adult child of an aging parent and that circle of concern extends to include another. Where you have patriots, great people, willing to sacrifice their own lives for their country, that sphere of inclusion extends to embrace a nation. Then there are the ones that we point to as the truly Great Ones, the messiahs, the avatars whose compassion is absolutely without limits — nationhood, gender, religion, none of these distinctions are real to that consciousness.

This process of expanding compassion echoes Besant's words: Spirituality is "the seeing of the Oneness of all things". When compassion reaches its extremes, it is the expansion from long accepted limits to an embrace of all people, no longer distinguishing between self and others. The experience of compassionate activity reveals itself most keenly from what we might describe as the symptoms of spirituality — peace, joy, happiness, healing. These are the things that to us are signs of something much deeper toward which we lean.

A question we might ask is: if any of this is true, if it has merit, then why do we tend to remain so unaware of the presence and activity of spirit? This is a question that throughout the ages has been a motivation for all of the avatars, messiahs, prophets, saints, seers, and messengers who have come to try to heal us from our ongoing blindness.

It would not be unfair to ask the question that if these great ones came to open our eyes what was the effect of their coming? For example: What was the condition of humanity before and after Buddha came, gave his messages, and lived his life? What changed? Certainly, there were many people who experienced enlightenment and the descent of this deep sense of compassion.

But did wars stop, was starvation ended, was the imbalance of wealth and poverty altered, did loneliness and sadness disappear? The fact that all of the negative conditions afflicting humanity continue in spite of the numerous great messengers who have come and gone would cause

some people to regard their lives and mission as a failure. I would not agree with that.

I would go more with the idea that is expressed in the Mahachohan's letter, that no prophet, saint, or seer has ever achieved full success during their lifetime. They planted seeds, started movements that would add to the possibility for enlightenment and unfoldment; but ultimate success is a very long-range project. One of the things that does occur is that they attract the attention of people like us, normal people, but people to whom this idea that there is such a thing as spirit has some reality, people who have some experience, even if momentary, of being elevated, of having spiritual moments that speak to the possibility for those to be the inheritance of humanity. For many people that is something worth dedicating a life to, even though we know, as was the case for people greater than us, that by the time we are gone, little will have changed . . . *but much will have changed.*

The other day someone I was talking with made the point that, just like others that have come before us, we are not going to be able to do much in a lifetime. The example I gave is: If I need to reach a point at the back of this auditorium, if before taking my first step I change my course by an inch, by the time I arrived at the back of the hall I would be a few feet away from the chosen destination. If this course correction continues for hours, the distance from the original destination grows. Imagine the difference a lifetime can make. We cannot ever forget that our capacity to influence ourselves and others is significant and that we are part of a long-range plan. ✧

Are we related? Relationship means to be together, to be in immediate contact with others, to know their difficulties, problems, and anxieties, which are our own. . . . But it is one of the most difficult things to communicate with another. . . . because most of us do not listen at all. . . . If one is to listen, one must be attentive. And there is no attention if one is occupied with one's own thoughts, conclusions, opinions, and evaluations. . . . We rarely are aware of this fact. One has to put aside one's own thoughts, conclusions, and opinions, and listen — only then is communication possible.

J. Krishnamurti, (JK),

"What is Relationship?", Bombay 1st Public Talk

The Alchemy of Theosophy

LINDA OLIVEIRA

THERE is a remarkably common phenomenon which we can think of as "the gap". This is the split or division between an intellectual appreciation of Theosophy, on the one hand, and the practice of its precepts in the conduct of our daily lives, on the other. For most students of Theosophy such a gap is likely to exist, to a greater or lesser extent.

Since the reintroduction of Theosophy to the world in the late nineteenth century, a substantial body of writings on the subject has been generated. The teachings are one thing, but the important question that we should ask is whether they have had a *qualitative* effect upon the way in which we live our life. Perhaps even a transformative effect?

The spiritual unfoldment of a human being requires what can be regarded as an alchemical process. Alchemy has commonly been understood as a medieval form of chemistry, the chief aim of which was to discover how to turn ordinary, or base metals, into gold. The production of gold was therefore a traditional function of an alchemist. Today we find some broader definitions of alchemy, for example, "a power or process that changes or transforms something in a mysterious or impressive way", and "an inexplicable or mysterious transmuting".[1]

In time, alchemy became associated with the search for the universal solvent and the panacea.[2] A solvent is something that dissolves other substances, which are then broken down into their quintessence or pure essence.

Madame Blavatsky (HPB) described alchemy as the chemistry of Nature and commented that transmutation of baser (or common) metal into gold is simply the terrestrial aspect of alchemy, for the alchemical process also has deeper significance. She taught that it has three essential aspects: cosmic, human, and terrestrial.

HPB wrote that the first principle of the alchemist is the existence of a certain "universal solvent" by which all composite bodies are resolved into the homogeneous substance from which they are evolved. This pure gold is also called *summa materia*, implying the ultimate sum of that which is known about matter, or the essence of matter. We can see the correspondence between this and the

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complete transformation of the human being because, *through* a certain kind of inner knowledge, it is possible to know matter in all fields of existence, including subtler fields; ultimately apprehending that unchanging, pure, homogeneous substance from which we have emanated.

What is Human Alchemy?

What does the chemistry of producing "gold" mean in a deeper sense? The Occultist-Alchemist, said HPB, spurning or rejecting earth's gold, instead directs effort towards the transmutation of what theosophical teachings refer to as the "baser lower quaternary", into the "divine upper trinity" of the human being. To put it more simply, we could say that this subtle gold, or the experience of that unchanging substance from which we are all derived, is produced by the flowering of our innermost nature.[3]

For Madame Blavatsky, alchemy was as much a spiritual philosophy as a physical science. She equated the mysterious process of the transformation of lead into gold with the "transformation of personality into pure, homogeneous Spirit". She referred to the Soul [*manas*] assimilating Spirit (*buddhi*). I would suggest that this is the very heart of human alchemy.[4] Through this rather mysterious process of assimilation, there is an emergence into the One Life.

There is a practical implication to all of this. We can note that HPB essentially emphasised the assimilation of Spirit or *buddhi* by *us*, not the assimilation of us by Spirit; specifically, the assimilation of *buddhi* by our mind principle.[5]

Recall the teaching that alchemy has three aspects — cosmic, human, and terrestrial. Human alchemy is that complete transformation which produces a regenerate human being. The general condition of humanity in our age of Kali-Yuga is one of pronounced egoism, along with a generally excessive enjoyment of material things which, for so many, simply overshadows the spiritual, and the experience of greater simplicity. We have fallen sway to self-interest, in its many forms.

So, what is required of us, if human alchemy is to occur? It requires a dramatic change within the mind. Fundamentally, we require a significant level of self-awareness. In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates famously said that "the unexamined life is not worth living". Do we have the courage to really look at ourselves and our lives? Can we see ourselves as we are, in a balanced way? What are our strong points? What do we have to give to the world? On the other hand, what are our imperfections? For we all have these, too.

It is not possible to change the ingrained tendencies of lifetimes overnight. Therefore, we can usefully undertake preparatory spiritual practices which can help to reconfigure the mind and render it more receptive to higher influences. This will not be limited to the work of one lifetime.

There is an interesting point here. The effort involved in certain things, such as meditation, becomes less arduous and a natural part of living, as the mind becomes more infused with the One Life; or as the mind principle allows itself to be permeated by *buddhi*. The matter of

which the mind consists will change in quality. It will become more attentive, more refined, far more sensitive to the numerous expressions of life which come into its field of awareness. This generates kindness and compassion towards all of Nature's kingdoms.

When they become truly blended and harmonious, our lower quaternary and upper triad will work together seamlessly. Then we will know our quintessence, our pure essence, our true Self. The "gold" of human alchemy is produced by the fullest realisation, and expression, of who we really are.

Armchair Theosophy?

The theme of this Convention is "Practical Theosophy and the Art of Self-Transformation". Theosophy can easily become conveniently crystallised as an accretion of mental constructs which explain the universe and the vast trajectory of our human evolution. We can think of this as "armchair Theosophy", the accumulation of a certain quantity of learning. However, this lacks the *qualitative* dedication and effort to change. For Divine Wisdom needs to be expressed in our lives and deeds, in order to find its completion and its fulfilment. We need to activate our understandings of Theosophy in meaningful ways, or else they may become selfish pursuits which are of relatively little use to the world. A true immersion in the teachings may help us realise that we need to examine ourselves and change the way we live, in various respects.

Theosophical teachings can be viewed as twofold:

1. There are those teachings which provide a scaffolding or larger framework with which to understand the vastness of life. They are likely to be of great interest, and can expand the mind, but will not necessarily help to precipitate meaningful change within us.

2. Secondly, there are also teachings which are potentially transformative, provided we are willing to assimilate them, not just mentally, but throughout our being. Such assimilation can help to elevate the quality of our actions in all fields of consciousness.

From a spiritual point of view, it is necessary to cease drifting along, for drifting is very easy to do. Perhaps at times, it feels as if we are on a raft without a set direction. Spiritual practices can gradually help to arrest such a state. They can help us render our inner environment susceptible to real transformation. We find hints and precepts spread throughout the substantial corpus of theosophical literature such as HPB's "Golden Stairs", the universal Yoga tradition, and inspiring passages in some of our theosophical classics. Regular and sustained meditation will help us to flourish spiritually. The simple act of sitting quietly in a natural spot, or in a dedicated sacred place, helps us connect more deeply with life. Significantly, also, when this connection is realised, then giving back in some way to the numerous other life forms around us becomes an imperative.

Infusions of Buddhi into a Receptive Mind

If we can allow times for stillness as

we journey through an incarnation, the light of *buddhi* has a greater opportunity to make itself felt, to be infused more by the mind. We may experience small transformations, temporary moments of alchemy, when the mind is quiet and available at certain times to this refreshing soul energy. At such times, our principles align temporarily.

The American Theosophist, Emily Sellon, wrote that change, transformation, illumination, enlightenment, occurs "now". It is a moment when we are fully conscious — when all elements of our being are fully engaged. It comes through like a flash of lightning, and the transformation occurs. However, there is a very important proviso, which needs to be emphasised. She remarked that there is a long period of preparation for the moment of illumination. The personal ego needs to be subdued in order to harmonise with the inner principles, for she wrote that all the elements of our being have to be united, to enable the sudden dissolution of the *ahamkara* or ego.[6] The fact is that we have work to do.

Dharma and Ethics in Self-Transformation

The beautiful term, *dharma*, is relevant to this exploration. It is derived from the root *dhṛ*: to hold, to bear, or to carry. Some of its various renderings into English are religion, duty, virtue, equity, justice, and good works. So, *dharma* has a strong moral dimension. A secondary meaning of the term is of particular relevance to our ability to really *live* and *express* Theosophy. It also means the essential quality or peculiarity, nature, or character.[7] Living according to our *sva-dharma* (individual *dharma*), therefore supports or holds us in our essential nature; it establishes us in the truth of who we are essentially; helps us to live in, and express, our Divine nature. In this sense, *dharma* can be seen as an enabler, helping us to bear our innermost being, which is true, good, and beautiful. Therefore, *dharma* is extraordinarily precious. Ethics, which are so well conveyed in theosophical teachings, embody the essence of *dharma* because, through living an ethical life, we are helping to support and sustain who we are essentially.

The ethical setting of our compass or true direction, should be of central concern when we consider the daily challenges of lived experience. The fact is that our commitment to living with Divine Wisdom as our pole star is tested repeatedly in the many practical situations of everyday living.

The quest for the subtle gold of human alchemy — the experience of the homogeneous substance from which we are all derived, our Unity — is the enterprise in which we are ultimately engaged. Some may understand this as the search for God, Brahman, or Tao. Our interior nature abides in the realm of Goodness and Truth. It is not surprising, then, that ethics feature as a golden strand in theosophical teachings. In a life which is lived accordingly, actions will possess an added "golden" hue of morality.

The question of motive is important, if we are to live ethically. Emily Sellon also wrote:

> The contributions that we make, the efforts that we make toward any tiny degree of spiritual insight, are not for our own personal self-development, but for humanity as a whole. This is the bodhisattva ideal . . . the same compassion that we might feel for ourselves, we have to feel for others.[8]

In a similar vein, the *Bhagavadgitā* stresses the importance of acting without desire for results. *Light on the Path* presents, in uncompromising language, the problem of desire: for one who is serious about living spiritually, desire is to be transmuted from the personal, to that which is "within you" and "beyond you", for "within you is the light of the world".[9] Therefore, we are not to undertake inner alchemy, this thorough self-transformation, simply for our own perceived benefit. It is to be undertaken as an offering to life.

Ethics can — and ideally should — reach all aspects of our lives: from the mode of living we choose to adopt, to our relationships with others, how we act in the workplace, our motives, our leisurely pursuits, the focus of our meditations, and so forth.

If we deeply sense life's Unity, then the principle of *ahimsa* becomes the natural cornerstone for the way in which we live. For many Theosophists, non-harming becomes a daily obligation. It finds itself expressed physically in various ways, such as adopting some form of vegetarian diet to help diminish the unnecessary suffering of numerous animal lives. For many, a lifestyle of non-harming includes a refusal to take substances which could dull and distort their natural level of awareness and lucidity. Basic self-care is important. For we need to be as fully conscious as possible, if interior alchemy is to occur. We need to be awake.

Can we set about training the mind to do no harm? Meditation and certain deeper studies may help, but how do we function at other times? Thoughts can move rapidly, almost before we know it. One practical application of mental ethics is watching any tendency to think critically about others. Such thoughts may not even be expressed in our speech but may still be present.

We know that thoughts are things with their own life, strength, and effects. For the aware individual, a negative mental current can instead be consciously redirected so that it uplifts and supports another. After all, criticism will only feed any existing weaknesses in the other person, for thought is a power. When we are speaking out about something we consider to be wrong, can we focus on the action itself instead of the individual, or individuals, concerned? If we practice mental ethics, then our speech will be elevated accordingly.

Life's Furnace and the Alchemical Possibility

We can recall that HPB essentially equated the mysterious process of the transformation of lead into gold with the transformation of personality into pure, homogeneous Spirit. She emphasised the assimilation of Spirit or *buddhi* by us, specifically by our mind principle. As we learn to think more altruistically, we open

the mental gateway to *buddhi* a little more.

The term "crucible" is a melting pot for chemicals; but it can also be applied to some kind of trial or conflict.[10] It is normal to experience trials and difficulties at various points in life. It is especially at these times that we have the potential for meaningful change in our consciousness. Adversity may bring out certain beneficial qualities, which help give expression to our *dharma*. For human alchemy, this thorough reconfiguration or transformation of oneself, occurs through the crucible of experience.

The full depth, the significance, and intensity of the laboratory of human alchemy, cannot be denied. It is a profound process, involving both joys and challenges. Some trials may test us to the very limit. They are opportunities for the mind to become purer and more luminous, as it opens to the freshness and beneficence of what HPB called the Spiritual Soul. In such a state, love is discovered as the only Reality – as Dante described it in *The Divine Comedy* ("Paradiso", 3): "Love, that moves the sun and the other stars."[11]

Finally, notwithstanding the huge collective global challenges today, we can take heart from the alchemical possibility that lies before each of us. For any thorough transformation in one individual naturally affects the whole. *The Voice of the Silence* is a shining gem of transformative theosophical literature which points us, through the furnace of life, towards the Bodhisattva Path. It describes in poetic, soul-filled language, that increasing inner refinement which ultimately sees the flowering of the three vestures, or three ways of being, of a Buddha:

> Out of the furnace of man's life and its black smoke, winged flames arise, flames purified, that soaring onward, 'neath the Karmic eye, weave in the end the fabric glorified of the three vestures of the Path.[12]

✧

Endnotes:

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6. Emily Sellon, *The Pilgrim and the Pilgrimage*, TPH, Wheaton, 1996, pp.75–76.

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The Story of Giordano Bruno — I

ANNIE BESANT

[The stories of Hypatia (published last month) and Bruno (begun in this number) were written by me when I was a sceptic, to complete the series which have been reprinted here. These two martyrs fascinated me much in the past — AB]

A BOY was lying on a vine-clad hill, looking dreamily over the blue Mediterranean sea. As he lay there he could see the beautiful Bay of Naples, curving inwards to the fair city; and behind him rose, stern and forbidding, the mountain of Vesuvius, sending its dark smoke up into the stainless purity of the sky. One of the loveliest scenes that Italy, or that perhaps even the world, could offer was spread before his eyes; but the boy, readily sensitive as he generally was to all beauty of form and color, today seemed indifferent to it all, and the large eyes, "full of speculation", were blind to the landscape he knew and loved so well.

For the lad was on the verge of a grave decision; should he or should he not bid farewell to the brightness of his youth, and shut himself up within the grey walls of a Dominican monastery, to devote himself there to study and to the search after truth? Monk or soldier, it seemed, he must be. The times were rough and violent, and there was no chance for peaceful study save under the garb of the monk. Besides, Nature herself seemed as uneasy and troubled as the States of Italy. In the quaint words of an old chronicler, there were "earthquakes, inundations, eruptions, famine, and pestilence; in that troublous time creation itself seemed to violate its own laws." And the boy was fanciful and superstitious, and he thought that perhaps the monastery would be the spot most approved of by his God amid such troubles.

But most of all, learning seemed to beckon him; for within the monastery were books, and ancient manuscripts, and wonderful parchment rolls that he could not yet decipher but which Father Anselm had promised him that he should understand, if he donned the garb of the monk and took on him the vows of Dominic. His pulse beat more quickly and the color glowed on his dark cheeks as he thought of all he might learn and the knowledge he might master, as with some the pulse would beat in dreaming of gay frolic, and

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Dr Annie Besant (1 Oct.1847–20 Sept.1933), international President of the Theosophical Society, Adyar (1907–1933). Reprinted from *The Theosophist*, Nov. 1909, p. 265.

the color glow with thought of some bright scene of festivity or of love. And when Giordano Bruno rose from the hillside his mind was made up, and he had resolved to enter the Dominican monastery, for there he fancied that learning should be his comrade, and truth itself should lift her veil before his eager reverent eyes.

"You have been long, Giordano, and it grows late," said his mother tenderly, as the lad entered his lowly home in the little town of Nola. "And your uncle has been awaiting you, and has gone away sore vexed. For he says that now you are a strong lad and a tall one, it is time that you should throw away the books you are ever poring over, and should learn to carry arms, as befits a gallant lad."

"Mother," the boy answered gently, "I shall never carry arms, nor go out to rob and kill my fellows at the order of some idle noble. I have resolved to go to the Dominican monastery, where I have long been for study under Father Anselm, and the good monk has promised that he will teach and train me, if I will promise after awhile to take the vows of the order, and become one of the brethren there. And, truly, to me it is a nobler life to study and learn what wise men have written, than to put on casque and hauberk and go slay poor simple folk who have done no wrong to any."

"But your uncle, my son, your uncle," urged the mother, anxiously. She had long known that her son cared for the study rather than for the street, and was therefore in no wise surprised at his words ; but she had feared lest his uncle should be wrath, and deal harshly with her fatherless boy.

"My uncle may fight as he will," laughed the boy merrily, "and scold as he will, too, so you be not angry or grieved, sweet mother mine." And he twined his arms lovingly round his mother's shoulder, and kissed away her tremors and her anxieties, till she sat down happily to supper, content in her heart of hearts that her darling should escape from the turmoil of that dangerous time, and should grow into a revered monk like Father Anselm, or one of the grave brethren of the famous monastery to which he belonged.

But no such monk as one of those, poor anxious mother, shall be that gallant-hearted, passionate, eager lad of yours. Oh, could you have read his fortune on that summer evening, I doubt whether you would not have chosen for him the rough toils and perils of the soldier's life rather than that seemingly peaceful one which opened as the monastery gate rolled back to let in the future monk, and which ended on the field of flowers in Rome, long ere the full life had begun to sink into old age. But that future was hidden from her loving eyes, and she bade farewell to her boy, sadly indeed, but yet resignedly, as he set forth to his new home, and plunged into the new studies with all the eagerness of his fiery youth, with all the passion of his warm Italian heart.

And there for some years he studied, and when the due time arrived he took the vows of the Dominican order, and clad himself in the monk's frock. But

Father Anselm, who loved him, and who marvelled at his keen wit and his strong subtle thought, would oftentimes shake his head gravely and sigh: "I fear me that that keen head will not rest easy under the cowl, and that that strong brain will bring its owner into trouble." And he would try to check the young man's eager questioning, and to dull his ardor after study, for he thought that there was peril in the future, in those days of growing heresy, for a youth who would never accept an answer to a question if the answer would not bear investigation, and who must ever be probing the old truths and the old beliefs, and refusing to accept as certain all that holy Church taught and all the traditions of Rome.

"My son, my son," the gentle old monk would say, "you seek to know too much. There is danger in your endless questionings and in your desire to be wise above that which is written. Read your breviary, and chant your offices, and leave Copernicus and his dreams alone. Does not Holy Writ declare that God "has fixed the round earth so fast that it cannot be moved," and did not Joshua call on the sun to stand still — a command which would have been absurd had the sun been stationary, as Copernicus suggests? The book tells us distinctly that 'the sun stood still,' and it must, therefore, have been moving before. Giordano, Giordano, my son, your questionings will lead into heresy, if you be not careful, and the Holy Inquisition has arguments that I would be loth to see applied to my favorite pupil."

Then Bruno would kiss the old man's hand, and say some light word to comfort him; but alone he would pace up and down his narrow cell, struggling, thinking, wondering, praying for a light that never came in answer to his prayer, and longing to be free of the narrow round of monastic duties, and to share in the intellectual struggles, the sound of which he heard afar, the struggle raging in every University of Europe between the old order and the new, between the philosophy of the past and the thought of the present. The young lion found his cage too narrow for him, and the confinement began to gall.

(*To be continued*)

Truth does not change because it is, or is not, believed by a majority of the people. Maybe you who condemn me are in greater fear than I who am condemned.

Giordano Bruno
(February 1548–17 February 1600)

A Theosophical View of War and Violence — II

JOHN ALGEO

IN "The Golden Stairs", HPB has given us a set of principles for guiding our behavior that covers many situations. The statement of "The Golden Stairs" contains thirteen clauses or steps that fall into three groups. The last group, consisting of the final four steps, gives practical suggestions about practicing *ahimsa*:

> A courageous endurance of personal injustice.
>
> A brave declaration of principles.
>
> A valiant defense of those who are unjustly attacked.
>
> And a constant eye to the ideal of human progression and perfection which the sacred science depicts.
>
> —These are the golden stairs, up the steps of which the learner may climb to the Temple of Divine Wisdom.

The first step is to endure courageously injustice directed against oneself. This is the substance of Christ's admonition to turn the other cheek. It is not unrealistic, sentimental advice. It is the most realistic, practical counsel we can follow. As the Buddha said:

> If a man foolishly does me wrong, I will return to him the protection of my ungrudging love; the more evil comes from him, the more good shall go from me.[1]

For the fact is that evil does not cease by evil, nor hatred by hatred; but evil ceases only by being confronted with good, and hatred by being confronted with love. This fact was the basis of Gandhi's political program of *satyagraha* (holding on to truth) and of Martin Luther King's passive resistance. Yet, as Gandhi and King demonstrated, our response to evil and hatred and injustice should not be one of passive acquiescence.

The next step of "The Golden Stairs" tells us that in the midst of our courageous endurance, we must declare bravely those principles on which we stand and from which we act — the principles that lead us to a nonviolent and loving response. Gandhi made the distinction very clear:

Dr John Algeo (12 Nov. 1930–13 Oct. 2019) was President of the TS in America (1993–2002) and international Vice-President of the TS (2002–2008). In 2014, he was awarded the Subba Row Medal for his significant contributions to Theosophical literature. Published in *The American Theosophist*, Vol. 70, October, 1982.

> Not to yield your soul to the conqueror means that you will refuse to do that which your conscience forbids you to do. Suppose the "enemy" were to ask you to rub your nose on the ground or to pull your ears or to go through such humiliating performances, you will not submit to any of these humiliations. But if he robs you of your possessions, you will yield them because as a votary of *ahimsa* you have from the beginning decided that earthly possessions have nothing to do with your soul.[2]

As topsy-turvy as it may seem to ordinary logic, earthly possessions are of infinitely less worth than one's conscience. To lose possessions is to lose nothing of enduring value. To violate one's conscience is to yield one's soul — to risk breaking the golden cord that binds the personality to the immortal Self. Thus it is imperative, while enduring personal injustice, to declare the basis of one's action and thus of one's conscience.

It is also important to be aware that we are not asked to endure injustice to another person. On the contrary, the next step tells us to defend valiantly any who suffer an unjust attack. How far may such defense go and still remain within the bounds of *ahimsa*? That is a question we must each answer when the time and occasion demand. But His Holiness, the present Dalai Lama — a man noted for his gentleness and long-suffering forbearance of violence — has said this:

> I believe that having a sympathetic heart, a warm heart, a kind heart, is the essence or the most important thing. Irrespective of whether you believe in a religion or not, or no matter what ideology you follow, if you have this . . . then even such a violent act as of killing someone, if it is done with a really good motive, could go beyond the usual level of killing.[3]

Ahimsa is no simple matter, and there are no simple answers to our moral problems. How do we make the necessary discrimination, to know when someone has been *unjustly* attacked or what degree and kind of force we may use in defending such a person without ourselves crossing the boundary into violence?

The last step in "The Golden Stairs" gives us the direction to look for that discrimination. We are to consider all actions in the light of the ideal of human progression and perfection that the Ancient Wisdom reveals. We have come forth from the One into the manifold. It is our destiny to return again to the One, enriched by our experience of the many. Whatever helps in our return and in the perfecting of our natures is *ahimsa* — nonviolence and love.

Nonviolence is not, however, by any means the same thing as absence of struggle. HPB, who could certainly not be charged with being an uncritical Darwinian, nevertheless accepted two of the key concepts in Darwinian evolution and pointed out that they long antedated Darwin himself:

> . . . the idea of Darwinian-like evolution, of struggle for life and supremacy, and of the "survival of the fittest" among the Hosts above as the Hosts below, runs throughout

> both volumes of our earlier work [*Isis Unveiled*], written in 1877. But the idea was not ours, it is that of antiquity. . . . The "Struggle for Existence" and the "Survival of the Fittest" reigned supreme from the moment that Kosmos manifested into being, and could hardly escape the observant eye of the ancient Sages.[4]

Struggle is not incompatible with *ahimsa* because harmless nonviolence is not a matter of action, but of motive.

We are here touching upon one of the most difficult of all philosophical and moral questions — the problem of evil. Human beings doubtless have struggled with this problem as long as they have had minds to do so. In theistic religions the problem is put so: If God is both all-good and all-powerful, why does he permit evil to exist? The Book of Job in the Jewish scriptures considers the problem, as does the epic poem *Paradise Lost*, by John Milton. (A work that deals with the problem is called a *theodicy* because it treats the justice [*dike*] of God [*theos*].) *The Secret Doctrine* envisions no creator God of whom such a question can be asked. But the problem still exists. And in considering it, HPB suggests that what we call evil is as much a part of the nature of things as what we call good:

> Thus when the Occultist says that the "Demon is the lining of God" Daemon [est Deus inversus] (evil, the reverse of the medal), he does not mean two separate actualities, but the two aspects or facets of the same Unity.
>
> . . . that divine Homogeneity must contain in itself the essence of both good and evil.[5]

How can that be? What we call evil is sometimes the impulse to diversity, to separateness, to matter, which is necessary for the universe to exist. It is the path of forthgoing, *pravṛtti*, which leads to *samsara*, the great illusion. On the other hand, what we call good is the impulse to oneness, to union, to spirit. It is the path of return, *nivṛtti*, that leads to *nirvana*, the unity of all things. In this sense, evil and good are relative to the position one has on the paths. Behavior that is appropriate and good on the path of forthgoing becomes inappropriate and evil on the path of return. In this sense, evil is merely displaced good.

One implication of that view is that "evil", including war and violence, has a place in the economy of the cosmos. That is a tough implication and an unpopular one. But it is a theme of the *Bhagavad-gitā* and of Annie Besant's World War I pamphlet on "The High Purpose of War". In times of international conflict it is tempting, of course, to seek justification for one's own nation and to assume that God, or *dharma*, is on our side — that we are good and our "enemies" are evil. But the fact that a truth can be perverted jingoistically does not make it less a truth. Shiva the Destroyer is as necessary to the divine economy as Brahma the Creator. The body needs both anabolism and catabolism to survive. Civilizations are built up, and civilizations must be torn down. The process of destroying and tearing down is often necessarily a strife-ful and strident one. Thus it is always a very difficult decision to know when

"evil" is filling a proper and necessary place in the world process, but it is a decision each person has to make.

At other times, what we call evil is a learning experience, a testing of the boundaries that hedge our behavior. Just as children need rules and regulations, and need to know where those rules set the boundaries of acceptable action, so all human beings are constantly pushing at the boundaries of *karma* — testing the Great Law that governs the universe, to find out what it is. In this sense, evil is our effort to find where we are and to discover those consequences of the inexorable law that teach us we have gone too far. When we lose our tempers, behave violently, or harm another, we are really harming ourselves, and the Great Law sees to it that we find that out. Karma is not punishment, but education. The Lords of Karma are not our stern disciplinarians, but our loving teachers.

If we had the eyes of prophecy and could see the whole world process in the here and now, if we could (as William Blake said) see a world in a grain of sand and eternity in an hour — so that we understood the cosmic pattern — then we would see that all things, even war and violence, have their orderly place. But, of course, to see things that way requires a *very* large vision. When God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, he asked, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" To comprehend the great pattern that embraces and harmonizes war and violence as well as peace and love, the demonic as well as the divine, we need a vision that stretches from the foundation of the world to its dissolution. Without such a vision, we can only trust that the Great Plan does in fact order all things.

The fourteenth-century English mystic Dame Julian of Norwich had a number of visions or "showings", as she called them. She was profoundly disturbed by the existence of evil in the world and in human beings (which Christians call *sin*). She put the problem to Christ in one of her visions, and he responded: "Sin is behovely (necessary) but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." Even what we call evil has a necessary place in the economy of the universe, but all things work toward a final good. It is upon such assurance from the higher self to the personality, from the One to the many, that we rely.

To come back, then, to the question with which these remarks began, how do Theosophists view specific acts of war and violence? That is a question only individual Theosophists can answer, each of us by ourselves. The principles Theosophists can be expected to follow in viewing war and violence are clear enough — they are principles embodied in *ahimsa*, in the Golden Rule, and in the last four steps of "The Golden Stairs". But those principles must still be applied in specific cases. And they can be applied only by individual Theosophists, looking within to the dictates of the individual consciences — which are finally one conscience, as we ourselves are finally one. Our view of war and violence must grow

out of our view of our oneness and of the love that unites all humanity and all beings. That is the love which, as Dante said, moves the sun and the other stars.

The world is now threatened by wars and violence. It has always been so threatened, but what is alarming today is the awful ability we have developed to wage war and inflict violence. However, violence is less what we do than how we do it — our motive and attitude. We can learn to purify our motives and better our attitudes only by making conscious, self-aware choices when we are faced with those difficult problems that have no obviously right solution. We must deal with moral ambiguity without succumbing to moral paralysis. And it is possible to learn how to do that by study, meditation, and effort.

Right motives and attitudes are purely individual responsibilities. The world cannot be at peace until you and I are at peace within ourselves. But how, we may ask, can a few persons have any effect on the world. A bit of leaven, as Christ says in the gospels, can raise a whole loaf. No one knows how great the effect is of even a few persons who live, or strive to live, at peace with themselves.

A kabbalistic tradition says that the world includes only a handful of perfectly just persons, but it is on account of those few completely just individuals that the world continues to exist. If they ceased to be, so would all the rest of us. That tradition expresses symbolically a great truth. The peace and progress of the world depend on and grow out of the lives of those persons — however few their number may be — who lead lives of peace and wisdom and love.

As members of the Theosophical Society, we are called upon to lead lives of *ahimsa*, which means striving to join that small, select company of the perfectly just, those whom we call the Masters. We are called upon to become like them — rooted in the One Life. Our efforts in that direction, no matter how small, will eventually bear fruit. But the personal effort must be made. All of us must do what we can. As in the lyrics of a popular song: "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me."

(*Concluded*)

Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Hermes Trismegistus: Nurturing Wisdom, Cultivating Conscience — I

ELTON HALL

> Ontologies cover Being: they *render* it, allowing a view of Being to appear as Being in its entirety while in the same act *covering it over* so that Being itself, now characterized by its covering, is placed under eclipse or occultation. . . . Being never appears as it is in itself but instead *allows* appearances to arise that cover it . . . but even that truth about Being is occulted when any specific take — any figure for Being, indeed, an ontology — is asserted positively or absolutely.
>
> Charles Stein [1]

> Wherever Hermes passes, religious tolerance prevails.
>
> Antoine Faivre [2]

I

THE story of Hermes Trismegistus — Thrice-Greatest Hermes — is a Gordian Knot for historians of religion, philosophers, and anyone wishing to learn from the Hermetic teachings and discern a path for doing so. There are three distinguishable problems involved in any attempt to understand this tradition. First, is the problem of just what a religion is. Second, there is the problem of what the Hermetic teachings actually are. And third, how one makes those teachings meaningful in one's life.

The first problem arises from attempts to define religion in general. The idea of a religious way of life is as old as humanity, but the variety of these ways, both those now passed and those still followed today, is such that any attempted definition is too narrow to include all traditions and practices that are religious; or, they are so broad that they include much that we would not call religions. The very idea of a religion is comparatively recent, and it arises from the Christian tradition. As Christianity developed, it drifted toward emphasizing belief over experience, and so "religion" came to be seen as a body of beliefs and practices that embodied

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those beliefs. Yet there are ancient and modern religious traditions in which belief is not central. Recognizing this fact, some scholars attempted to define religion in terms of practices which represented, and perhaps gave rise to myths. But today many individuals shun specific practices and yet are religious.

The attempt to discern a religion and what it essentially is has supported much work in anthropology, sociology, theology, and philosophy. This has given rise to a debate over *etic* and *emic* study of various societies, including their religious understanding that affects the thinking, worldviews, and structure of these societies. The etic view is the effort to study a society or community "from the outside", that is, observing its members and their activities without in any way participating in them. This stance includes the view that involvement in what is being studied distorts one's findings, for in becoming involved one's objectivity is compromised.

The emic view recognizes that one cannot understand a community without entering into its social and subjective worldview. Hence, the so-called objective understanding from the outside is no real understanding at all but rather merely a conceptual framework imposed on what is studied. Both approaches are found in the studies of the teachings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus and to the whole Hermetic strain that has come through Western culture down to the present.

The second problem — what did Hermes Trismegistus actually teach — can only be approached by deciding on which of several options to take: (1) the first is to look for the earliest texts associated with Hermes Trismegistus; (2) the second option is to examine teachings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus beyond those texts; and (3) the third one is to look at the whole historic stream of Hermetic thought throughout Western history down to the present. For our purposes, we will focus on the early texts and only reference other teachings and the historic stream as appropriate to this focus.

The third problem — how to apply those teachings to one's life in some meaningful way — will deeply concern us in this presentation.

II

The problem of just what a religion is will not concern us, for it may be a non-problem. To use an example, Christianity has fragmented into countless traditions. One naturally thinks of the many Protestant churches, but Catholicism also contains numerous divisions, not only of orders sometimes opposed to one another, but of great differences in practices across the globe. In fact, each self-identified Christian has his or her understanding of the chosen tradition, since the meaning of that tradition is saturated with an individual's own experience — how he or she was raised, how educated, what life experiences have been assimilated, and so on — so that there are as many Christianities as there are Christians. Obviously, they overlap, combine and twist around one another, but, like fingerprints, no two individual understandings are

exactly alike. The same is true of the other great religions of the world, present and past, and of the less widespread ones as well. In one important sense, there are as many religions as there are religious people in the world.

The same would have been true of the early Hermetics, and certainly is true of those down the centuries who saw themselves as Hermetic followers. This realization allows us the freedom to ignore any attempt to delimit too sharply the religion of Hermes Trismegistus. Rather than thinking of a religion in some well-defined tradition, we can think of a spiritual stream, meandering from a source, which may be unknown, down through the ages. That stream was understood in various ways from the earliest times we can discern. Like all streams, it becomes muddy, that is, tainted, at times and is purer at others.

This idea of a spiritual stream is what lies behind those who hold that there is a Source for all religious traditions, a *philosophia perennis* that is within and behind them. The historian of religion Mircea Eliade tended toward this view and argued for it in many writings. He wrote:

> The structure of this holy and transcendent Universe varies according to a man's culture and religion. . . . For all conceptualization is irremediably linked with language, and consequently with culture and history. One can say that the meaning of the supernal light is directly conveyed to the soul of the man who experiences it — and yet this meaning can only come fully to his consciousness clothed in a pre-existent ideology. Here lies the paradox: the meaning of the light is, on the one hand, ultimately a personal discovery and, on the other, each man discovers what he was spiritually and culturally prepared to discover.[3]

This approach to religion and religions invites comparisons, and it has provoked strong reactions. Some scholars in what universities call religious studies have gone to great lengths to show the differences in religions. This, of course, is the emetic debate in another register. It is easy to show differences in religions, from the seeming polytheism of Hinduism to the alleged atheism of Buddhism. Yet we also know that there are as many differences in each major religion as there are between religions.

Wouter J. Hanegraaf, History Professor of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam — one of the few departments in the world devoted to esoteric traditions — rejects what he calls religionism. This approach is exemplified in Mercia Eliade's work. Eliade is convinced that there is something in religion that is real and fundamental to human nature and the cosmos, a conviction that easily leads to belief in a *philosophia perennis*, or at least to the Renaissance idea of a *prisca theologia*, a primordial theology — the view that the ancient philosophers, East and West, anticipated through revelatory insights the advent of Christianity, the culmination of spiritual truth. Though the terms are sometimes used synonymously, *philosophia perennis* is the more general view of a spiritual impulse that pervades all

religions, each of which is a partial expression of it cast in the terms of various cultures and times.

Though Hanegraaf shuns this view, he also rejects other scholars who examine religions from the standpoint that they all are mere myths in the sense of stories humanity has told itself. Put bluntly, in this view they are not true, though they have explanatory power to affect lives and cultures. Hanegraaf takes a middle course, neither affirming a spiritual unity nor denying the truth of religious claims. Rather he wants to investigate what a religious position means for those who hold it, including what it means for the lives they live. Truth, for him, is as elusive as any concept of the ultimate nature of existence. Put another way, he takes the Hermetic texts seriously and wants to discover what they meant for those who imbibed them. Theosophists can learn a great deal from Hanegraaff's careful analysis of Hermetic writings, but they also recognize the *philosophia perennis* as the Wisdom Religion, which has had many names and that H. P. Blavatsky chose to call Theosophy.

III

The natural question to ask is: who was Hermes Trismegistus? This is not an easy question to answer today. Throughout history, Hermetic disciples and scholars have wrestled with this question, and the answers have varied widely. One common and ancient view was that Hermes received an illumination from the Source of all existence — sometimes called "God" and sometimes the highest Logos — and he thus became known as Trismegistus, thrice-greatest. He taught his son Asclepius, who then taught his son Tat, such teaching leading to Initiations such as Hermes Trismegistus had. We remember that the idea that the divine entered the human sphere is an old one. Ancient Greek families traced their origins back to one or another god. Alexander the Great, after his visit to the oracle of Zeus in Egypt's Siwa oasis, believed that his real father was Zeus and not Philip II of Macedon. And Mary's son Jesus had God as his father. In one way or another, the ancient Mediterranean world was familiar with the idea that the Divine entered or even engendered remarkable, enlightened human beings.

Some thought that Hermes Trismegistus was a contemporary of Moses, others that he came before or after. Others held that he was a god, an incarnation of the Greek Hermes and the Egyptian Thoth, whom were thought to be equivalent. Both gods were said to have taught humanity writing, metallurgy, and agriculture — all the fundamental elements of civilization. Others thought that Hermes Trismegistus was an enlightened sage who lived in the earliest historic times and taught in Egypt. Yet others thought there were two Hermes, one the god and the other human, and a later writer even identified five Hermes. One reason for these various views is that the Hermetic texts do not seem to be written by a single individual. For example, some seem to be theistic and others point to a Source beyond any conception of God one might entertain.

To date, scholars have not seriously considered the answer H. P. Blavatsky provided in *The Secret Doctrine* when she wrote: "Hermes or rather Thot, was a generic name. Abul Teda shows in '*Historia Islamitica*' five Hermes, and the names of Hermes, Nebo, Thot were given respectively in various countries to great Initiates . . . . They were all 'serpents of Wisdom' as connected with the Sun astronomically, and with Wisdom spiritually."[4] She noted that the Hermetic stream goes back to those great beings who taught humanity in the Third Root Race and have nurtured humanity spiritually ever since then. Only the Hermetism of recorded history can be called "Western," since it is one expression of the universal Wisdom that recognizes no East and West.

The second natural question is just "what are the writings attributed to Hermes?" From the beginning to the Christian era, such writings were known and thought of as already ancient. Early Church Fathers referred to them — including Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius, and Justin Martyr. They saw these works as anticipating Jesus as the Christ and hence leading people to Christianity. Later orthodoxy, including St Augustine of Hippo, rejected them as devilish distractions. As a consequence, the Western Middle Ages knew only of one text, the *Asclepius*, which centered on medicine, while the Byzantine world preserved a number of texts. At some point, these texts were gathered together into about eighteen treatises known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the body of Hermetic writings. Some of these and other works survived only in old Middle Eastern languages such as Syriac and Armenian. With the conquest of most of the Byzantine Empire by Islamic states after about 650 CE, Hermes was translated into Arabic, along with other texts attributed to Hermes or to the Hermetic tradition.

Because much of Spain was Muslim for several centuries, over time these Arabic works were translated into Hebrew and Latin, and they entered the Western Roman world through France and Germany, though they were not well known in Italy. Italy, however, received the *Corpus Hermeticum* at the height of the Renaissance in the fifteenth century and was translated by Marcilio Ficino, who also translated the works of Plato, both brought from Byzantium a little earlier.

Because all these writings came from two different places, Northern Europe was enthused by the texts from Arabic, and the Italian world was excited by the Greek texts from Byzantium. As a consequence, the Hermetism of Northern Europe strongly focused on its texts, which were alchemical and medical in nature, while the South focused on the more philosophical texts. In this way, the Hermetic stream was largely divided. We will focus on the more philosophical works, because they suggest much about the nature of Hermetic spirituality.

The alchemical side is not, of course, entirely divorced from the philosophical side. The famous *Smagdarine* or *Emerald*

Tablet, allegedly discovered in a cave, states that what is above is like what is below and vice versa, being the key to the One Work. The microcosm reflects — indeed, is an embodiment of — the macrocosm. The human being embodies the whole cosmos in miniature. Alchemists took the One Work to be discovery of the Philosopher's Stone, which would turn any substance into gold. Scholars have tended to treat alchemy as a precursor of chemistry, and there is much truth in this view. They also thought that connecting alchemy with personal transformation was a post-Renaissance development, and this is not so.

The spiritual dimension of alchemy was present from the first. In the late third century, Zosimos of Panopolis, an alchemist, wrote letters to Theoseibia, an alchemist in Egypt who was engaged in teaching esoteric alchemy to a circle of students. Some letters survive, and what they make clear is that alchemy (1) involved the transmutation of substances into gold and the search for the philosopher's stone, but that this activity was a waste of time unless (2) a parallel mental and spiritual transmutation took place. The outer activity was seen as one with the inner activity, and so both mental attitude and a purified ethical nature was required for inner and outer success.[5] Otherwise, Zosimos wrote, alchemy would be demonic, that is, would produce dangerous results for the alchemist and for the world. H. P. Blavatsky reminded us that the Emerald Tablet "has seven keys to it," and the One Thing "is MAN."[6]

For some time, Hermetic thought of both the philosophical and alchemical kinds pervaded philosophical and religious thinking throughout Europe. But then in 1614, Isaac Casaubon, born a Huguenot in France, educated in Geneva, and ultimately dying in London, published his famous critique of Hermetic writings. Though a deeply religious Protestant, he had become a classical scholar and philologist — one of the first in the modern sense of the word. He showed that the language of the Hermetic writings was that of the second or third centuries of the Common Era and not ancient.[7]

Since so much of the authority of the Hermetic teachings depended upon the conviction that they were ancient and even pre-Christian, this discovery dealt a fatal blow to a general appreciation of the Hermetic works. From this time on, Hermetic thought went underground, so to speak, driven even deeper by the Enlightenment, which, in its most robust form, rejected all religion, and certainly anything that smelled of myth, on the altar of reason.[8]

To make a long story short, only three points need to be made. The first is that Hermetic thought did not disappear. The alchemical Hermetism of Northern Europe continued in many places, and one can see its effects in the writings of Paracelsus and Jacob Boehme, both of whom inspired generations of followers. Because the Hermetic teachings honored in Southern Europe were more philosophical, their influence was even more obscured. The second point is that philo-

logy and related studies since Casaubon's time, and especially within the last century or so, have become more sophisticated. Scholars now know that, though the texts we have can be no earlier than, perhaps, the late first century, and mostly from the second and third centuries, they contain older, reworked material, some of which may be much older.

The third point relates to nineteenth and early twentieth century views. Especially with the rise of positivist thinking, deriving from the materialism of the sciences since the eighteenth century, scholars generally thought that the Hermetic writings had nothing to do with Egypt. The texts are in Greek and no Egyptian versions have been found, hence the so-called Egyptian nature of the doctrines were not really Egyptian at all. Put simply, the Hermetic story false. But more recently, scholars have reexamined the texts and found much of ancient Egypt in them.[9] Thus, their origin has at least in part returned to Egypt. These three points would require much additional material to demonstrate conclusively, but we will leave them at this.

(To be continued)

Endtnotes

1. Charles Stein, *The Light of Hermes Trismegistus: New Translations of Seven Essential Hermetic Texts*, Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont, 2022, p. 18.

2. Antoine Faivre, *The Eternal Hermes: From Greek God to Alchemical Magus*, Phanes Press,

Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995, p. 39.

3. Mircea Eliade, *The Two and the One*, University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Ed., Chicago, 1979, pp. 76–77.

4. H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, p. 210

footnote, facsimile ed., Theosophy Company.

5. Wouter J. Hanegraaf, *Hermetic Spirituality* and the Historical Imagination: Altered States *of Knowledge in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2022, ch. 4.

6. *The Secret Doctrine*, II, p. 109

7. Similar philological work has in more recent times demonstrated that about half of the letters attributed to St Paul in the New Testament cannot have been written by him. It is assumed that these letters are attempts to apply the teachings of St Paul to later times when the church had a degree of organization (with bishops, and so forth). The writers are mostly Pauline in spirit but, overall, more restrictive in advocating Christian practices and doctrines than St Paul was.

8. During the French Revolution, the crucifix was removed from the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, and a statue of the goddess of Reason placed on the altar!

9. Interestingly, recent scholars have found much in early Christian ideas and practices that originate in Egypt, especially in the great cult centers, including Alexandria and its temple of Serapis.

Thinking the Unthinkable: A Musing — I

GANESH KUMAR

IN the "Proem" of *The Secret Doctrine* H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) had written about:

> An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless and Immutable PRINCIPLE on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. It is beyond the range and reach of thought — in the words of *Māndukya Upanishad*, "unthinkable and unspeakable".[1]

Is it possible to think about this unthinkable principle and speak about it? This omnipresent, eternal, boundless, and immutable principle, which may be called as the Ultimate Reality and denoted in the ancient Indian parlance as *brahman,* was the question that had been deliberated some 5,000 years back and the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, II.1.1, states: "The knower of *brahman* attains the supreme.[2] When we analyse the *sutra* (*śloka*) to interpret it correctly and decipher the ingrained meaning in its entirety, we might say that this *sutra* is a very apt definition of the undefinable, that of the Ultimate Reality — a precise, bold, meaningful, clear, and powerful statement, which we can say is the best definition or conception of Ultimate Reality. To understand its deeper meanings we need to delve into the components of the *sutra,* similar to extracting the contents of a zipped file one by one.

The statement that the knower of *brahman* attains the supreme or highest gives rise to four questions. The questions are:

1. **Who** or what is *brahman*?
2. **What** is the highest that one gets, **when** one gets "to know *brahman*"?
3. **Where** is *brahman*?
4. **How** to know *brahman*?

Let us take the second question first — what is the highest that we can get by knowing *brahman*? Can we attain supreme power or wealth that would enable the entire fulfilment of all our desires by realizing this *brahman*? Does it mean that we will get all the desires of our bucket list fulfilled, desires that we wish to fulfil during our lifetime, say, visiting hundreds of wonderful places worth visiting before we die, or getting all that we need from Amazon or other similar online shops or achieving all the ambi-

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tions and goals of our lives, and so on? Not really. But something more profound, that which is the final outcome of supreme power or wealth, the fulfilment of all our desires — happiness. Complete elimination of all our sorrows and attainment of ultimate peace (joy) and bliss (ecstasy) — *paramānanda* — that is what we will achieve by knowing *brahman.*

The next question is who or what is *brahman*? The sutra continues to say "*brahman* is *satyam, jñānam, anantam*", that is, *brahman* is be-ness (existence), consciousness, infinity — which means *brahman*, is infinite be-ness and infinite consciousness.

Let us now explore further how the above *sutra* describes the Ultimate Reality — "*anantam*", without any end or boundary or limit. And we can think of three kinds of limits — limit of space, limit of time, and limit of object.

No limitation in space: If I am here at HPB Lodge in Auckland, New Zealand, then I am not at Adyar or Krotona, which applies to every being or object or event — that is the limitation of space.

What is *brahman* then, which is not limited by space? That means that there is no place that *brahman* is not present, or in other words, *brahman* is everywhere; that is *brahman* is all pervading, omnipresent — *brahman* is everywhere, in heaven, in hell, and on earth, and therefore *brahman* must be here as well.

No limitation in time: Every entity has a beginning and an end in time — it is born, lives, and dies or is created, exists, and perishes; thus every event, every object, and every being has a beginning and an end. What about something that does not have any limitation of time? There was not a time that it did not exist, there is no time that it is not existing, and there will not be a time that it will not be existing — past, present, future — it does not make any difference, it is everlasting, eternal. *Brahman* existed in the past, exists now, and will exist for ever.

No limitation of object (no boundary of uniqueness): *Brahman* has "no object limitation". Every object is different from all other objects; if something has object limitation, it means that it is only that object and nothing else. Each one of us are different from all others, similar to this issue of *The Theosophist* magazine which is different from everything else. But if an object or an event or a being does not have any object limitation, then there is nothing in the universe which is different from it or there is nothing in the universe which is apart from it. Hence the statement "no limitation of space" implies that everything that exists in this universe is *brahman.*

Thus, *anantam* — without end, infinite, boundless — in the *sutra* means without limits in space, time, and object — that is, all pervading, eternal, and nondual.

We have discovered that *brahman* is infinity. It is a wonderful explanation, but the question is: "Does such a being or thing exist?" If *brahman* exists, what is it, where is it, and when is it? To find an answer to these questions, we need to examine the sutra further. Let us decipher the other two definitions — *brahman* is *satyam, brahman* is *jñānam.*

Sat means existence, being, reality.

What is real? All that exist in this world are in one way real as sensed by our sense organs and interpreted by our mind and intelligence; the sense objects, taste, touch, smell, hearing, and so forth are all real — are they *brahman?* Not quite — because these objects or beings are not eternal or all-pervading, in the sense that over time, they all do change. They are also not nondual. The implied question is what is that which is present in all that we consider as real and yet is not limited by space, time, and object. It is existence itself — this magazine is, the chair is, the computer is — we can say it is the quality of "is-ness" or "be-ness". If we consider gold ornaments of different varieties and names, such as bangles, rings, chains, and so on, the one thing that is in everything is "gold". In the ocean, the waves, surf, bubbles, foam, spray, and so forth are all nothing but one reality, water. In a similar way, one thing that is running in and through everything that exists is the quality of existence, be-ness — *sat* in Sanskrit. Existence is abstract — yes, ornaments are real but gold is abstract, waves are real but the ocean water is abstract. The right interpretation here is that the ocean water is real and has independent existence and the wave has a dependent existence. In a similar way all that exists depends on "be-ness" or existence or *sat*. That existence, that "be-ness" is everywhere — we cannot think of something which is different from "existence"; it will become non-existent. We cannot think of a gold ornament where gold is not. We now have something which is beyond the limits of space, time and object, and it is everywhere and is undeniable, and that is *brahman. Sat* is the "be-ness" mentioned by HPB in *The Secret Doctrine*: "It is "Be-ness" rather than Being (in Sanskrit, *Sat*), and is beyond all thought or speculation."[1] That "Be-ness" is everywhere, at all times, and is everything and nothing is different from it.

If there is something which is beyond space, time, and object limitations and is everywhere, all the time, then that is *brahman*. Ordinary people say that the world is **real**, the knowledgeable ones say that the world is **unreal**. Ramana Maharishi said: "Only the enlightened will say that the world is real" because for them everything is *brahman*. Anything that is **limited** by space, time and object is ***māya***, but what is **underlying** that *māya* is *brahman*. It is just a theory for us, but it is a reality for an enlightened person — as J. Krishnamurti said once when he realized that he was the tree, the woodcutter, the axe, the path, and so on, or he was one with everything. Thus we know what the enlightened one experiences, the Christ in everything!

Jñānam means consciousness, and extending our examination in a similar way like what we did for *satyam* or existence, we may find that *brahman* is infinite consciousness. What is that we consider as consciousness? Feelings, emotions, thoughts, ideas, doubts, memory, imaginations — all these are conscious events, perceptions, but all these events are not infinite conscious events. They are all limited by time, space and are not one and the same for all of us. Hence feelings, emotions, thoughts, ideas, doubts, memory, and imaginations are not *brahman*. Every conscious experience of ours is limited

in time, limited in space, and is different from each other and is not infinite. Underlying all our conscious experience in our life, there is awareness, which we cannot grasp because it is not an object. There is no experience apart from that awareness or consciousness and it has no limitations of space, time and is the same in everyone and everything, and that is *brahman*. *Brahman* is that infinite consciousness.

Then the question arises as to **where** this *brahman* is? The sutra continues: "He who knows the *brahman* lodged in the sacred cavity of the heart, enjoys all desirable things."

It is stated that this *brahman* is in the sacred space of the heart of everything in existence. One who realizes this truth becomes the enlightened person and all his sorrows disappear and is filled with all the peace and bliss. Of course, the mundane world and activities will continue for the enlightened as well, but the enlightened is full of bliss (*ānanda)*, seeing *brahman* not only within themselves but in everything that exists. The sacred space in the hidden cave of our heart is the seat of *brahman* or awareness or consciousness or life. In other words, we are *brahman* — our own reality. *Aham brahmāsmi* — I am *brahman*. In all the Upanishads one underlying principle is: *tat tvam asi* — That thou art.

We can thus say that if we know ourselves, we will know the entire kosmos, "for he knows that he is Parabrahm and identical in every respect with the universal life and soul — the macrocosm is the microcosm — and he knows that there is no God apart from himself".[3] In terms of fundamental design, the minutest miniscule and the ultimate creation are the same. "Nature follows the same groove from the 'creation' of a universe down to that of a mosquito."[4]

Not being a student of biology, I was fascinated to come across the information recently that the heart is the first organ to develop and function, without which the physical body cannot form at all. Hence, we may say that the body comes into existence because of the heart — that the heart is the main reason for the formation of the physical body, which is nourished and achieves growth through food and serves as the hardware for our higher emotional and mental software. It is also to be noticed that the heart is the only organ in our body that functions in and out of the body, that is, the heart keeps ticking even when it is taken out of the body. It is the main source or basis of our being, encompassing the divine spark of the Ultimate Reality. Thus, the principle which gives life dwells in us, and without us. Hence, we could say that the secret cavity in the heart is the seat of life for manifestation of the divine spark of *brahman*. Can we say that this is the "Hidden Life vibrant in every atom" declared by Annie Besant?

The final question still remains as how to know *brahman*.

As we have seen, the Ultimate Reality is not farther than the farthest, but in fact nearer than the nearest, if only we human beings can realize our inner self by deciphering and following the secrets hidden in the Objects of our Society.[5]

All religions provide teachings that show the way to enlightenment or realization of Ultimate Reality. In a similar way, "The Golden Stairs" propounded by HPB is the practical teaching of the Theosophical Society (TS) which is the spiritual and mystical guideline to achieve the qualifications that would enable humans to overcome the divine dissatisfaction by realizing the Oneness of Life. "The Golden Stairs" is probably one of HPB's most underappreciated and underrated works. But those who have delved deeply into it know that its apparent simplicity contradicts its true worth. There is more to it than that meets the eye. The first challenge is putting the steps into practice, day in and day out. Reading them is so much easier than understanding the deeper layers of the meaning hidden beneath the surface of those words. The second challenge is applying and making them an integral part to bring about the necessary transformation of our lives and attitudes. "The Golden Stairs" may be considered as a *sutra* in this respect as well as a *mantra* defining the goal of life of the spiritual seeker. Further it is worth remembering that it is not an express elevator whereby one arrives effortlessly at the top floor.

But another valid question also comes to our mind — if *brahman* is everywhere and if I am *brahman*, why can I not see or feel or realize it within my own heart? Is it that only the enlightened can realize it?

We are all quite conversant with the doctrine of "One Life"[6] declared by the TS, and as members of the Society we do accept it intellectually but most of us might not yet have realized it experientially. We understand from the writings of theosophical stalwarts such as Annie Besant that Life and Consciousness are one and the same, looked at from different aspects. That way, we also understand that there is only One Consciousness. If there is only One Consciousness, why can we not see it or feel it or realize it? What we see, feel, or realize in our waking consciousness is only multiplicity and separateness, not oneness. Can we realize oneness in our waking consciousness so that we can be absolutely sure of the One Life or *brahman*? This is the question that we all could ponder together, the question being whether in our waking conscious state can each one of us realize the Unity of Consciousness or Unity of Life or Oneness?

(To be continued)

Endnotes

1. *The Secret Doctrine,* Vol. 1, Cosmogenesis, "Proem", p. 14, TPH Adyar, 1978.
2. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.1.1 <scriptures.redzambala.com/upanishad/taittiriya-upanishad-english-sanskrit-2.html>
3. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, Chron. Edn Letter No. 88 (ML-10, p. 54, TPH Adyar, 1979)
4. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, Chron. Edn Letter No. 44 (ML-13, p. 70, TPH Adyar, 1979)
5. "The Objects of the Theosophical Society — A Musing", *The Theosophist*, Vol. 145.9, June 2024, pp. 34–35

Theosophical Work around the World

International Convention, Adyar

The 149th International Convention of the Theosophical Society (TS) in Adyar, Chennai, India, took place from 31 December 2024 to 4 January 2025, on the theme "Practical Theosophy and the Art of Self-Transformation", with approximately 626 in-person delegates and over 1,200 online on the opening day. International President of the TS, Mr Tim Boyd, lighted the lamp with four others, and the prayers of all the religions were recited as a reminder that the Divine Wisdom forms the common background of all faiths. Then greetings were given by delegates from 16 countries, who were on the dais.

The other international officers present on the stage were Dr Deepa Padhi, Vice-President; Ms Nancy Secrest, Treasurer; and Ms Marja Artamaa, Secretary. Mr Boyd gave the keynote address on "Adyar: Today and Future", elaborating on the developments that have taken place during the past few years and the works in progress. The President's report, in the form of a video, highlighted the theosophical activities around the world during the last year.

As always on the first day after the morning session the inauguration of the exhibitions (Art Restoration, Archives, and Adyar Library), and the stalls (Olcott Education Society and Besant Memorial Animal Dispensary), took place and the Reception was organized in the afternoon, where all delegates met informally over refreshments. The last session of the day was the Ritual of the Mystic Star.

There were **public lectures** in the evening on each day of the Convention. The first one, on 31 December, was delivered by Mr Kurt Leland, who is based in Boston, US. He is an international lecturer for the TS and a practicing clairvoyant. His lecture had an appealing subject, "The Value of Joy in Self-Transformation", and was recorded and played for the audience, as he could not attend the Convention in person.

The next day Mrs Christine Ödlund, a Swedish artist based in Stockholm, talked on "Growing the Third Ear under the Great Astral Mother Tree — Art in Relation to Theosophy". The **Besant Lecture** was on 2 January by Mr R. N. Ravi, the Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu, on a very contemporary and relevant subject: "Theosophic Governance — Sustainable Future for Mankind". The **Theosophy-Science Lecture** was delivered the next day by Mr Alok Aurovillian, who leads water research initiatives across India and Europe, developing innovative technologies for water treatment, on the very interesting subject titled "Science of the Sacred — Water's Transformative Power". On the last day of the Convention, Mr Boyd delivered the **President's Lecture** on "Spirituality and the Practical World".

All the public lectures had about 500-600 people in the audience.

The Convention mornings started with two options for the delegates: Bharata Samaj puja or silent walking meditation. The main programs were an opportunity to listen to the insights of 27 speakers/facilitators who elaborated their enlightening thoughts on a multitude of aspects of Practical Theosophy.

Short lectures were given by Mrs Linda Oliveira, former TS international Vice-President and National President of the TS in Australia for many years, on "The Alchemy of Theosophy", and Mr Shikhar Agnihotri, TS International Speaker, on "Theosophy — The Philosopher's Stone".

The Convention had a **dialogue** session on the theme, "Theosophy, the Theosophical Society, and the World", between TS international President Tim Boyd and Mr Pedro Oliveira (TS in Australia).

A special session of **Mini-Talks** by Young Theosophists was organised in which Mr Vighnesh R. spoke on "Hope", Ms Merike Martsepp on "Small Steps Matter", Mr Svyatoslav Lipsky on "Inner Unfoldment and the Theosophical Life", and Mrs Catalina Isaza Cantor on "The Art of Self-Mastery".

In the session on **Theosophy and Art,** the speakers were Mrs Elif Kamisli, Exhibition Manager, from Turkey, who spoke on "The Divine Hidden in Daily Life", and Mrs Anupama Gaur, Consultant Conservator, India, on "Preserving the Legacy — the Art Conservation Project for the TS Museum Art Collection".

Ms Nancy Secrest, international Treasurer and also International Secretary of the **Theosophical Order of Service** (TOS), gave a presentation on the activities of the TOS during the last year.

There was a **symposium** on the theme of the Convention. The participants were Ms Krista Umbjärv (TS in France), who spoke on "The Human Mind, This Unknown Laboratory", Mr Richard Sell (National President of the TS in New Zealand) speaking on "The Blossoming of Intuition", and Dr **Deepa Padhi** (TS international Vice-President) on "Self-Transformation through Values".

Workshops took place in different venues in the campus: "Invoking the Future Garden" by Mr Joss Brooks, veteran Australian ecologist from Pitchandikulam Forest, Auroville; "Theosophical Education — The Art of Living and Learning" by Mrs Sonal Murali (Director of the Adyar Theosophical Academy), and "Expanding Perspectives through Forum Theatre" by Mr Yugesh Ramachandran, a Young Theosophist.

The **Indian Section Convention** had two sessions. The first was the presentation of the annual report by Mr **Pradeep Gohil,** the National President, Indian Section, and the second had five Indian speakers — Mr Milind Joshi, Ms Smitapragyan Patro, Mrs Arunima Baruah, Mr M. S. Sridhara and Mrs Sushma Srivastava — speaking on the various aspects of the theme "Know Thyself".

A session where many delegates were able to participate and express their thoughts, insights, and views on the conven-



Group photo at the opening on 31 December 2024



Theosophy-Science lecture by Alok Aurovillian, Water Science Researcher



Public lecture by Christine Ödlund, Artist, Sweden



Indian Section Convention—I on "State of the Indian Section"







BESANT LECTURE by Thiru R. N. Ravi, Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu, on "Theosophic Governance: Sustainable Future for Mankind"



Tim Boyd, international President; Thiru R. N. Ravi; and Deepa Padhi, international Vice-President



Dialogue between Tim Boyd and Pedro Oliveira



Short talks by Linda Oliveira and Shikhar Agnihotri, Patrizia Calvi as the moderator



Children of Social Welfare Centre



Adyar Theosophical Academy



Nadam Dance by Narthan Academy of Dance and Music



Olcott School New Building Dedication



Art Conservation Lab Exhibition



World Federation of Young Theosophists

tion theme was the **Discussion Groups**.

The Convention was also enriched with **artistic programs**: "Poetry Circle" by the World Federation of Young Theosophists, classical dance and music by the Narthan Academy of Dance and Music, and a participative evening full of music, dance, singing, and the message of Oneness of Life, the TS Members' Talent Show. Also, a **devotional meeting** was conducted on 2 Jan 2025 morning by Ms Chandrika Mehta, a TS India member.

Exhibitions were a large part of the Convention. The Surendra Narayan Archives had on display "HPB's Paintings, Satirical Sketches, and Doodles"; and the Adyar Library and Research Centre showed "Kanjur and Tanjur: The Holy Books of Tibetan Buddhism". The Art Restoration Studio had an exhibition on "The Divine Hidden in Daily Life". The Blavatsky Museum exhibited its permanent display of historical objects.

With chief guest Richard Sell (National President of the New Zealand Section), **visits** were arranged to the Social Welfare Centre, the Adyar Theosophical Academy, and the Besant Memorial Animal Dispensary. A special visit to Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School also took place, where the new building was dedicated in the presence of about 200-plus delegates.

Apart from the exhibitions, the newly started **Adyar Eco Development** project had a display in the Olcott Bungalow, open for delegates to visit throughout the Convention.

On the last day of the Convention **new members** were welcomed by President Boyd. Later, he and Ms Marja Artamaa informed the delegates about the upcoming **12th World Congress** of the TS in Vancouver, Canada, in July 2025, and invited everyone to attend the same. This was followed by Mr Francis Lim (TS in South East Asia) who presented the work of the World Federation of **Young Theosophists.**

At the **Closing** Ceremony, the Convention Officer, Mr Shikhar Agnihotri, delivered a **vote of thanks** to all who had tirelessly worked before and during the event for a smooth run of the Convention. No meeting goes well without good **food**. The Bangalore City Lodge brought cooking staff and volunteers to Adyar to run a canteen, in addition to the Leadbeater Chambers kitchen staff catering to the delegates who opted for it.

Finally, Mr Boyd gave the **closing words** and declared the Convention closed, with a feeling of sacred peace permeating the whole atmosphere and looking forward to meeting everyone again on the very special occasion of the next Convention, celebrating the Society's **150th Anniversary.**

SHIKHAR AGNIHOTRI

Who looks outside, dreams;
who looks inside, awakes.

Carl Jung

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