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Editor: *Mr Tim Boyd*

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Cover: Side view of the cascading fountain in the central garden of the Krotona Institute of Theosophy, Ojai, California. (See p. 36 of this issue for a related report.) Photographer: John Greisen, board member of the TS in Portland, Oregon; facilitator with the TS in America's Virtual Study Center; and creator of the Instagram page, @theosophy_station.

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THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

Founded 17 November 1875

President: **Mr Tim Boyd** *Vice-President:* **Dr Deepa Padhi**
Secretary: **Ms Marja Artamaa** *Treasurer:* **Ms Nancy Secrest**

Headquarters: ADYAR, CHENNAI (MADRAS) 600 020, INDIA
Vice-President: ivp.hq@ts-adyar.org
Secretary: secy.hq@ts-adyar.org
Treasurer: treasury.hq@ts-adyar.org
Adyar Library and Research Centre: alrc.hq@ts-adyar.org
Theosophical Publishing House: tphindia@gmail.com // www.adyarbooks.com
Editorial Office: editorialoffice@gmail.com, Website: http://www.ts-adyar.org

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

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

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

Spirituality and the Practical World — II

TIM BOYD

THERE are a couple of questions we need to ask ourselves: if spirit is an omnipresent reality; and if our deepest nature is like a fragment of spirit, then why are we so resistant to truth? Why is it that even though throughout human history great people have come, lived their lives trying to communicate to us about what is truth and how we can experience it; why is it that as a human family we can remain unmoved by their message? In one of his poems the Nobel laureate poet, T. S. Eliot makes the point that we are "distracted from distraction by distraction". We cannot hear the "still small voice" of the inner self because of the powerful voices of our many outer selves. The body is hot, cold, hungry. The job needs our time, effort, thought. The family needs emotional and financial support, quality time, food, shelter, and so on. Our hobbies, the church, temple, nation, are also shouting their demands.

J. Krishnamurti spent 60 years of his life trying to point out the cause of our tendency toward distraction. He used expressions such as, the conditioned mind — that we are continually being conditioned by the thoughts of others and our own. We are so insulated from reality by these layers and layers of conditioning which we live through, that we become immune to the experience of truth.

In this process we make an effort to awaken, to connect with spirit so that in some way this practical world within which we live can be influenced. Krishnamurti talked about truth being a pathless land. But on our way to truth we do follow a path. According to Blavatsky the path that leads to truth is steep and thorny. It takes place in three distinct phases.

I would put it this way: We have all been asleep, but a time comes when we wake up. The Bible story about the prodigal son is an example. A son who leaves the house of his father, who has everything, who gives everything to him, the house of universal consciousness, and goes out on his own, travels to a distant land — the land of matter and life in a material body. In the "far land" he finds himself completely cut off — oblivious to his divine heritage. But the point comes when he awakens. He remembers his previous exalted state and determines to return. In terms of the spiritual life this is the all-important moment for us — the point where we wake up and remember that there are possibilities much greater than the ones we currently embrace. With this awakening the journey home begins. Ultimately the son reaches home and reunites with the father.

The outgoing journey is a period of ever increasing involvement in a world of attractive sensations, thoughts, desires, and activities. But the homeward journey is of a different nature. Outgoing we are involved in a process of continually adding more — more thoughts, wants, desires, roles, or identities — all of which demand our attention and engagement. At the deepest point of our involvement if we were asked "Who are you?" we would point to one, or many of the identities we have taken on, as a parent, teacher, worker, citizen, religious practitioner, and so forth. The return journey involves a process of purification in which we drop our identification with the many things that obscure the vision of our essential, most inner self.

In this process of **purification**, clear self-assessment is important. A great American wit came up with a principle he called The First Law of Holes, which stated: "If you ever find yourself in a hole, the first thing you must do is stop digging." Near the end of his life the Buddha stated the same thing differently. He encapsulated his lifelong teaching in eight words which expressed three spiritual principles: (1) Do no harm (in essence, "stop digging"). (2) "Do good", which begins the process of climbing out of the self-created hole. (3) "Purify your mind", which restores our sense of wholeness. These are the principles that are involved in the purification process that lead to the "realization of Oneness" that Annie Besant spoke about.

The culmination of the long, purifying journey can be called Realization — in the example of the prodigal son, it is that moment when he once again arrives at his father's house, is welcomed and given all good things. This is the moment when we realize that the grace and goodness of this universe within which we live, move, and have our being is always present. Again, in the words of T. S. Eliot:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.

It is the first time we *know* it because this time our eyes are opened; we can see.

All of these ideas are familiar to us as principles we try to apply to our individual unfoldment. We try to be aware of the obstacles that we have created and try to do something to alleviate them. But we are part of something more than our individual selves. We also play a part in the collective unfoldment of humanity, but what can we do that has real meaning?

It seems that wherever we find ourselves, whatever we do in life, the way we approach our living can significantly contribute to the collective need. Because for more than a decade I have been working at Adyar, I see it as an example of one approach to working locally for the grand cause of humanity. Annie Besant described the Adyar TS headquarters as "the Masters' Home". Anybody who has been here has at some time felt something more exalted than just beautiful Nature and camaraderie. During her time here, and that of Olcott and HPB, the presence of the Masters of the Wisdom was not infrequent.

If the experience of living and working here does not change you, then it is because you are not paying attention. Connecting here in a deep way has a transformative effect. I see it as a virtuous cycle. We are familiar with the term "vicious cycle". An example is given of the man who comes home angry from work, kicks the cat, the cat runs through the house, knocks over the fire lantern, the house burns down, which causes him to become angrier. But there is the opposite cycle that can be described as virtuous, where one's compassionate or positive action feeds the growth and the expansion, the magnification, of another. That is what is happening here.

Although I am speaking from my personal experience, the virtuous cycle of collective action has been evident, as has the awakening-purification-realization model. For me, being here at Adyar was an awakening, almost like when one wakes up in the morning. Shortly before we open our eyes, we are in some sort of dream, but we open our eyes and we realize we are in our physical body. It is time to get out of bed and start doing whatever we do. I found myself here and the physical body of this place was in decline.

All of us recognize that with any physical thing, as time passes there is a process of decay and decline, which if you do not do something to interrupt that process, takes over. In our own bodies one of the main signals is the slowing down of our energies. Initially, for me it was like awakening, looking around, and then trying to figure out the next step. The most obvious thing that we could actually do something about was the structures.

We have more than a hundred buildings on this campus and every one of them was in need. Those were obvious things that we had to address. As we were able to get that moving, along with it came certain inner changes, we could say inner effects, one of which was a recognition of a beauty that had been hidden. Our goal in this purification activity is not to give life, or to bring life, but to reveal it, to remove that which obscures it from view. The life is already there.

Much like the art conservation process which has recently begun here at Adyar, there is the meticulous removal of that which hides the beauty. Then when it is fully seen, the effect on those of us who have had the privilege of working here at Adyar has been a sense of appreciation, recognition of beauty, and empowerment that if we can do this, we can do other things as well.

Out of that we started to "discover" people who could further this process. Mostly these people were right here all the time, but the conditions had to be created in order to make it possible for them to give what was within them. Oftentimes they did not even know how much they had within them. Out of these new opportunities that became open to them, their own sense of vision led to an expansion of their potentials, previously unknown to them — for seeing a bigger picture, for management, for efficiency, and for the collaborative work which has

been the emphasis of all of this. With a place like Adyar no one person can do anything by themselves. The whole point has been to develop a collaborative point of view bit by bit. That continues to grow as wider avenues of service reveal themselves.

There is the expression in *The Idyll of the White Lotus*: "The soul of man [and woman] is immortal, and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendour has no limit." Our role is to remove obstacles that limit. As we engage, we also find that there is a rising sense of guidance in all that we do. It is something that we become aware of, to the point that we expect it. How and when it appears we do not know, but we know it will. Experience shows that time after time when crises have arisen, always there was the appearance of something or someone to address them.

A lot of talk goes on in theosophical circles about the Masters. There was a time in the TS's history when the fanciful nature of that talk got to be just too much. One of the Mahatma Letters was written to Annie Besant saying that this whole outcry about the Masters had to be stopped, because it was distracting, and it was inaccurate, and people were tending toward glamour. In the letter it was expressed as, "The cant [the insincere use of pious words] about "Masters" must be silently but firmly put down." Members' personal desire to contact the Masters to aid them, to uplift them, and to initiate them was the basis of the "cant". For the longest time that kind of conversation was suppressed — not that the Masters were suppressed. From time to time, as I travel, I am asked about the Masters. One of those questions is "Where are they? How long has it been since anyone got a letter?" In the United States there was a member, who in addition to being a prominent theosophist was also a standup comic. Every year during the convention he would do a standup comedy routine. One of the lines that would recur in his routine was "I didn't get a letter. I did all these good things, but I didn't get a letter!"

I have even been asked if, as International President of the TS, I have ever received a letter from the Mahatmas. Probably I should not answer it in this way, because in today's online, social media world it will be certain to be taken out of context, but here we go. If I were to be asked, "Have you ever received a letter from the Masters?" my truthful answer would be, "Many . . . but none of them were written on paper." These letters will not be able to go into our archives, but in my experience here at Adyar letters from the Masters have been many.

But these letters have been written in the hearts and in the character of many of the people who have come here to help this work that we are attempting to grow. They are the letters from the Masters, received thankfully. Quite honestly we find ourselves walking around and sharing this campus with many of those letters. I know them, they have names. This is something that becomes in many ways the norm. We want to call on the Masters, we want their help, we want their assistance in our personal issues, but in order

to use their energies effectively they need to have groups, bodies that have the potential to reach people more widely with their service. That was the intent for the TS from the beginning, and that intent is unchanged.

By nature, I think I would not be wrong in describing myself as an optimist. I believe in bright things, and my experience tells me that I am not wrong. Actually you could make the argument that the optimist is always right — maybe not in the short term. There is an expression that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. It also bends toward harmony, peace, enlightenment, compassion. Where we find ourselves in that arc at any given moment provides the conditions we have to contend with, but optimistically speaking that is the future that awaits us.

The fact is that all of us are here for a very brief time. We get numerous chances at it, but this life's moment is brief. It would make sense for us to try as early as possible to think in terms of the most effective ways to utilize this time. We find ourselves in the fortunate situation of receiving the wisdom of the ages that others lived and died for, to make available to us.

I have no doubt that given the patterns of human behavior which seem so intractable at the moment, that there will be dark times, there always have been. But all of us have the capacity to go through those and to bring others through, whole, unfragmented, once we learn to work together, not just in isolation. The idea of collective responsibility for a group such as the TS that adheres to certain principles, requires that, especially when things get a little bit rocky, those principles need to come to the fore.

The poet William Blake made the statement: "What is now proved was once only imagined." Everything that is real now is the product of some group or individual's imagination. It arises from our capacity to imagine and to act on behalf of that vision. I believe in that, and what I would ask is that we lend ourselves to that kind of dreaming, that we call upon our capacity to dream a world together, and to *call* that world into being. It is waiting just on the other side of this imagining process.

When I look at what is happening here now, we have all of these things that seemed to come out of nowhere, the Arts Conservation Project, the Adyar Eco Development, the growth of the Library, the Archives, the outreach and involvement of our members and others that it is. It is one thing after another that was not here earlier, that is here now, that is flourishing, and that is paving the way for other possibilities.

In closing this Convention I want to thank you, not just for your attention, but for the energies that you have brought to bear over these five days. It has been a good time, as it always is. I always notice when the Convention starts there is a sense of things not yet coming together. Then it comes, it forms, and as it ends, at least for me, I find myself with a sense of renewed hope, a renewed sense of wholeness, because of what we have done together.

(*Concluded*)

Disseminating Theosophy

PRADEEP GOHIL

IN the Theosophical Society (TS), whenever members talk about "dissemination of Theosophy", the word "Marketing" is almost considered a dirty word because our founders and our past leaders have indicated that we should not "sell" Theosophy to increase membership. The problem here lies in the fact that there is a huge difference between "marketing" and "selling". As someone who has spent his life in both the boardrooms of global corporations and in Lodge meetings of local TS groups, I would like to share my point of view on this important subject.

Let us look in detail at what is marketing and then we can look at how to do marketing of Theosophy that will benefit the TS as well as the people around the world.

A very brief definition of marketing says that it is awareness development, demand creation, and customer satisfaction for a product or service. Philip Kotler, the father of Marketing Management says that marketing is the planning, organising, directing, and controlling of activities through which demand is created by developing customer orientation and product awareness, eventually resulting in customer satisfaction. In short, marketing lists the components (tools) for effective external communication with a certain target group, to create awareness and potential demand for a product. A product should be considered in the broad sense, and can be both a physical product or a "service", related to emotional, mental, or spiritual values, (*kāma*, *manas*, or *buddhi* in theosophical terms), and in many cases a combination of these.

A good example here is Coca Cola: sparkling water, sugar, and a syrup. The product particularly started to become one of the strongest global brands after World War II, when the liberated people saw the American soldiers drinking it, and considered it as a symbol of liberation, the New World, and so on. They wanted to be part of that experience. So, the physical product was "loaded" with emotion, a strong combination.

Let us look at the definition and see how it relates to the TS. It talks about demand creation. This means that the TS must create an environment where a

Pradeep Gohil is the National President of the TS in India since 2017. He joined the TS in 1982. He is a chemical engineer with an MBA from the US and a law degree from India.

demand for joining it is created. Consider the example of Coke where the Coca-Cola company created the demand for it. Basically, Coke is water in which they dissolve carbon dioxide to make it a little acidic and add a very bitter caffeine-infused syrup, with about eight teaspoons of sugar added in a 300 ml can to neutralize the severe bitterness. Who in the world would pay to buy and drink such a product that can clean the toilet bowl or automobile headlights? Can you imagine what it does to our stomach? Yet it is one of the most sought-after cold drinks in the world for more than a century!

It was first served at Jacob's Pharmacy in Atlanta, Georgia, a decade after the TS was formed in 1875. It was first marketed as a tonic for common ailments. Then they said it improves the mood, brain function, and memory as well as reduces depression. Lately they say it reduces thirst and children ask for it when they see a thirsty film star drink it! In actual fact, it increases thirst. This is how demand and awareness creation managed to make Coke the largest selling product in the world!

The product of the TS — Theosophy — is genuinely far better than Coke. Then why can't we have a program to trigger the latent spiritual demand for people to join the TS by developing awareness of Theosophy in the world? When one is hard-selling a product or service a kind of "push" is created. However, when one is triggering a latent demand a "pull" is created, which is quite a different approach. There is nothing wrong in building awareness about Theosophy amongst people in the world. In fact, I would like to remind those who do not want to market Theosophy that our founder, Madame Blavatsky, had said that "it was formed to assist in showing to men that such a thing as Theosophy exists", without pushing them to join the TS. They will become members by the *pull of the awareness about Theosophy*. Then what is the harm in properly marketing/disseminating Theosophy, by building its awareness among the people in the world?

The four key factors that must be thought of, fully considered, and wisely implemented in order to successfully market a service like Theosophy to people are Product (Service), Price, Place, and Promotion. These are called the four Ps of a marketing mix. They are the key factors that are involved in introducing a product or service to the public. They provide the framework that organisations can use to successfully market their product or service to consumers. The concept of the four Ps has been around since the 1950s. As the marketing industry has evolved, three other Ps have been identified. They are People, Process, and Physical evidence. These 7 Ps are the key elements considered part of a "marketing mix", a combination of factors an organisation controls when creating a marketing strategy.

The first P stands for the Product or Service. Theosophy and its practice are a service that is provided by the TS. Creating a marketing campaign for Theosophy would start with a proper understanding of Theosophy itself. This has to be pro-

perly communicated to the people at large. One must also distinguish how Theosophy is different from other similar spiritual services. This requires a clear description of its USPs (Unique Selling Points or Propositions), an important aspect in external communication.

The second P stands for Price. It is the amount that the people will be willing to pay for becoming a member of the TS. One must link the price to similar services provided by other organisations, the real and *perceived value* of the service, while also considering the costs associated with the service. In some cases a theosophical Lodge, a Federation, or a Section could lower the joining fees and membership dues significantly to get more members. Some financially strong Lodges and Sections can even eliminate joining fees and annual dues from the members to increase membership. The perceived value is extremely important for products and services, which has more to do with the image, the emotion, than the physical.

Further, the issue of price may be quite different in countries and for individuals. In Europe, for instance, the TS has low fees when compared to similar but much larger esoteric organisations, charging at least EUR 300 to 500 per year or even a percentage of the income. Apparently these organisations have a high perceived value for their members. Some people appreciate or even demand no costs, whereas others feel that when a program is free, it apparently has little value.

The general approach is to ask for a reasonable fee to support the TS and make a small financial sacrifice, while it is also known that those who cannot pay the fees, can ask for a reduction.

The third P stands for Place or Placement and it is the consideration of where the service should be available. In the case of a TS Lodge, thoughts must be given to where should it be located so that it would be easy for people to attend meetings and lectures on Theosophy. Placement also involves identifying the place where efforts can be made to get members. This can be colleges, associations, and so on, where learned theosophists can go to give lectures to develop awareness of Theosophy. This aspect changed a lot since Covid-19 in particular, when all communication went online. Now TS members and people at large can follow a broad range of online lectures and courses. While this is very helpful to spread Theosophy, the aspect of physically meeting fellow members at a more inner level in Lodges and Centres cannot be ignored.

The fourth P can be considered as Promotion in the context of the target group. For example, if it is college students it may be sufficient to inform them about the website or send brief lectures in a WhatsApp group. One should also decide how to get the word out on Theosophy and what tactics to use to convert prospects into buyers. Your promotion strategy may include public relations, social media marketing, content marketing, target marketing, and so forth. Even the best service in the world does not stand

a chance if you do not have a strong promotion strategy behind it. While there are some promotional tactics that can be done on a shoestring budget, such as do-it-yourself blogging, others can be costly.

While the four Ps came first, three more were added later, and thus we now have the seven Ps of marketing. The fifth P refers to the People within your organization who work together to create the awareness of Theosophy among the people in your area. It is this group that must serve these people by being customer-centric and deliver a memorable high quality new member experience for those that join the TS.

The sixth P refers to Process and it is the steps followed by you to make the target group in your society aware of Theosophy and ultimately getting them to be members of the Society. Is it easy for a person to become a member of a Lodge in the TS or are there barriers that make the membership experience difficult? Are there issues of communication with the prospect that negatively impact the experience? For example, you talk to the person in a gender-neutral manner but he or she finds out later that the communication in the Lodge about Theosophy is not gender-neutral. One must take care that such things do not happen.

The seventh P refers to the Physical Evidence or in our case the physical environment in the Lodge building. Physical evidence includes the layout, ambience, and overall aesthetics of the location that contribute to the impression you make on prospects. For example, when we invite a group of prospective members to our Lodge, we need to make sure the room is clean, the furniture is properly organized, the environment feels spiritual, maybe using incense, photos of the Founders are displayed, love and respect between members is evident, and so on. It is important that our Lodges and Centres look relatively fresh and contemporary. An outdated look may result in an image issue of an outdated organisation.

Just like the seven Ps mentioned here, a marketing specialist has introduced the four Cs of the marketing mix. This is believed to be more customer-centric work and hence expected to have higher success. They are Customer, Cost, Convenience, and Communication. The first C, Customer, is the heart of any marketing strategy and hence he must always be at the centre of the marketer. If people do not become members of a theosophical Lodge, it could be because the needs and wants of the people being targeted were not known and that Lodge members were not oriented to get people (customers) to become their members.

Lodges must prioritize members' satisfaction above all else, as it will ultimately result in higher membership. Do we have a sufficient understanding of what is in the mind of potential members? What could trigger their latent spiritual demand? If we know, we can use these words for instance in Google, with a fast reference to the TS. This is the experience of the Dutch Section. In addition, do we know what our best-selling books are,

which are apparently meeting demand?

The second C, Cost of marketing for membership in a Lodge, is also essential, as it takes money to develop an appropriate marketing mix to deliver a compelling message across all channels. The third C, Convenience of marketing for new members in a TS Lodge, is also important. The Lodge members are all voluntary workers and most do not specialize in fields like marketing. Hence the marketing mix developed should be simple. Finally, the fourth C, Communication, is vital for implementation of any kind of a marketing mix to get new members in the TS Lodge.

Let us now take a case study of the Indian Section and see how it succeeded in using these principles of marketing to increase the membership of the Section. A marketing strategy was formulated in which a number of elements which were under the control of the Indian Section were grouped under the marketing mix and put into action. Let us see what was done starting from 1 October 2021, when the membership of the Indian Section was 9,039. At that time, there were a lot of ghost members who had passed away but were never reported and accounted for. As there was a provision for life membership, it went on even after the life of the members was over. We insisted on a signed letter from the life members indicating that they were enjoying and interested in continuing their membership in the TS. Out of the 1,214 life members as of 30 September 2021, only 443 members responded. The rest were dropped from membership.

After this cleanup, the new marketing strategy was formulated and a good marketing mix was implemented. The Product or Service was Theosophy, so good knowledge about Theosophy had to be disseminated amongst the Indian Section members. A session was organized where the twenty national lecturers exchanged their knowledge and experience. They set ambitious goals of delivering maximum theosophical knowledge to the members. Then these members from various Lodges went to different colleges and educational institutions, various organisations, and groups of people to talk to them about Theosophy. They brought awareness of their product, Theosophy, amongst a number of students, young people, and those that had retired.

At the same time, the second element of the marketing mix, Price, was also considered. The Indian Section had become financially strong in the previous three years and was not dependent on the admission fees and annual dues from the members. In a bold decision admission fees and annual dues were abolished. Many students had limited pocket money and could not become members due to financial limitations even though they were interested in Theosophy. A number of them along with other young people joined the TS.

The third element of the marketing mix is the Place for propagation. Colleges and other educational institutions, clubs, and various groups of people were targeted. Trained members of the Lodge went

there to talk to them about Theosophy.

The fourth P is Promotion. The members who were given the responsibility for disseminating Theosophy planned hundreds of online lectures on theosophical subjects. In fact, the online lectures which started with the COVID-19 days were extended to become a regular norm.

The fifth P was the People of the Indian Section. It was members of the TS that worked together to create the awareness about Theosophy in the country.

The sixth P refers to the Process that was followed in disseminating Theosophy, starting with grasping proper knowledge of Theosophy and going for talks to different groups. When people asked about membership, the application forms were promptly handed over for them to become members. Finally, the seventh P, which refers to Physical Evidence was taken care of by ensuring that the physical environment in Lodge buildings and the ambiance would contribute to a good and positive impression on a prospect coming to attend the first Lodge meeting.

The above is the actual case study of how the TS membership in the Indian Section went from 9,039 members to 12,230 members within a span of two years after the formulation of the marketing strategy with an appropriate marketing mix. In fact the membership further increased to 13,506 as on 1 October 2024, an increase of 10.5%.

The way ahead in the Theosophical Society is to engage in e-marketing. There is a Lodge in the Indian Section which has no place to meet. Everyone logs in using their computers or mobile phones at a specific time and day of the week for a one-hour meeting. The use of the Indian Section website is another platform for disseminating Theosophy. We do get inquiries from young people who have read about the TS on our website. Soon, we expect to accept membership applications online so that people would not have to print out, fill, and mail them to the Indian Section.

There is no doubt that there are many benefits for the TS from e-marketing. First, it will have a nationwide reach. With a website, we can reach anyone in the world if they have internet service allowing access to various groups of people. Second, a properly planned and effectively targeted e-marketing campaign can reach the right people at a much lower cost than traditional marketing methods. Third, people can find out about Theosophy and how to become members any time of the day even when the offices are closed. Fourth, marketing by e-mail or banner advertising makes it easier to assess the efficacy of the awareness campaign via trackable and measurable results. Fifth, e-marketing enables interactive campaigns using music, graphics, and videos. Finally, e-marketing has a better conversion rate due to the ease of obtaining additional information or becoming a member.

Regarding using aggressive moves for increasing membership in the TS, as opposed to sitting quiet and hoping it will happen on its own, the best way out is a

balanced perspective in working to build awareness of Theosophy and not pushing people to join. Blindly mistrusting any aspect of marketing Theosophy can lead to unwarranted skepticism and impede the growth of the Society. Instead, a critical yet constructive approach guided by evidence and reason should be followed to make room for a meaningful posture to ensure the credibility and effectiveness of proper marketing.

How can theosophists help in the work of marketing Theosophy? Well, it is indeed the duty of every TS member to provide food for thought by teaching others and improving their knowledge of Theosophy. Madame Blavatsky said in *The Key to Theosophy* that members of the Society can help:

> First by studying and comprehending the theosophical doctrines, so that they may teach others, especially the young people. Secondly, by taking every opportunity of talking to others and explaining to them what Theosophy is, and what it is not; by removing misconceptions and spreading an interest in the subject. Thirdly, by assisting in circulating our literature, by buying books when they have the means, by lending and giving them, and by inducing their friends to do so. Fourthly, by defending the Society from the unjust aspersions cast upon it, by every legitimate device in their power. Fifthly, and most important of all, by the example of their own lives.

It is the duty of every member of the TS to teach Theosophy to others with a beneficent spin-off as mentioned by Madame Blavatsky in the same book:

> No Fellow has a right to remain idle, on the excuse that he knows too little to teach. For he may always be sure that he will find others who know still less than himself. And also it is not until a man begins to try to teach others, that he discovers his own ignorance and tries to remove it.

So, we can see that marketing has so much potential in bringing about Theosophy into the world and increasing the membership of the TS. The best feature of marketing is that it does not involve forced selling, which our founders have told us not to do. Marketing never pushes a person to become a member of the TS, but it pulls people towards it by creating awareness about it. If we can succeed in informing the whole world all that Madame Blavatsky has to say about Theosophy, then I believe a very large number of people will become members of the TS. Proper marketing of Theosophy can achieve that objective.

I would now like to make a proposal. Would it be helpful to work on a marketing plan for the TS that elaborates and specifies the issues as discussed here, triggering the latent spiritual demand?

To summarize, I will say that building a solid marketing plan can help a theosophical Lodge or Section to create or improve awareness of Theosophy amongst the people in their area and result in higher membership. Isn't that what all of us, members of the Theosophical Society, really want? I am sure you will find the answer easy. ✧

The Story of Giordano Bruno — II

ANNIE BESANT

[The stories of Hypatia (published two months ago) and Bruno (begun last month) 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]

IN that monastery library Bruno found a danger that had been missed by the careless monks around him; he tells us that "after having cultivated literature and poetry for a long time, my guides themselves, my superiors and my judges, led me to philosophy and free enquiry." But what place had philosophy and free enquiry within the walls of an Italian monastery, and what greater danger could befall a man than to find such things as these? At that time Aristotle was supreme in the Christian church, and Bruno, preferring the philosophy of Pythagoras and of Plato, soon found himself in conflict with his teachers.

Pythagoras had taught that the sun was the centre of our system, and that the Earth was but a planet revolving round it, and, Pythagorean student as he was, Giordano naturally followed the teaching of Copernicus on the same subject, despite all that Father Anselm could urge. And, indeed, Giordano had latterly shunned the kind old monk, being unwilling to give him needless pain, and yet more unwilling to seem to be less true.

For some weeks past Father Anselm had noticed that evil glances were being thrown on his favorite pupil, and he had caught one or two muttered phrases that alarmed him for his safety. A witty pasquinade, entitled "Noah's Ark," had been written by the young monk, and had given sore offence in the monastery, for in it he, under a thin veil of allegory, mocked at the luxury and ignorance of the monkish orders, and the lash of his sarcasm had curled round and stung some of the brethren in his own monastery, and bitter complaint had been made to the Prior that this young critic of monkish ways needed a lesson to teach him to keep that gibing tongue of his from slandering his elders and superiors.

At last the word "heretic" began to be bandied about freely from mouth to mouth, and whispers circulated that the

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Dr Annie Besant (1 October 1847–20 September 1933), international President of the Theosophical Society, Adyar (1907–1933). Reprinted from *The Theosophist*, December 1909, p. 399.

Prior would soon take measures to teach the malapert monk to mend the error of his ways. And one afternoon, as Bruno lay idly in the vineyard adjoining the garden of the monastery, he saw Father Anselm approaching with hurried steps and troubled countenance, and rising, he went to meet him and asked him gently what was amiss. The old man sank down on the sunny slope, well-nigh breathless with his haste and the grief that oppressed him, and Bruno waited patiently till he had recovered power of speech, and Anselm said:

> Giordano, my son, danger is around you. Your foolish talk about the Earth moving, and of the inhabitants of other worlds than this, which you insanely pretend are among the stars above our heads, has reached the Prior's ears. Father Jerome, who thought you aimed at him in that biting jest of yours on the swine saved by Noah in the ark, has whispered in the Prior's ear that you are a heretic, dangerous to the good name of the monastery in the country round, and the Prior, who is, as you know, a good man, but withal somewhat narrow-minded in his faith — and truly he is blessed therein, in that it saves him from many anxious questionings of the doctrines of Holy Church —has taken alarm, and is minded to question you before the brethren touching your rejection of Aristotle, and your belief in these new-fangled theories of Copernicus. I fear me lest —.

"Fear nothing", said the young monk, proudly, springing to his feet, and tossing back his head with a gesture of bright self-confidence that beseemed him well; "Fear not for me, father, for I fear not for myself."

"And therefore do I fear, my son, answered sadly the elder monk. Satan triumphs most easily over those that have not the 'spirit of holy fear'. Your speculations are too bold, and you cannot have weighed well all that is implied in the idea of this firm world of ours revolving in space. Where do you believe hell is, and where the souls of the lost, and the devils chained in darkness, in this new universe of yours that has neither top nor bottom?"

"Truly", said Bruno, laughing softly, "I have not troubled my brain much with such Satanic geography, and there can indeed be no 'under the earth', now that we know that it is ever turning in its journey round the sun."

"Hush, hush, my son!" the old man said hastily, crossing himself as he spoke. "Beware lest Satan himself come to show you the way to the prison beneath the earth, whence none goeth forth. But bethink you: whither went the blessed Lord when he ascended, going upwards, as we read, from the surface of this earth, and being received into heaven. How could he ascend from a whirling globe and in what direction went he when he was, as Holy Writ tells us, taken *up*? Tush, tush, my son, your fancies are blasphemous absurdities, and were they true the cardinal doctrines of our holy faith would become impossible, which may be the blessed Virgin and the saints forefend." And again he crossed himself piously as he spoke.

A strange and subtle smile flitted over Bruno's mouth at the last sentence of the simple father, and he opened his lips to answer. But ere a word was uttered he checked himself, thinking: ' Of what avail to shake the old man's faith '. So he spoke no word, but looked across the sea, his deep eyes full of search and longing, and of unsatisfied yearning after certainty of truth.

"Giordano!" again said the old monk, "listen to me. You are young and brave, but your youth and your courage will not avail you in tomorrow's strife. I shall have to do heavy penance for my warning, but warn you of your peril I will, at whatever risk. They are plotting to catch you in your answers, that they may stamp you heretic; and I know — " the trembling voice sank into a whisper — "I know that a messenger has gone to the Holy Office at Naples, and the inquisitor will be here tomorrow to — " The bright listening face blanched for a moment, but then the mobile lips grew firm and set, and Bruno laid his hand gently on his friend's arm.

"What would you have me do, my father ? You would *not* have me lie, even to escape the terrors of the Holy Office?" "Fly! fly" the old man whispered. "Fly while there is yet time. Oh! my son!, I would not see your young limbs broken on the rack, your young face writhen with pain! Oh! I have seen — I have seen —" The good monk's voice failed him, and he broke down in strong emotion; and then, hearing steps coming in the direction of the vineyard he rose and went hastily.

For an hour Giordano Bruno sat where his friend had left him, still seemingly gazing idly across the sea. But his heart was full of warring, surging thoughts, as he strove to judge his danger, and the best way of swift escape. Presently the light came back to his eyes, the smile to his lips, and he leapt to his feet. "Good fathers all", he said merrily, "I leave Noah's Ark tonight; for I fear it is no longer an ark of safety for me."

So that night, when all were sleeping round him, Giordano Bruno rose silently from his pallet, and after listening a few minutes to see that none were stirring save himself, he unwound a rope which he coiled round his waist beneath his monkish frock, and knotting one end tightly to the bar of his window, he slipped out through the narrow opening and slid swiftly to the ground, and struck off across the country northwards, his heart bounding with new liberty, and his young limbs rejoicing in the strain of his rapid flight.

And it was well he fled; for the messenger to the Holy Office returned with tidings that ere day dawned the familiars would be at the monastery, and that they would seize the young rebel and take him to Naples instantly, and that the questionings should be done at the hall of the Holy Office itself. But when they came, those terrible bloodhounds of the Inquisition, they found an empty cell, whence the victim had escaped; and they were fain to be content with excommunicating him —delivering him over, body and soul, to the devil; while he,

rejoicing in his strength, set his face northwards towards the Appenines.

Forward and northwards ever went the fugitive monk, generally on foot, but now and then getting a lift from a friendly traveller, wending his way in the same direction. When he approached a town, being afraid of being questioned, he usually hid till the evening fell, and then during the darkness slipped past unnoticed, as though he had committed some crime and were fleeing from the hands of justice. For it is one of the evils of superstition that in countries where it is powerful it treats honest men as criminals and criminals as honest men, provided only that the criminals are devout, and obey the clergy, and frequent the Church.

Until Christianity became softened and liberalized by Freethought, it was safer in every country of Christendom to be a murderer or thief than to be a heretic. For the murderer and the thief could buy forgiveness and safety by gold and by prayer, whereas the heretic found the rack and the stake the penalty for pure life and honest speech. At last Giordano saw the white tops of the mountains which divide Italy from the fair Swiss land, and knowing that Switzerland had to a great extent thrown off allegiance to Papal Rome, and that the Protestant Reformers there dwelt in safety and in honor, he dreamed that when he crossed that mountain barrier he would be free to breathe in safety, far from the grim clutch of the Inquisition.

Ah, Bruno! you have to learn that hatred of science and persecuting zeal are not the marks of one Christian sect more than of another, but are of the very essence of the Christian faith itself ! As well seek for a blind man who can see, as for a Christian who can respect the freedom of thought of a heretic. Up the steep sides of Mont St. Bernard he climbed, and he reached the top as soon as the sun began to sink ; he stood and looked across the plain of Italy, billowing far beneath his feet, and as he looked the Italian heart in him melted, and he sank on his knees and stretched out his arms towards the wide landscape, glowing in the radiance of the setting sun: "Italy, Italy!", he cried aloud, and the hot tears rolled down the brave young face, writhen now with pain."

Italy! Italy! my beautiful, my beloved! chained as Prometheus on the mountain peak, thou who hast brought to men that living fire, stolen from the burning heart of Nature, the divine, the self-sufficing, the mother of all; as Prometheus torn by vulture beak, torn by Pope and priest, yet as Prometheus undying, and looking for the redemption that shall be Italy! I fly from the devils incarnate, made by Christianity out of men; shall I ever come back to thee, to live and die in thee? Uast thou for me a home and a refuge; or, my Italy, hast thou only a grave?"

O Giordano Bruno! noble son of Italia degraded; thy Italy has for thee no home or refuge; thy Italy has for thee not even a grave. Italian winds shall scatter thy ashes far and wide over Italian soil, and those ashes shall be the seeds that, after

two centuries, shall bloom into flowers of memory and gratitude for thee!

His last farewell to Italy spoken, Bruno turned his back resolutely on the land which the Inquisition was searing, and slowly paced along the path which led to the hospice of St. Bernard. As he turned the corner which shut out Italy, he came in sight of the long low building, sheltered from the wild winds and nestling beneath a guardian crag. No possibility was there that he should pass unseen that hospitable door, for already the dogs had scented his approach, and the deep bay of twenty noble animals welcomed the wanderer to the refuge of all travellers to the pass.

But Bruno dared not enter a dwelling where his tonsure would tell of the profession he had rejected, and where he would find it hard to parry the curious questions of his hosts, so when he reached the Hospice door, he prayed but for a crust of bread and a drink of thin red wine, and, urging that his business forced him to haste onwards, despite the growing darkness, he started again on his way, down the path that led to the valley far below. Four or five of the dogs escorted him on his road, until he reached the limit of the snow, and then with a deep bay of farewell, they turned homewards again, leaving him to pursue, with lightened heart — since now indeed he was in Switzerland — his steep and slippery way.

(*To be continued*)

The great Masters of Compassion, who live within the reach of men, that humanity may not be an orphan without a father, that the pupils may not be seeking a Guru and find no Guru to instruct. They are Those to whom some of us feel such an intensity of gratitude, because They stay within the sphere of Earth though They live in Nirvanic consciousness beyond it . . . Those who might have gone from us but who stay with us, who might have left us orphans but who remain as the Fathers of men. Such are the great Gurus at whose Feet we bow; such the great Masters who stand behind the Theosophical Society. They sent their messenger, H. P. Blavatsky, to bring the message to the world which the world had almost forgotten, to point again to the narrow and ancient Path along which some feet are treading now, along which your feet may tread.

Annie Besant

The Path of Discipleship

Hermes Trismegistus: Nurturing Wisdom, Cultivating Conscience — II

ELTON HALL

IV

SO what does Hermes Trismegistus teach? The *Corpus Hermeticum* does not say a great deal about cosmology, the origin of the world, and it speaks more about the human condition and the path of freedom from the world of strife and suffering. The *Poimandres*, the first text in the *Corpus Hermeticum* does connect the origin of all existence with the human condition. It begins with Hermes reporting:

> I was thinking about everything.
> Suddenly my mind shot up
> and my senses everted —
> but not as in a stupor, not drunk or sated.
> And it seemed to me that something very big
> — completely unbounded, immeasurable —
> called my name.[10]

Hermes, who will come to be called Hermes Trismegistus, here begins to tell us how he came to his divine knowledge. Deep in thought about many things, his mind mysteriously transcends its ordinary thinking and his senses are turned inside out. This withdrawal of the senses from their normal outward attention to within himself opens him to the presence of a reality quite beyond conceptual grasp. In calling Hermes' name, it both directs itself to Hermes and draws Hermes' attention to it. The human and the divine are joined in what will become a dialogue.

The voice asks what Hermes wants to know, and, unsurprisingly, Hermes asks the question: Who are you? And this immensity answers: "I am the Poimandres — the Mind of the Authentic One."[11] To this, Hermes replies that he wants to know everything, and Poimandres gives him just that in general terms. First, everything is turned to mild light, but then a "downward tending" darkness appears and from it an inarticulate sound, likened to wailing. The darkness becomes a churning, watery fluid. But then "from the Light a holy word came out / and it stood on the watery nature / so it seemed to me this word was the voice of the light."[12] Poimandres asks if Hermes understands what he is witnessing. Hermes, of course, does not at this point, so Poimandres tells him:

> That Light, I AM it. Mind. The first god:
> He who was before the watery nature came
> out of the dark;

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

and the one that came out of the Light
is the Logos, the word-son *of* this god.

And suddenly the heart of this cosmology begins to manifest. Poimandres says:

Know by looking at, by listening to that which is *in* you
that the Word is the Son of the Mind
and that they do not stand apart from each other
for Life is the oneness of them.

Life is the utter unity of Mind and Word, and so of Light. This is the key to all that follows.

Hermes then explains that as he looked at the Light, he saw innumerable powers within it, a world without limit, and says that "I knew these things / through *seeing* the word of Poimandres." Here light and sound are one, the situation before creation, which is affirmed when Poimandres says: "In your mind you now know the archetypal form— the First before the First — the Apeiron — the Limitless." The four elements begin to distill out of the watery fluid, water, fire, air, and earth.

The First Mind is now seen as having a double nature, a polarity that will eventually manifest as the two sexes. Combining that polarity, a Second Mind is born, and it is the creator of the world, the Artifex. It forms the seven directors — which are the seven planets or, rather, being formed out of spirit and fire, are the beings we see as the seven planets. Their orbiting together constitutes *heimarmene*, usually translated "fate". As Hanegraaf puts it, *heimarmene* is "the astral machinery of necessity or 'fate'".[13]

Now that everything is in place, the Word (Logos) leaves Nature and the elements fashion the world with its flora and fauna, but without Logos. But the Father Mind — the First Mind — formed Anthropos, the archetype of the human being, complete with all the powers of that Mind. Anthropos saw the work of the Artifex, the Second Mind, and was given permission to create as well. Looking into Nature, Nature responded: she fell in love with Anthropos and reflected his image as in a mirror. Anthropos descended through the spheres of the Directors — the planets — and entered mindless Nature.

And that is why Anthropos — humanity — unlike all other things that live on the earth has a double nature:
being mortal, according to its body,
and immortal
because it is — Anthropos — immortal
with dominion over everything
but suffering like a mortal also, cast down under fate.

Having entered Nature with the powers of the seven Directors, Nature produced seven Persons, each one with one of the seven powers predominant. Formed of the elements — feminine earth, masculine water, spiritual air — the fiery Light and Life entered the seven as Soul and Mind. Life manifested as Soul and Light as Mind. At first, each person was androgyne, both male and female in one, and this lasted "until the end of the epoch". Then in the next epoch, all creatures, including the human being, were separated into men and women. We are not told how this happened, but we might

think of an analogy with the biological cell dividing itself. The incarnate Anthropos, now divided, multiplied — and here we all are. But the god let us know that we are immortal and that desire is the cause of death. "But that whoever knows himself / has entered the Good."

So, each of us is Anthropos as reflected and embodied, a spark of Light and Life, apparently separate because embodied, but one in that Light and Life which pervades all embodied existence as Mind and Soul. And she who has recognized herself

> has entered the blessed state,
> Good beyond being.
> But whoever loves the body
> wanders in the darkness and knows death.[14]

Hermes is surprised by this statement, asking why those who do not recognize their true nature should be consigned to death. Poimandres does not answer directly but rather demands that Hermes himself answer the question. Hermes realizes that it is darkness, which became watery, that forms the body. He also recognizes that "the one who knows himself" enters the Good beyond being because his source, the Father, is Light and Life, and those who know this return to what they ultimately are — the Good itself.

Now we come to the critical explanation of the human condition. Human beings who worship the body do not have Mind in any active form. It "stays away", or remains only as a potential, for those who are greedy, envious, mockers, and worse. Mind withholds itself from those, that is, who identify with the limiting powers of the planets through whom Anthropos descended in becoming embodied as living Nature and human beings. But those who worship Mind, who express spiritual love and sing songs of praise to the Father, with which they are ultimately one, will escape those limiting spheres and experience the immortality which is theirs. Upon death, the limiting conditions of embodiment will return to their own sources, "becoming a part of the cosmos / to be combined again into another being". Here "death" seems to mean transformation, for the Initiation of Hermes here occurs in life. He is being freed from the body even while embodied.

> But the Man Himself that remains
> [after this dissolution of death]
> goes up in sequence through
> the cosmic structure.[15]

The human being who knows himself or herself — though the human being who knows is neither male nor female in reality — ascends through those limiting spheres that correspond to the planets. Passing through the sphere of the Moon, Man relinquishes the energy that gives growth and decay; passing Mercury, he surrenders cunning, and past Venus, he lets go of desire. Moving beyond Jupiter, he renounces arrogance and the will to dominate,[16] and moving beyond Mars, he loses the tendency to precipitous, thoughtless intention and action. Passing Saturn, he surrenders greed and the lust for money, and going beyond the Sun, "he surrenders bad faith, mendacity, and the wish to do harm." In rising beyond the spheres ruled by the seven planets, the human being has escaped *heimarmene,*

fate, the dynamics of those limiting conditions that characterize embodiment in Nature.

> And then stripped naked of all that in him had become actual
> through the sevenfold harmonic of the cosmic structure,
> he takes to zone eight — the Ogdoad — in possession now
> of his own proper power.[17]

The proper power is, of course, the power of Light and Life itself.

In the eighth sphere, which is beyond all spheres of the planets — apparently the sphere of the fixed stars — the human being who knows himself finds himself in the company of other knowers, all of whom sing praises of the Father who is in the ninth, formless sphere, the Ennead. Those in the Ennead have a unique voice, one voice with the Source. Those in the Ogdoad can hear that unique voice and are drawn up into the Ennead, entering the Good, of which no more can be said.

Poimandres concludes:

> This is the goal, this the consummation; for those that have gone *in* now have Gnosis and are the knowers themselves.

Poimandres now charges Hermes, for he has everything, to become a guide of the worthy so that "the generations of the Anthropos / may be saved through you and the god".

Having been so instructed — witnessing the truth of existence — Hermes becomes Hermes Trismegistus, the divine teacher of those human beings who are worthy, that is, who are willing to listen and take to heart what they hear.

What distinguishes those who hear and respond, and those who do not seem to have a conscience, the small voice that warns us not to do something or compels us to act where we see need. Those who ignore these promptings — and some even utterly suppress them — cannot heed the message Hermes Trismegistus has for humanity. Conscience is what opens us up to the possibility of deeper understanding if we nurture it and follow its guidance, for an unsullied consciousness is always ethical in its promptings.

V

The first treatise of the *Corpus Hermeticum* thus gives us the worldview of the Hermetists. In broad terms, it gives us the origin of existence, the origin of humanity, the nature of unfolding existence, the dynamics of the human condition — how it became what it is — and the road to transcendence of limiting conditions and return to full realization of what each human being actually is. The remaining treatises, which we recall were probably gathered together long after they were written, deal with some details but tend to deal with psychology and ethics, and so elaborate what is largely implicit here, but they do not say much about the cosmology itself.

For some time, scholars tended to treat Hermetism as a religion in competition with ancient paganism, Judaism, and, especially, Christianity, but this seems unlikely. The Hermetic thinkers did not form an institution and so developed no tradition of ruling on what was orthodox

and what was heresy, nor did they have a mechanism for declaring certain writing as those of Hermes Trismegistus himself and others of disciples. There was never a bible, a list of authentic writings. Their "organization" was, so to speak, much looser. Individuals and groups traded documents and established practices that likely varied from group to group. Here one might think of the "house churches" of very early Christianity, where people gathered to reflect on the meaning of Jesus's teachings and the letters of St Paul, which existed at least two decades before any gospels appeared.

Perhaps we should think of the traditions of what we call Hinduism — though that label is relatively recent — where a guru gathered disciples and taught them one or another way of thinking of reality, the human being, and the path to liberation from suffering. In both examples, the teachings would be united in spirit by general understanding, but the details would vary from teacher to teacher. No group likely possessed all the treatises found in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and there is a lot of evidence that there were numerous texts now lost to us.[18]

As indicated, very little is said about the Ogdoad and Ennead in the *Poimandres.* When the Coptic Gnostic Library was found in the middle of the last century in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, these texts from the early centuries of Christianity included fragments from Plato and a previously unknown Hermetic work, now called *The Discourse on the Eighth and the Ninth.* Here we find those who have reached the eighth sphere singing — the words are largely strings of vowels — and hearing the sound of the ninth sphere. It appears that the language of these highest spheres, beyond the zodiacal spheres, is a language quite beyond what we call language. Therefore, the representation in seemingly meaningless strings of vowels symbolically reflect in our language what is quite beyond it. Recall that the Word is the son of God in the *Poimandres,* so that our speech is merely the diversity of the Word as it has descended through the spheres into Nature and humanity. Just as we are fragments, so to speak, of Anthropos, so our languages are fragments of the Word.

Is the cosmology of the seven spheres to be taken literally? It is hard to say. We know in early Christianity that some converts took the biblical texts literally and others found them to be allegorical and symbolic. From almost the beginning, some Christians thought that the Bible was a veiled presentation of esoteric truths. The Church Father Origen, for example, in the early third century held that scripture had to be read at three levels — literal, allegorical, and symbolic. Something like this is probably true of the Hermetic cosmology. Charles Stein says:

> . . . belief in astrology is hardly the point since it is one's conditioning — one's cognitive conditioning *as if* astrologically but really by any means — that one we must achieve *release* from.[19]

And, beginning with Poimandres' appearance to Hermes Trismegistus, this release involves Initiation of some kind.

An individual, when prepared, is given the truth of things, and this is liberating. Stein adds:

> Initiation is a process of overcoming one's conditioning, a kind of disrobing of the psychic garments that cover a spirit whose true being is absolutely unconditioned. Since astrology symbolizes one's conditioning as is in fact to be discarded, it is not belief in astrology, really, but only in the conditioning that it symbolizes that requires one's intuitive understanding.[20]

The conditioned consciousness that binds us to the world we ordinarily experience, with all the limiting powers of the seven spheres in us as embodied beings and in Nature as a whole, cannot reach beyond ordinary experience. Though it is only implicit in the opening lines of the *Poimandres,* other treatises indicate that a kind of meditation is involved. That is, one must make a concentrated effort to mentally reach beyond the conditioning — beyond the perceptions and conceptions of daily life — to a deeper or higher level of consciousness. When the senses are everted — turned within — consciousness is open to realization of what lies within and behind apparent reality. This is revelation, and it may seem to come from a higher being, though it is one's own efforts that allow the so-called revelation to occur. And, as Poimandres says, we are ultimately that higher being.

VI

The remaining treatises frequently deal with this preparation and with unfolding revelations in the human being who senses that what they are lies beyond mundane experience. In both the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the alchemical texts, self-purification is an ethical practice that is essential to real awareness and knowledge. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of these ancient ideas is that the effort to realize one's real nature is not just for oneself.

At the end of the discourse we have just considered, Poimandres instructs Hermes to share what he has realized with those who are worthy, and this Hermes — now Hermes Trismegistus — does just that in subsequent treatises. He teaches Asclepius and Tat, his "sons" in a spiritual sense, in some of them. For the sparks of Light and Life are in each human being, and those open to this fact can be awakened to their real nature. Those who are focused entirely on the body, that is, on personal embodiment and individual existence, will dismiss, even mock, such ideas. They can be left alone, for teaching them is a waste of energy and can only desecrate the sacred truth. For Light and Life, Mind and Soul, are sacred, being aspects of the Authentic One.

In teaching others, without invoking the planetary powers that give us arrogance and cunning and all the characteristics that make us believe we are separate and therefore alienated creatures, we open ourselves to even greater revelation. Here, revelation is direct experience, which means directly becoming what we learn. This is nothing more than stripping ourselves of the ultimately false characteristics of conditioned exist-

ence and becoming what we truly are — Light and Life itself, which is none other than the Authentic One, the one reality behind, and so seemingly beyond, what we too easily take ourselves to be. Yet that One pervades both humanity and Nature, and It is already within us and hence is accessible as our real natures, if we make the effort to overcome the conditioning of consciousness.

VII

From these considerations, we can see why the Hermetic spirit has resonated through history, even though Hermetism as a tradition faded, was suppressed at times, and re-emerged in different cultural conditions and in new forms right down into the present. Unlike the historians of ideas, who trace historic links to and divergences from such ideas, there have always been those who have deeply sensed the spiritual meaning of such teachings and their promise for each individual and for humanity as a whole.

Such an intuitive sense connects the individual with others and with Nature, which connection requires the exercise of the most noble ethics — work with Nature and be of spiritual service to all other human beings, even those who cannot notice such service — in pursuit of realization for oneself and all others. Put another way, this is conscience in its most active form.

Unlike some systems that fall under the rather loose label of Gnosticism, there is no spiritual hierarchy here. The macrocosm is ultimately a total unity, and that unity is already in the microcosm — the human being — but in potential form, in that the individual must be awakened to it. But there is a hierarchy in spiritual attainment as individuals first realize the possibility of enlightenment and spiritual unity, and then in the struggle to pass through the seven spheres that separate us from realization of the Divine.

As Hermes Trismegistus shows through his own attainment, this return to the Source and realization of our true nature is possible in life. Here death is a metaphor for what must occur. In the language of St Paul, the old man must die for the new man to be born, meaning that everything we mistakenly take ourselves to be must be stripped away, so that we become the radiance that we potentially are — the spark returns to its Source.

An analogy might help here. Think of the Boston marathon. While a few of the hundreds of participants may be aiming to win, the vast majority seek to fulfill the challenge of crossing the finish line. In the race, some will be faster and ahead of others, but that is not what matters. They are not aiming to win but to complete the task. In this effort, a hierarchy temporarily seems to emerge, because some will be farther along at any point in time. But that is an illusion of time, for all will cross the finish line, and that is what counts.

So with the Hermetic teaching: some will be more spiritually advanced than others at any given time, and they can and are required to teach others, but it is only the goal that ultimately matters, and the goal exists beyond time. Hence all are equal in the end, just as they were

equal in the potential they had at the beginning. In this sense, we all belong to a spiritual democracy, but as in a political democracy, some of us will vote and others will not. Some of us will open ourselves and pursue our divine possibilities while others will ignore them. That alone is what Hermes Trismegistus recognizes when he is charged to teach the worthy, that is, those who are prepared to listen.

In attempting to understand the Hermetic or any other spiritual tradition, we are always confronted with the same question: Are we merely entertaining ourselves with the exotic beliefs of others, or are we worthy to grasp what the tradition teaches?

(*Concluded*)

Endnotes

10. Charles Stein, *The Light of Hermes Trismegistus: New Translations of Seven Essential Hermetic Texts*, Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont, 2022 p. 199. I am using Stein's translation because of its poetic sensitivity. Stein is a poet and classical scholar who attempts to provide an English rendition that captures both the content and the spirit of the text.

11. Poimandres is often taken to mean "Shepherd of Men", from *poimen*, taken to mean "shepherd" and *andres*, plural of *aner*, "man". Stein refers to the great classicist philosopher Peter Kingsley who doubts this interpretation. He believes that it refers to the *gnosis* of Re, the early Egyptian Sun god. *Gnosis* is related to Thoth, so, if Kingsley is right, Poimandres would be an aspect of the solar principle, which is the intelligence of the cosmos. Hermes associates himself with Thoth in the Hermetic writings. (See Stein, p. 213.)

12. Stein, p. 200. The following quotations are from pages 200 and following.

13. Wouter J. Hanegraaf, *Hermetic Spirituality and the Historical Imagination: Altered States of Knowledge in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2022, p. 84.

14. Stein, p. 207.

15. Stein, p. 210.

16. The will to dominate probably includes the sense of being an independent person in charge of himself or herself, an attitude that obscures our fundamental interdependence on one another and on all of Nature.

17. Stein, pp. 210–211.

18. Virtually all known fragments have been gathered in M. David Litwa, *Hermetica II: The Excerpts of Stobaeus, Papyrus Fragments, and Ancient Testimonies in an English Translation with Notes and Introductions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018. It is often difficult to tell when a testimony is quoting a text or merely paraphrasing it.

19. Stein, p. 216.

20. Ibid.

Forth then, my soul sped, throughout the Cosmos, seeing ever, new things and old; learning that man is truly space-born, a Sun of the Sun, a child of the stars.

Hermes Trismegistus, *The Emerald Tablet of Hermes*

Thinking the Unthinkable: A Musing — II

GANESH KUMAR

ONE of the common reasons given for not realizing the Oneness of Life is that we do not have a sustained longing to realize the One Life, though we may be listening to so many lectures, reading so many books about One Life. Of course, a very strong and unrelenting longing or desire is one of the most important requirements which we cannot refute at all. We talk about Oneness and yet when we open our eyes and observe, there is no Oneness in the world. We are all different in every aspect and respect, different bodies, personalities, capabilities, each of us separated in all possible ways, in time and space, which reveals only the differences and not the Oneness.

Some say that it is the One that has become the many or appears as many and the enlightened beings are able to see the oneness clearly without any effort and at all times. Does it mean that the enlightened ones are in *samadhi* all the time to realize *brahman*? Though Buddha is said to have practiced meditation to attain enlightenment, after attaining enlightenment there is no mention of him spending time on meditation during his continuous travelling and preaching while being in the state of an awakened person. We also do not read about Jesus practicing meditation during his lifetime except that he went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God, before appointing his twelve apostles. Is it that the enlightened beings see a different world from what we see or do they also see the same world like us with all its differences? We have read or heard the famous quote: "Before enlightenment, cut wood, carry water, and after enlightenment, cut wood, carry water". That perhaps implies that the enlightened do not see a different world, yet how do they claim that it is One Life or One Consciousness? Is it some kind of belief or faith or *mantra* or delusion? Or is it an actual first-hand experience for them? If so, why can each one of us not realize the same in this world of multiplicity?

It is said that one of the great Western philosophers of recent times, Wittgenstein, once remarked to his friend, "Why do people always say, it was natural for man to

Mr Ganesh Kumar is a member of HPB Lodge of the Theosophical Society in Auckland, New Zealand. He joined the TS in Zambia in 1980.

assume that the sun went around the Earth rather than the earth was rotating", and his friend replied: "Well, obviously because it just looks like that." And Wittgenstein observed: "If it were the other way around, what would it look like?"

Assuming that we all are separate individual beings of flesh and blood and experiencing other people and the vast physical world out there as separate entities, the world looks like what we are experiencing now, a world of multiplicity. And if there is One Reality, that is, if we are all not individual beings, would it be like this or different? Then how do we know which one is true?

For this purpose, let us consider the dream world, which we all have experienced. In our dream state, we meet with different people, converse with others, activities take place — good or bad or horrific — and we have a sense of living in a world of its own, in which we have our own body as well. But, we do not realize that we are in a dream world. We feel we are in a real, physical, waking world and we do not feel as if we are a disembodied spirit in the dream world. When we wake up it is all very odd, but while we were in the dream state, it was very real.

We also notice that in our dream state we have individual bodies, others are there with their own separate bodies, along with other things and activities, separated by time and space just like in the waking world. Once we wake up, we realize all the different things that were there in our dream state were all nothing but one thing, our dreaming mind and nothing else! At the present level of developed technology, we could have similar vivid experiences with virtual reality! A computer program giving us varied experiences without anything existing in reality. The ones and zeros in the computer application program giving us varied real-time, first-person experiences. A single computer program appears as diversity and we become part of that diversity, similar to what happens in our dreaming state. To understand this let us step into the dreaming mind and see how it happens.

Oneness, here our mind, becoming or appearing as diversity, and we becoming part of that diversity, is a dream. We can say that it is our mind appearing in many different ways during our dream state, but in the waking state, there is real difference in the physical world outside us. How can we understand it?

For us to understand our dreams, we need to step back from our dreaming personality in the dream, into the dreaming mind. When we analyse a dream from the perspective of the dreaming mind, we realize that it is we who are dreaming. Similarly, during our waking state, we need to shift our attention from the point that we are experiencing the world to the understanding that it is the consciousness which is experiencing the world through our body or bodies. When we analyse how we see this physical world, this open secret will become obvious and there are so many methods to achieve this paradigm shift, like various yoga practices.

Let us examine how we see this world. Our eyes see things happening in the

world, our ears hear all kinds of sounds, and the same with all the other sensory inputs. All these inputs — our thoughts, emotions, feelings, memory, sense of "I-ness" and all the sensory data — are dumped in our mind, which is not physical. We are aware that all these inputs reach the mind. And we are aware of our mind as well. What is "IT" that is aware of the mind? IT is the Ultimate Seer, the Ultimate Reality, *brahman*. The Ultimate Seer is never the Seen. We cannot objectify IT! Without the Seer, nothing can be seen. The Seer cannot be seen, just as we cannot see our eyes that see everything.

With our eyes open, we see the world with its multiplicity and when we close our eyes, the world disappears, but we are there. Similarly, when we sit in meditation, we experience our feelings, thoughts, and so on. If during our meditation, if there were no feelings or thoughts, we are still there. We, as consciousness, to which the perceptions appear or do not appear are always there. We are the consciousness present all the time, irrespective of whether the thoughts appear or do not appear; when we do not hear or see or smell or taste or touch, we are still there; when there is no memory at all, even then we are there. This basic "I", does not have a form or shape, a gender or a caste or religion or age or time or space; it is not something that can be heard or seen or smelt or tasted or felt.

This "I" is always present, everything else comes and goes, things happen and change in the world. My body, feelings, thoughts, the mind, memory, everything changes, but I am always there. All these changes in the waking state appear to "me", the dreams appear to "me", the darkness of the deep sleep also appears to "me" — to the basic "me". All the changes are in the body, in the mind, in the world, and they appear *to* me, but these changes are not *in* "me". We are the Ultimate Seer, we are *brahman*, which thus is an immutable or changeless principle. The statement by HPB of "An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless and Immutable Principle" may perhaps be termed as *brahman*.

If "I" am not there, the entire world, everything disappears, goes into nothingness, nothing exists. We exist, all of them exist; we shine, the world shines, by our light the world is lit up. That is the divine spark shining that is hidden in the secret cave of the heart of every being.

This consciousness is also called the light of lights in Vedanta (*jyotir* in Sanskrit, as in the statement *tamaso ma jyotir gamaya*, meaning "Lead me from darkness [ignorance] to light [awareness]" in our gem, "At the Feet of the Master"). It is the inner light that illuminates everything, the "hidden light" that enables the "shining" of the manifested world "in every creature". We might also interpret the hidden light as the shining light which has been veiled, or covered, that it appears as hidden. If we analyse the property of "light" it would become very clear to us as to why consciousness — the light of lights or the veiled light — *is not heard or seen or smelt.*

The real nature of the self is identified as light of lights — not the light of the

material world or the light of the sun. One of the reasons for consciousness being compared to light is due to the fact that objects in a dark room are not visible, but once we switch on the light, they are revealed. Similarly, consciousness reveals things to us, reveals first person experiences of life. First person experience = Consciousness + Objects. All our sense experience is consciousness plus the sense objects, including even our sense of the self. The self is identified as a spark of *brahman*, *jyotir*, that Light of Lights, the essence of LIFE, and LIGHT of the Universe, *that* which can have no subject of cognition as stated by HPB in the "Proem" of *The Secret Doctrine*, as we further explore.

We know that the outer space in our solar system is dark, in spite of the light from the sun radiating all the time. The reason is that light is visible only when obstructed by an object, else it cannot be seen. Light behaves like an energy wave when it is not obstructed and behaves like a particle (photon) when it meets a material object. Even modern science is unable to comprehend this property of light behaving like a wave as well as a particle. It is like consciousness or life energy, though present everywhere and at all times, it reveals itself only when encountered by matter. Since it is one energy present everywhere, any disturbance at any one place is felt at all other places as proven by the quantum entanglement phenomenon (a change in the spin of a photon on Earth effects a corresponding change in a photon many light years away). Could the hidden variable suggested by Einstein and his fellow scientists as regards the quantum entanglement be the invisible Oneness embracing all in Love?

Consciousness, or life, or *brahman* is everywhere at all times, which enlivens and shines through all matter in the manifested kosmos. Consciousness is neither affected nor affects the matter, but illuminates the mind which in turn illuminates all our senses, thoughts, emotions, and so on. It is like the operating system of a computer without which the applications cannot function, but is neither affected by the application nor affects the application. We may now perhaps partially understand the statement of HPB in *The Secret Doctrine*: "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." Though we may think and speak about it, it is beyond even the greatest scientist's conception!

Now, what is the difference between the enlightened ones and us in realizing the Oneness of Life in the waking state? One who has experienced and realized the One Life has nothing to claim as personal or individual, that is, for the enlightened, the personality or the "I-ness", which veils the Divine Spark within the heart cavity does not exist at all.

For the purpose of realizing Oneness

in the waking state, we need to have a paradigm shift — instead of us thinking that we are a body experiencing consciousness, we have to comprehend that we are consciousness experiencing a body that we have constructed with the available material in the present world. This paradigm shift in perspective is most essential for us to realize Oneness and it can be done right here and now and at all times. Theosophy asserts that human beings instead of being bodies with a soul, are souls (monads) using bodies.

The sun rising in the East is a fact, but it is not the truth.

The sky seen as blue is a fact, but it is not the truth.

The stars twinkling is a fact, but is not the truth.

Reincarnation is a fact, but it is not the truth.

Multiplicity is a fact, but it is not the truth.

Oneness is the Truth, or the Ultimate Reality, or *brahman*, which is higher than any religion or philosophy or science. By realizing the Oneness of life, realizing our true self, we will attain the highest in our waking conscious state as stated earlier. If these musings have raised more questions for further seeking, the purpose of this article might be considered as being fulfilled.

(*Concluded*)

Human beings are a part of the whole called by us *universe*, a part limited in time and space. They experience themselves, their thoughts, and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical *delusion* of their *consciousness*. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal *desires* and to *affection* for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to *free* ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of Nature in its *beauty*.

Albert Einstein

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

WHAT are the *real* necessities of life? The answer to this question depends entirely on what we imagine to be necessary. Railways, steamers, and so on, are now a necessity to us, and yet millions of people have lived long and happily, knowing nothing about them. To one man a dozen palaces may appear to be an indispensable necessity, to another a carriage, another a pipe, and so on. But *all such necessities are only such as man himself has created*. They make the state in which man now is agreeable to him, and *tempt him to remain* in the state, and to desire nothing higher. They may even hinder his development instead of advancing it. Everything material must cease to become a necessity if we would really advance spiritually. It is the *craving* and the *wasting of thought* for the augmentation of the pleasures of the lower life which prevent men entering the higher one.[1]

H. P. Blavatsky
Practical Occultism

[1] *Magic*, Hartmann, p. 61.

Theosophical Work around the World

USA — Partners in Theosophy Intensive, Krotona School of Theosophy
The "Partners in Theosophy Intensive Program" began in 2009 as a cooperative endeavor of the Krotona Institute of Theosophy and the Kern Foundation. The initiative seeks to strengthen the Theosophical Society in America (TSA) and to further theosophical outreach by encouraging and inspiring serious TS members who have the Society's interest and growth at heart, and who are willing to work for it at local, regional, and national levels.

During its first 14 years, "Partners" was based on the design and completion of a theosophical service project. Members partnered with mentors experienced in their field of interest, such as in the publication of a written work, public presentations of theosophical concepts, and organization of theosophical activities. Past participants in "Partners" include members who have gone on to publish articles in *Quest*, our national magazine, serve on our national and federation boards of directors, and to present theosophical workshops and lectures.

The program was restructured in 2023, to offer member education for service and leadership in the Society. This training takes place through a 3-year online course covering "Learning Theosophy", "Sharing Theosophy", and "Doing Theosophical Work". This year we had a group of 11 participants and 5 faculty members from 24 to 31 January, concentrating on the theme "Sharing Theosophy: Preparation and Practice".

The training program consists of a 7-unit, self-study course hosted by TSA's Online School of Theosophy. <study.theosophical.org>. The course provides prerecorded lectures by mentors as well as videos, audios, and writings. Mentors also guide a monthly, live, online meeting. The program also offers participation in an annual one-week intensive meeting at the Krotona Institute, where knowledge acquired during the year is put into practice. Collaboration in various tasks now also contributes to the ongoing development of the Online School of Theosophy. For additional information please contact Pablo Sender, Director, at <psender@theosophical.org>.

Argentina — 58th Summer School, San Rafael Center

The Argentinian Section held their Summer School at the San Rafael Center from 26 January to 1 February 2025. Their National President, Leandro Cesano, and Ernesto García, Director of the Center, were in charge of the Inaugural Session. In the morning, coordinators María Belén Sender, PhD, and Engineer Mauro Cesano gave a presentation on the theme, "To Be or Not to Be: The Beginning of a New Stage", which led the participants to

Faculty, staff, and participants of the annual Partners in Theosophy Intensive Program, with the theme "Sharing Theosophy: Preparation and Practice". Faculty members: Doug Keene, National President of the TS in America (back row, the tallest); Martin Leiderman, international lecturer (with sunglasses); Pablo Sender, Director of the Partners Program and international lecturer (in front of Doug); Susanne Hoepfl-Wellenhofer (to Pablo's left); and Maria Parisen (in front of Susanne). Annie Johnston, School Registrar is to Maria's right. Barbara Hebert, faculty member, is absent. Photo by: Ananya Sriram, Director of Krotona School.



Summer School participants of the TS in Argentina at the Theosophical Center in San Rafael (TCSR)
Seated on the lawn, from right to left, are: Evangelina Villalobos, Secretary, TS in Argentina
National Council and Mauro Cesano, Director, Theosophical Publishing House (TPH)
in Spanish. Behind him is Belén Sender, Administrator and Proofreader, TPH (w/ necklace).
Next to last row, Erika Chavez, Director, Theosophical Order of Service (TOS) in Argentina (white T-shirt).
Last row, from right to left: Ernesto García, Director, TCSR; María Rosa Martínez, Board of Directors, TCSR;
Andrea Nuñez, Treasurer, TCSR; Adrián Pizarro, Additional Member, Inter-American Theosophical Federation (IATF)
for South-America (w/ blue shirt); and Leandro Cesano (next to last), National President, TS in Argentina.
Photographer: Luis G. Cruz, Member, TS in Argentina.

choose a place among the trees, where they reflected on the material selected for that day. In the afternoon small groups discussed the theme, ending with a group plenary meeting.

During the whole week the theme, "Reflections about *Light on the Path*", was developed, except for one day during which there was an activity presented by three members of the Theosophical Society (TS), invited by the coordinators. That day in the morning the TS members: Lic. Andrea Núñez and Prof. S. Danhe talked about "The Public Work of the Theosophical Society", based on the ideas proposed by Pablo Sender (*The Theosophist*, Sept. 2015), in which all participated. In the afternoon another TS member, G. García, talked about "Exact Sciences — Help or Obstacle for Treading the Path?"

The 45 people who participated in this Summer School came from all over Argentina, both TS members and sympathizers. Mauro and Belén complemented each other in a harmonious and enriching way with not just the material and the commentaries, but also with the thoughts expressed that touched all those present, guiding them to a meditative inquiry and reflection. ✧

As the wheel of life moves on, old Karma is exhausted and again fresh Karma is accumulated . . . Karma is twofold, hidden and manifest, it is those who are, their action. True that each action is a cause from which evolves the countless ramifications of effect in time and space . . . To those who are worldly Karma is a stern Nemesis, to those who are spiritual Karma unfolds itself in harmony with their highest aspirations.

William Quan Judge
(April 13, 1851 – March 21,1896)
One of the principal Founders of the Theosophical Society in 1875,
along with Helena P. Blavatsky, Henry S. Olcott, and others.

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Date	Section	General Secretary, etc.	Address	Magazine	Email address
1947	Africa, East and Central	Mr Narendra M. Shah	PO Box 14525. 00800, Westlands, Nairobi, Kenya	*The Theosophical Light*	**narendrashahi999@gmail.com**
1909	Africa, South	Mr Desmond Chapman	31 Streatley Ave, cnr.Lothbury Ave, Auckland Park, Johannesburg PO Box 91523	*The South African Theosophist*	**tsinsa.gensec@telkomsa.net**
1956	Africa, West	Dr K. A. Tutu	PO Box 720, Accra, Ghana	*The West African Theosophist*	**katutu@gmail.com**
1929	America, Central *	Mrs Beatriz Elisena Martinez Pozas	Colonia Universitaria Norte, Calle Julio Mejia, Poligono, E-7 Mejicanos, San Salvador, El Salvador		**bemapo03@hotmail.com**
1920	Argentina	Mr Leandro Cesano	Rivadavia 533, San Lorenzo, Provincia de Santa Fe	*Teosofía en Argentina*	**secretaria@sociedadteosofica.org.ar**
1990	Asia, East and Southeast †	Mr Chong Sanne	24 New Industrial Road, #03-09 INSPACE Singapore 536210	*Newsletter*	**sanne@theosophyasia.net**
1895	Australia	Mr Stephen Mcdonald	Level 2, 162 Goulburn St., Surry Hills, NSW 2010	*Theosophy in Australia*	**pres@theosophicalsociety.org.au**
1912	Austria *	Mrs Karin Waltl	Berghäusl 28, 4160 Aigen-Schlägl	*Theosofie Adyar*	**info@theosophischegesellschaft.com**
2013	Bangladesh †	Mr Subrata Chowdhury	Urban Gardenia, Flat 5B, House 45A, Road 3A, Dhanmondi, R/A Dhaka 1209		**house_advocates@yahoo.com**
1911	Belgium	Mrs Sabine Van Osta	Place des Gueux 8, B1000 Brussels	*Le Lotus Bleu*	**info@ts-belgium.be**
1965	Bolivia †	Mrs Maria Luisa Cabrera	c/Valdivieso Nº 541 Cochabamba	*Revista Teosófica Boliviana*	**mlcp2@hotmail.com**
1920	Brazil	Mr Otávio Marhesini	SGAS Quadra 603, N. 20, CEP 70200-630 Brasilia (DF)	*Sophia*	**secretaria@sociedadeteosofica.org.br**
1924	Canada *	Mr Robert Béland	1120 Chemin de la Rivière, Val David, . P.Q., Canada J0T 2N0	The Light Bearer	**president.atcta@gmail.com**
1920	Chile *	Mr Eric Alejandro Muñoz Concha	1761, 8370055 Santiago, Región Metropolitana	*Revista Teosófica Chilena*	**sociedadteosoficachile@gmail.com**
1937	Colombia †	Mr Armando Motta Zapata	Carrera 6, # 56-40, Bogotá (Chapinero Alto)	*Selección Teosófica*	**stsgamoz@gmail.com**
1997	Costa Rica †	Mrs Cecilia Calderón	San José, 1350, Costa Rica		**cmaycalderon@gmail.com**
2007	Croatia ▲	Mr Darko Majstorovic	Siget 11, 10000 Zagreb, Republic of Croatia	*Teozofija*	**teozofija@teozofija.net**
1905	Cuba	Mr Fidel Carrazana Macías	Apartado de Correos 6365, La Habana 10600		**teosocuba.1@gmail.com**
1987	Dominican Rep. †	Mrs Magaly Polanco	Calle Santa Agueda 1652 Les Chalet Col San Juan Puerto Rico Apartado 23 00926		**polancomagaly@yahoo.com**
1888	England & Wales	Mrs Jenny Baker	50 Gloucester Place, London W1U 8EA	*Esoterica*	**president@theosoc.org.uk**
1907	Finland	Mr Janne Vuononvirta	Teosofinen Seura, Vironkatu 7 C 2, Fin 00170, Helsinki	*Teosofi*	**ylisihteeri@teosofinenseura.fi**
1899	France	Miss Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu	4 Square Rapp, 75007 Paris	*Le Lotus Bleu*	**tsfr.office@gmail.com**
1902	Germany	Mrs Manuela Kaulich	Hauptstr. 39, 93138 Lappersdorf	*Adyar*	**theosophie-adyar@gmx.de**
1928	Greece	Mrs Erica Georgiades	25 Voukourestiou St., 106 71-Athens	*Ilisos*	**info@theosophicalsociety.gr**
1907	Hungary †	Mrs Adrienne Nagyiday	H-1085 Budapest, Horánszky u. 27. fsz. 10	*Teozófia*	**info@teozofia.hu**
1921	Iceland	Mr Haraldur Erlendsson	PO Box 1257 Ingolfsstraeti 22, 121 Reykjavik	*Gangleri*	**iceland.ts@gmail.com**
1891	India	Mr Pradeep H. Gohil	The Theosophical Society, Kamachha, Varanasi 221 010	*The Indian Theosophist*	**theosophyvns@gmail.com**
1912	Indonesia	Mr Widyatmoko Nekara	Dsn. Parelegi no. 21, RT 02/ RW 09, Desa Purwodadi, Kecamatan Purwodadi, 67163 Pasuruan, Jawa Timur	*Theosofi*	**indonesia.teosofi@gmail.com**
1919	Ireland *	Mrs Marie Harkness	97 Mountsandel Road, Coleraine, UK BT52 1TA		**marieharkness@yahoo.co.uk**

1954	Israel ▲	... Mr Abraham Oron	... PO Box 9114, Ramat-Gan, Israel 5219002	... *Or*	**oravr@netvision.net.il**
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1897	Netherlands, The	... Mr Ingmar de Boer	... Tolsraat 154, 1074 VM Amsterdam	... *Theosofia*	**info@theosofie.nl**
1896	New Zealand	... Mr Richard Sell	... 18, Belvedere Street, Epsom, Auckland 1051	... *TheoSophia*	**np@theosophy.org.nz**
1913	Norway *	... Mr Audun Solberg	... Knapstadveien 8, 1823 Knapstad		**organisasjonssekretaer@teosofisksamfunn.no**
1935	Orlando ▲	... Mr Carl Metzger	... 1606 New York Ave. Orlando, Florida, 32803-1838, USA		**TheosophicalSocietyCF@gmail.com**
1948	Pakistan †	... Mushtaq Ali Jindani	... Jamshed Memorial Hall, M. A. Jinnah Road, opp. Radio Pakistan, Karachi 74200	... *The Karachi Theosophist*	**mushtaqjindani@gmail.com**
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1925	Puerto Rico †	... Mrs Magaly Polanco	... Apartado 36-1766 Correo General. San Juan, Puerto Rico 00936-1766	... *Heraldo Teosófico*	**polancomagaly@yahoo.com**
2012	Qatar ▲	... Mr Lijo Joseph	. . . Crewing Officer, Teyseer Services Company P.O. Box 2431, Doha		**qatarblavatskylodge@yahoo.com**
2013	Russia *	... Mr Svyatoslav Lipsky	... Apartment 131, House 1135, Zelenograd, Moscow	. . . *Teosoficheskoe Obozrenie* (The Theosophical Review)	**secretary@ts-russia.org**
1910	Scotland *	... Mr Gary Kidgell	... Christine Gear 32 Newmains Road Kirkliston Edinburgh EH29 9AL	... *Circles*	**garykidgell@hotmail.com**
1992	Slovenia *	... Mrs Irena Primc	... Kajuhova UI 9, 3000 Celje	... *Teozofska Misel*	**irenaprimc3@gmail.com**
1921	Spain	... Mrs Angels Torra Buron	... Av. Vall d'or, 85-87 08197 - Valldoreix(Spain)	... *Sophia*	**presidencia@sociedadteosofica.es**
1926	Sri Lanka †	... Mr D. A. L. Wanigasekera	... 146 Anderson Rd, Dehiwala,	... *The Sri Lanka Theosophist*	**dumindawanigasekera@gmail.com**
1895	Sweden	... Mrs Birgitta Skarbo	... Karla Plan 5 B, 11460 Stockholm	... *Tidlös Visdom*	**teosofiska.samfundet.adyar@telia.com**
1910	Switzerland †	... Mr Andrea Biasca-Caroni	... Via Collina 19, 6612 Ascona, CH-6612	... *The Lotus*	**info@teosofia.ch**
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1886	USA	... Mr Douglas Keene	... PO Box 270, Wheaton, IL 60187-0270	... *The Quest*	**info@theosophical.org**
1925	Uruguay *	... Mr Ramón García	... Javier Barrios Amorín 1085, Casilla de Correos 1553, Montevideo		**st.uruguay@gmail.com**
1925	Venezuela †	... Mrs Nelly Nouel	... Romualda a Socarrás, Edif. de Oro Piso 12, Apto. 122 – Caracas		**nellynouel5@gmail.com**

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Indo-Pacific Theosophical Federation: *President:* Mr Gerard Brennan, 42 Melbourne Street, Concord, 2137, Sydney, Australia. **president@ipf-ts.org**
Pan-African Theosophical Federation: *Chairman:* Mr Navin B. Shah, P.O. Box 14804.00800, Nairobi, Kenya. **<navinmeera@hotmail.com>.** Phone no.: +254 733-935525.

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