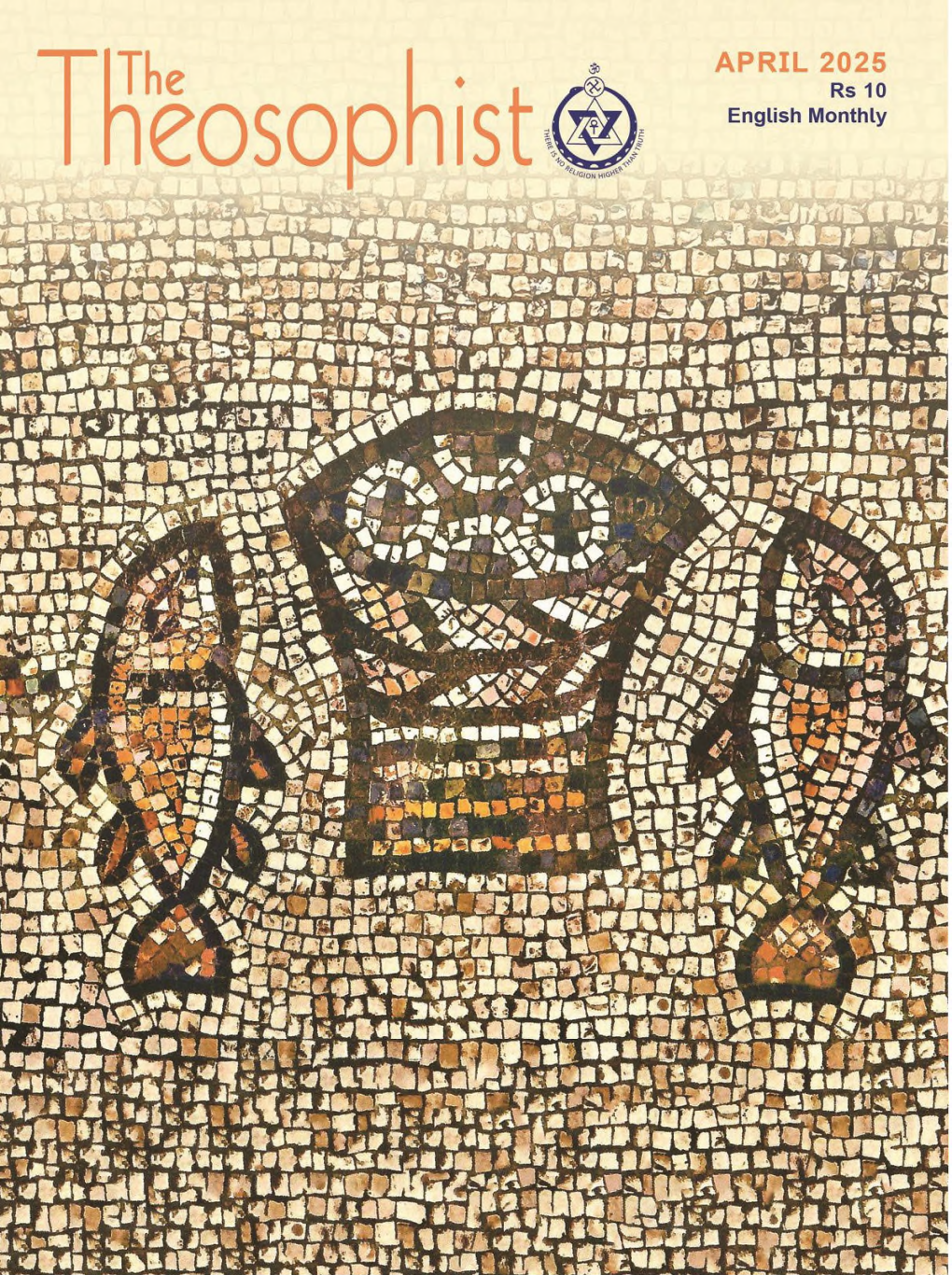
The Theosophist

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Freedom of Thought

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

Freedom of the Society

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

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

THE THEOSOPHIST

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Cover: A 6th century mosaic from Tabcha (Ein Sheva), a place in the northwest section of the Sea of Galilee which, is blessed by seven springs. The mosaic commemorates Jesus' miraculous multiplying of 5 loaves of bread in a basket and 2 fishes to feed a multitude of 5,000 as told in the Gospels.

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THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

Founded 17 November 1875

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

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

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

Meditation

TIM BOYD

MEDITATION is a foundational element of esoteric teachings for anyone consciously engaged in the spiritual life. I feel fortunate to have stumbled into it untrained. Fortunate because I was not carrying the baggage of ideas of others to shape my experience. My introduction to meditation took place over an extended experience of weeks. Only later did I come to know it as meditation. Much like some of the great teachers have tried to communicate, the actual state of meditation is *not* dependent on posture, whether the body is moving or still, the place, or the level of activity. Certainly at an early stage all of these conditions have their effect, but they seem to be unrelated to the actual experience. If Krishna's advice to Arjuna is true, then even in the midst of a war, while fighting for one's life, the meditative state is possible.

In my early acquaintance with it I found it was more easily experienced sitting or walking, but it could also be maintained riding a bus, or having a conversation. I tried to test it, and see if I could maintain the state while playing basketball. Engaged in such a high level of physical exertion, I could not do it. Although I am certain that there are those for whom the still mind remains unaffected in all conditions, at that time I was not one of them.

One of the things about the experience of meditation that becomes clear is that, however we describe it, it involves stilling the waves of thought; quieting our involvement in generating and interacting with thoughts.

During his life Jiddu Krishnamurti (JK) made many comments about what meditation is and is not. One of the things he said was that to understand the immeasurable requires an extraordinary mind, quiet, and still. So, the idea of meditation as a movement into the immeasurable, which then leads to understanding, requires stillness and quiet. He also spoke very strongly against meditation as a method or practice. He was opposed to the idea that regimentation and conditioning are effective in the process of freeing the mind. To him practicing meditation makes us mechanical. It is not engaged in out of freedom, but out of discipline.

JK was an absolutist, in the sense that he was uncompromising in speaking from the level of consciousness that he inhabited. From that perspective, practice may not be necessary, but still it is not irrelevant. Though practice itself is not the state of meditation or being free, it does allow for those moments of insight that are freeing. Practicing music does not make us a musician. Whether it is music

or meditation, it is only at the point where we transition from mere practice and fully commit that we experience its depths.

Advice on meditation tends to fall into two categories: (1) a positive, affirmative approach, and (2) a negative approach. In the "Diagram of Meditation" attributed to H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) she presents these two poles of meditative practice and combines them into one. In that diagram she outlines the two categories as Acquisitions — the positive activity of acquiring states of consciousness, and Deprivations — the negation of limiting conditions of consciousness. The fulfillment of the Acquisitions results in a consciousness that acknowledges "I am all space and time". There are no confinements or limitations.

The Deprivations involve the refusal to think of the reality of meetings and separations, possessions, personality, the distinction of friend and foe, and sensation.. The fulfillment of this stage results in the realization that "I am without attributes" — the total negation of everything that we think of as a self. "No thing", nothing remains to define one's identity.

In Buddhism there is focus on two meditative activities. One activates the mind. The other quiets the mind. There is "analytical" meditation in which we engage the mind in the analysis of high ideas about the divine, the nature of ourselves, or the path that leads toward freedom. This is the activity of *jñana* yoga, or yoga of knowledge. As the mind becomes active in this process, moments occur when we reach the pinnacle of a line of thought and can go no further. The mind has led us to a height where the analytical function no longer applies. It is at this point that concentrated meditation becomes our tool.

As such experiences arise during this analytical phase, something like a void appears. In those moments the mind becomes quiet, because at that point we have done all that we can do. There is nothing more our thinking can add. It has led us to a space that can only be filled by a sustained absence of activity — concentrated meditation.

Oftentimes the *bhakti* practice of yoga has been described as self-emptying through devotion, love, and regard for the divine. As everything is poured out in love and devotion toward the divine, it empties one of one's self. In that space, what Krishnamurti described as the immeasurable finds root in our consciousness. In the Bible there is a description of a way to meditate or pray. It advises that when you meditate "go into your private (or inner) room, close the door and turn to your Father who is in secret". We enter the inner room of our consciousness, described in some traditions as the "cave of the heart", and turn to the Father, what Krishna describes as the "Inner ruler immortal". H. P. Blavatsky describes the Father in this way, "The 'Father in heaven', that deific essence of which we are cognizant within us, in our heart and spiritual consciousness". In the "private room" of our consciousness, with the door of the senses closed to the outer world we link ourselves with the "Father".

There was an advice given by HPB. In response to the question, "What is meditation?" She responded that meditation is "The inexpressible longing of the inner man for the infinite". As an advice it is not something on which one could build a practice, but it is something spoken by someone who had the profound experience of what meditation is. It is an indication of both what meditation is and is not. The longing that fuels the process cannot be expressed in any way. The inexpressible longing is also directed toward another negation, the Infinite.

Longing is the deep desire to remove a sense of separation. We cannot long for something we know nothing about. In stories like the Ramayana and Mahabharata we find symbolic stories of kings in exile. Great beings who have ruled over kingdoms, who now, find themselves separated from their home, and engaged in the journey and struggle to return. The Inner Self longs for the return to its original state of wholeness, and all that might mean. Meditation is one of the roads homeward.

In Sufi poetry they speak about the separation between the lover and the beloved and the intensely felt *need* to reunite. The inexpressible longing of the inner Self, does not refer to the desires of the personality. It is not that we want better times and nicer things. We all know what longing is, but this is the longing of the inner Self. The core consciousness, the higher Self of each of us finds itself separated from its highest, truest expression, in a state of confinement within all the limitations the personality places on its expression. It longs for the return of its inherent kingship, free from confinement and limitation. Even though in our normal day-to-day living, it tends to be covered over, subdued, even denied. This is the longing that moves us toward a spiritual path, that moves us to try to experience states of quiet. It moves us to create conditions where the mind no longer disrupts our connection with our source. ✧

Clasp Me with heart and mind. So shalt thou dwell
Surely with Me on high. But if thy thought
Droops from such height; if thou be'st weak to set
Body and soul upon Me constantly,
Despair not. Give Me lower service. Seek
To reach Me, worshipping with steadfast will.

Shri Krishna

The Story of Giordano Bruno — III

ANNIE BESANT

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

DOWNWARDS and downwards, ever, until Bruno reached the refuge of St. Pierre, and there, wearied out, he craved a night's lodging, and slept his first really fearless sleep since he had quitted his monastery cell.

Far into the next day he slept, and at length awoke refreshed and vigorous, and started once more, still downwards, though the path was now less steep and rugged than it had ever been before. And thus on till the vale was reached, and on until he passed by the Tête Noire to Chamounix, and saw the mighty stainless head of Mount Blanc rise pure and dazzling against the clear blue sky. And onwards still, through a land now less stern and grand, but not less beautiful, until the broad waters of Lake Leman smiled at the weary traveller, and until at length he reached the fair city stretched beside the Lake, and the walls of Geneva rose before him, the refuge to which his thoughts had pointed since he swung himself downwards from the window of his cell.

Fearlessly, with head erect, he passed into the famous city, the city of Calvin and of Beza. Calvin indeed was dead — he had died in 1564, and it was now 1580 — but Calvin's spirit still dominated the city in which he had ruled supreme. At first Bruno found welcome from the Genevan Reformers, for they regarded him only as rebel to Rome, and dreamed not that the soaring spirit of this young man, now but thirty years of age, had broken not the fetters of Rome, but the fetters of Christianity, and that Calvin's narrow theology could no more hold him captive than could the statelier creed of Rome. For awhile, however, brief rest was his, until that warrior spirit of his, ever longing for battle with its peers, flung itself into hot controversy over the old quarrel with the philosophy of Aristotle. Just as Aristotle had become the pillar of orthodoxy in the Catholic church, so

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Dr Annie Besant (1 Oct. 1847–20 Sep. 1933) was international President of the Theosophical Society, Adyar (1907–1933). Reprinted from *The Theosophist*, Dec. 1909, p. 399 & Jan. 1910, p. 507.

did Aristotle also rule unchallenged in Geneva. In fact, the Genevan citizens had actually passed a decree "for once and for ever, that neither in logic nor in any other branch of learning, shall any one among them go astray from the opinions of Aristotle".

Such iron mould of thought did in no way suit Bruno's enquiring and ever-progressing genius and he soon found that, as before in the monastery, evil looks were cast on him, and hard words were his lot. To his surprise at first, and then to his bitter indignation, he found that the Protestants of Geneva claimed the right to dissent from Rome, and the right to persecute those who dissented from themselves, and at last, being told that the rulers of the city had begun to recall the fate of Servetus, burned in that very city by Calvin, but some twenty-seven years before, Bruno deemed that he would do wisely to take to flight once more, lest the prison he had fled from in Italy should reappear to incarcerate him in Switzerland.

For the second time Giordano was a fugitive. For the second time as night spread her precious darkness over the Earth, Giordano stood beside an open window, watching for chance of escape. A friend had given him shelter whose house was on one of the city walls ; and this night, when all was still, and the far-off tramp of the sentinel seemed only to mark the silence of the dusk, Bruno slipped down a rope from the window and safely reached the ground, and waving silent farewell to the faithful friend above, he turned his footsteps towards France, outcast and fugitive once more, and slowly made his way to Lyons.

Of his stay in Lyons we know nothing. At that time Lyons was a centre of printing, and from the presses of Lyons poured out books which were spread over Europe, carrying light. Did Bruno long to see with his own eyes those printing presses which then seemed so wonderful? We cannot say. But we know that his stay in Lyons was very brief, and that he passed on to Toulouse.

But Toulouse was no safe resting place for Bruno. Toulouse boasted itself the bulwark of the faith against the reforming tide, and soon threats resounded from every side against the heretic visitor, who, coming from the city of Calvin, was a worse heretic than Calvin himself. Thirty-six years later a fellow-countryman of Bruno, Vanini the Neapolitan, was burned for heresy in that same city of Toulouse, and Bruno was wise in quitting it and seeking rest in more liberal Paris.

An exciting journey was that of our young Italian through France — "a long and vast tumult", he himself styled it. Papist and Huguenot were fighting against each other with equal religious ferocity, equal religious fanaticism. "The Papists razed the Churches of the Hugnenots; the Huguenots pillaged the sacristies of the Papists; blood flowed in town and country; fanaticism stifled family affection and civic friendship; the priests excommunicated with ringing bell and extinguished torch; the parsons anathematised pharisaism and idolatry." Through this

Babel of wavering creeds the heretic went on his way, noting how religion desolated a Christian land, and how Catholic and Protestant alike robbed and murdered to the glory of their Gods.

In 1582, Bruno saw stretching before him the long-dreamed-of city of Paris, where he hoped to find an asylum, perhaps a welcome. There the Sorbonne stood as the type of unyielding bigotry, of protest against all new thought; face-to-face with it was the Royal College of France, welcoming the scientific spirit, welcoming the new light. Here, indeed, was a fair field for the knight-errant of Freethought, and here he put lance in rest to charge gallantly down on his old foe Aristotle, the idol of the Sorbonne.

He asked permission to teach philosophy in public, and this being granted, the young Italian was surrounded soon by crowds of adoring pupils, attracted by "his ready wit and the Neapolitan warmth of his oratory". Here was a teacher who made the driest study attractive, the hardest subject easy. The King Henry III bade the young scholar attend his court; for the monk's cell he had the splendour of the palace; for weary cloistered hours the joy of intellectual combat, of vivid Parisian life.

"Giordano," said Henry brightly to him one day, entering his favorite's room, "Giordano, *mon ami* [my friend], I have good news for you. In the University a chair of Philosophy is vacant, and they tell me none can fill it better than a certain eloquent Italian, one Bruno, who has taken the town by storm."

Bruno, who had risen to his feet as the king entered, flushed over brow and cheek. "A chair, sire!" he faltered. "A chair for me in the University of Paris! I have dreamed of this at some future day, but I am yet too young, too unknown."

"Tut, tut!" interrupted the King. "Who better than you can draw the youth of Paris, or better control the same turbulent youth? No easy task it has been found, I warrant you. No hesitation, Giordano *mio* [mine]; I will that a countryman of my mother shall fill a chair that he can fill so worthily."

"Sire, I can but accept," answered Bruno, gratefully. "I shall indeed have found rest and peace here, after my long wanderings. And when will my duties commence, my royal and generous friend?"

"Commence? Oh, at once," replied the King. "There are a few necessary formalities to be gone through, the signing of the papers and so on. And, by the way, Giordano, you are careless of your religious duties. I do not remember me to have seen you at mass. Do not forget, my dear professor, that attendance at mass is one of the duties of your position."

Bruno started, and his bright eager face clouded, and became dark and set as flint.

"Did I understand your majesty rightly?" he said gravely; "as a professor I must attend mass?"

"Yes, surely," quoth the king, unnoticing the change of his companion's tone and face. "You would not have the professor set an example of irreligion to the University? Oh, it is not a long business,

I assure you. You need not grudge such short loss of time, you busiest of men."

Bruno turned and walked to the window, a sore conflict raging in his heart. The professorship gave him an assured position, an adequate income. After all, what was a mass? A number of foolish words, of senseless phrases. He need only pretend belief in it all, and he would be safe, and might pursue his philosophical studies in peace. If he refused, not only would he lose the professorship, but the fickle and bigoted king might turn against him, and he might be driven from Paris, as from Italy and Switzerland, from Lyons and Toulouse. Only a mass? "Only a lie," muttered Bruno to himself between his teeth, and then his brow cleared and his eyes shone out again bright and true ; he turned back to the king, who was gazing at him with surprise:

"Sire," he said gently, "you are goodness itself to an Italian exile; be not angry that I cannot accept the condition annexed to the gift you honor me with."

"The condition?" questioned the king. "What condition?" "Sire, the attendance at mass."

"That is folly, Bruno. I have told you the service is brief, and however indifferent you may be to religious duties, no good Catholic should object to attending mass."

"But, sire," answered the young man low and grave, "I am not a Catholic, and I cannot in honesty attend mass. Stay," he said pleadingly, as the king started back in horror. "I have not wilfully deceived you; my lectures have been on philosophy and not on theology, and no question of my personal faith has arisen. Long ago, I began to doubt; I became a monk in 1572, but study made my faith waver —".

He stopped, for his pleading was unheard. Henry was pacing up and down the room, his face black as night. At last he stopped and faced the young Italian.

"Do I understand you rightly?" he said sternly. "Do I understand that you are not a Catholic? that you reject the authority of Holy Church, and are a heretic, a Lutheran, or a Calvinist, or perchance one of the accursed Huguenot fanatics?"

"I am not a Catholic," answered Bruno steadily, "nor do I follow Luther or Calvin, or any of the Huguenet Protestants. I am a philosopher, a man of science, and my thought fits not into any creed 1 know."

There was silence for awhile; then the brave face and pleading eyes touched the king's heart, despite his religion, and he stretched out his hand to the young man, bold enough to hold his own face-to-face with danger, and with royal wrath.

"Adieu!" he said gravely. "Be silent on your heresy, if you value your life. Holy Church has sharp arguments wherewith to convince the unbeliever, and there are seats more uncomfortable than that of a professorship burdened with a mass. I will pray our Blessed Lady to bring you to a better frame of mind; but if the doctors of the Sorbonne hear of your impious folly, even my favor may not avail to shield you."

And as the door closed, Giordano's head dropped, and a weary look clouded the brightness of his face. Was he again

to be a fugitive, a wanderer? Was there no rest for the man who had out-grown the superstition of Christianity?

In 1583, Bruno turned his face northwards, and travelled to England, bearing letter from King Henry to Michael de Castelnau, French ambassador at the Court of Elisabeth, from whom he received friendly greeting and cordial hospitality. In the brilliant court of Elisabeth, Bruno found congenial spirit in Sir Philip Sidney, the chivalrous and generous-hearted, and the Italian and the Englishman were soon closely knit in bonds of loyal friendship. Ever does Bruno speak tenderly and reverently of the rare mind and heart of his beloved friend.

For Elisabeth herself, he conceived an intense admiration and his praises of this Protestant Queen, worded with all the warmth and exaggeration of that time, were used against him with terrible effect, when the bloodhounds of the Inquisition pulled him down in later years. "No noble of her realm equals her in dignity, in heroism; no lawyer is so learned; no statesman is so wise She rises as a brilliant sun to shed light over the globe. By her title and her royal dignity, she is inferior to no monarch in the world. In the judgment, wisdom, and prudence she displays in governing, it is difficult to find a Queen who approaches her." And this Elisabeth, so highly praised, was the excomunicated foe of Rome, the anathematised heretic who had rent England from the papal obedience.

At that time England and Italy were as sisters, save in religion. Italian learning, Italian art, and Italian literature — all found heartiest welcome under English skies. Shakespeare found in Italy much of inspiration; later, Milton travelled thither wards to seek poetic culture; the English court was as Italy to an Italian, and Bruno found himself surrounded there by memories of all he held most dear. Here might the knight-errant of liberty have found rest, had he been content to veil some of his boldest thoughts, and to pass merely as a Protestant, warring against the pretensions and the tyranny of Rome. But no such veiling was possible to Bruno, for soon came chance of bold speech — chance too tempting to be lost by the fiery Italian orator.

The fair city of the Isis was en fete in June, 1583; as river Thames rolled past her dainty spires and tall battlements, he saw Oxford in her most gallant array, and heard the hum of many tongues. For the Earl of Leicester, Elisabeth's haughty favourite, held his court there as the Chancellor of the University, and gave right royal welcome to the Count Albert de Lasco, having gathered there to do him honor England's most learned sons. Purple-robed doctors were there in long procession; splendid banquets were spread; and on each day a literary tournament was held, in which philosophical theses were maintained and attacked, in which tongues served as lances and syllogisms as battle-axes.

At last, when Oxford challenged all comers to meet her sons in wordy warfare, Bruno's warrior-spirit flashed into fire, as when steel strikes flint. See him

as he stands in the arena — beautiful, eager, eloquent, fighting anew the same old battle that he has fought in Italy, in Switzerland, in France. It is again the question of questions for the sixteenth century: Does the earth move? Are there more worlds than one? "The earth is motionless; the universe is finite and mobile", said the University with Aristotle and Ptolemy. "The earth revolves, and the universe is infinite", said Bruno, leaning on Philelaus and Copernicus. Bruno has left his own account of the struggle: "The dispute grew envenomed; my antagonists took refuge in sarcasms and insults. One, seizing pen and paper, cried: 'Look, be silent and learn; I will teach you Ptolemy and Copernicus.' But as soon as he began to sketch the spheres, it was clear that he had never opened Copernicus."

And he on whose side was the Truth silenced his opponents, though he stood alone; and many a brow was bent darkly on the gallant Italian, as he strove for the honor of his mistress Science, and carried her colours victoriously through the fray.

Then Bruno prayed for and obtained permission to lecture at Oxford, and there as at Paris, his lecture-room was crowded, though as he walked along the streets men turned and muttered: "Atheist!" and priests, hearing that the Bible was not of authority in science, scowled bitterly at him as he passed, and sternly bade the young men leave alone the heretic and blasphemer, who would drag their souls to hell.

At last England became too hot to hold any longer the bold philosopher; his friends, Michael de Castelnau and Philip Sidney, had both been called abroad, and their strong protection was no longer around him. Threats grew louder, the storm-clouds hung heavier; and at last, early in 1586, Bruno fled from England to France once more, and held during three days in Paris at Whitsun tide a public dispute, still on the physics of Aristotle. This dispute put an end to his residence in Paris. Henry no longer dared to defend him, and the Sorbonne muttered threats of punishment; so Bruno was once more forced to fly, and turned his steps to Marburg in Hesse, hoping to find work and livelihood at the University there. At first, things looked brighter. In the July of the same year a doctor's degree was bestowed upon him, and strong, as he fancied, in this recognition, he begged permission to teach philosophy.

As Bruno waited permission to teach philosophy, regarded merely as a matter of form, his heart grew light. Here at length he might teach freely; here at length he might spread the truth he loved, and none would hinder him. As his messsenger returned with a silktied scroll in his hand, Bruno took it gaily and carelessly, and cut the silken thread with a smile on his lips. But see how his face changes; see how his eyes darken; the Rector of the University writes dryly that he is obliged to deny the permission asked for; there are grave "reasons" why Bruno should not be allowed to teach, and so forth. The passionate Italian leapt to his feet in fiery

wrath, and swiftly made his way to the Rector's house. Ushered into his presence, he flung the scroll on the table, and demanded to know what reasons were referred to. "Doctor of your University have you made me, and the doctor's right of teaching you deny me. Of what avail the empty title? Why do you treat me thus?"

The frigid thin-lipped Rector, Pierre Nigidius, drew his mouth into an acrid downward curve: "Your views, Dr Bruno are not sound. They are not such as are safe in a teacher of the young."

"Sound? safe?" cried Bruno impetuously. "But if they are trust" "Truth must be measured by the divine standard, my dear Sir, and your teaching that the earth revolves flies in the face of Scripture."

"So much the worse for Scripture," answered the hasty Italian, careless of the Rector's darkening face.

"You blasphemer!" he answered sharply. "But no blasphemer shall teach in this city while I, Pierre Nigidius, have rule within its walls."

"Take back then your trumpery degree!" cried Bruno, in his wrath, "for teacher who may not teach I will never be. Erase my name from the lists of your University, and do me not an honor as empty as your own creed."

"There is no difficulty in erasing your name," sneered Nigidius, "from a list that ought never to have been dishonored by it. Erased it shall be fore the sun goes down, as it is erased from the Lamb's book of life, and look to yourself, blaspheming infidel, lest you learn that Marburg has prison for the heretic, be he foreigner or citizen of the State."

So Bruno became once again a wanderer, and took refuge in Wurtemberg.

"You did not question me as to my faith, which you did not approve; you regarded only my love for charity and peace, for philanthropy and philosophy; you allowed me to be only friend of wisdom, the lover of the muses; you did not forbid me to proclaim freely opinions contrary to the doctrines received among you, although philosophy is among you neither end nor means; although your piety, sober, pure, primitive, makes you prefer ancient physics and the mathematics of the past, yet you allow me to profess a new system. . . .You did not grow angry; you showed wisdom, humanity and urbanity, with the sincere wish to help and to serve. . . . Far from restraining liberty of thought and from tarnishing your reputation for hospitality, you treated the traveller, the foreigner, the prescribed, as friend and fellow-citizen; you allowed him to protect himself against poverty by teaching; you repelled all the calumnies circulated about him during the two years that he spent within your walls, beneath the shade of your hospitality."

There is nothing to show why Bruno quitted this peaceful retreat, where he was safe, honored and beloved. Perhaps his fiery warrior spirit could not rest happily where no combats were raging, and he yearned once more for the turmoil of hot theological controversy. Be that as it may, he left Wurtemberg in 1588,

and went to Prague, where the Emperor Rudolph II. was holding his court. To the Emperor, Bruno presented some mathematical theses, having learned that Rudolph was a friend to learning, but Bruno's heresy tainted his mathematics, and the Christian ruler turned a cold face on the heretic thinker. So he travelled to Helmstadt, where he became tutor to the eldest son of the reigning Duke of Brunswick for a few months, and then, the Duke dying, persecution struck at him once more. Boethius, the head of the clergy, excommunicated him in open church, and all men thence forth regarded him as outcast. For one year of struggle he held his ground, and then finding life was being made impossible for him, he passed out once more among strangers, teaching ever the doctrines that he loved.

And now Frankfort knew him for a few months, from June, 1590 to February, 1591, and here he published his last works, while his home-life was cared for by a family named Wechel, a member of which had been a friend of Sir Philip Sidney. In Frankfort came to him a letter which drew him back to Italy, drew him back into the jaws of that Inquisition from which he had fled, and which had had its sleuth-hounds on his trail ever since. See him as he bends over the letter, his cheeks flushing with the thought of Italy. The scroll was signed "Giovanni Mocenigo"; it prayed him come to Venice as tutor, assuring him of full safety and of cordial welcome. The young noble who wrote was of a house strong enough to protect, and he pledged his faith that secure home on Italian soil awaited the brilliant teacher, whose name for the last ten years had been ringing through Europe.

The letter dropped from Bruno's hands, as he rose slowly to his feet, and turned to the window which opened towards the south.

"Italia! Italia!" he sighed, his own soft Neapolitan tongue falling from his lips in cadences most musical. "My beautiful, my beloved; shall I indeed see you once more? Oh, to feel the air of Italy, after the heavy air of the north! Oh, to see the skies of Italy, after these dull greys that are never blue!" His eyes sparkled, his pulses throbbed — but suddenly his head drooped, and a weary sadness settled on his face.

"The Inquisition! What noble house can guard me from the cruel claws of the Roman wolf? Italy, which cradled me, will be my grave, I fear me, if I listen to the pleadings of this youth, and dwell in Venice. Here, at least, I am safe; and if one town grows too hot for me, another is open to me. But there! 0 Italy! Thy palaces cover thy dungeons, and thy beauty is the mask over the face of the familiar."

(*To be continued*)

To establish a consistent flow of psychic freedom we need to accept situations in constantly new and fresh frames of reference . . . If there is a servile dependence upon history, there we will find bondage.

Clarence R. Pedersen, "The Chains of Living", *Am. Theos.*

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky: A Biography — I

(11 August 1831 – 8 May 1891)

KIRK GRADIN

IN celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the modern Theosophical Movement, it is apropos to honor and reflect upon the remarkable woman known to history as Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (HPB). Lodges and Societies around the world commemorate her passing every year on the Sunday prior to the 8th of May, called "White Lotus Day". It appears this title was chosen for several significant reasons. To begin with, upon the first anniversary of her passing, an unusual profusion of white lotuses appeared at the Theosophical Society Adyar headquarters in Madras (now Chennai).

The Lotus, or *padma*, is a very ancient simile for both the cosmos and for humanity, uniting macrocosm and microcosm in a single symbol. A lotus plant contains in its seeds complete representations, as prototypes, of the future plant, symbolizing unfoldment from within without, from the noumenal to the phenomenal. When fully grown, its roots lie in the dark mud of the lake bottom, its stem in the water of the lake, and its flower in the air and sky, suggestive of the Three Halls mentioned in *The Voice of the Silence*. The white flower opening to the sun above the waters is emblematic of radiant spiritual awakening, white being indicative of purity and the logoic synthesis of all colors.

Many regard HPB as not simply the Mother of the New Age, as she is often called, but one in a long line of Messengers of that celestial Bodhisattva of boundless compassion known as Padmapani, the guardian of our *Kalpa,* whose symbol is the lotus. Known as Avalokiteshvara in Tibetan Buddhism, and Kwan Yin in Chinese Buddhism, this being of many names and faces ever watches over, blesses, and aids all evolution through sacrificial service and enlightened wisdom in action.

What becomes clear when we study her life and the quest she embodied, is that we

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cannot separate Blavatsky from any part of the teaching she left, from the Masters whom she served, nor from the entire *guruparampara* chain, the long line of such sages, reformers, and spiritual teachers reaching back to primeval races and ages. Nor can we separate her from the most neglected and downtrodden, the most lost, reviled, and forgotten members of the human family. In fact, if we take her teaching to heart, we cannot separate her from any being whatsoever, any life atom or kingdom of Nature, visible or invisible. She sought to awaken our love for and sense of unity with ALL, through a brilliant, unique and buddhic articulation of the timeless Perennial Philosophy.

The short biographical sketch which follows, is drawn from many sources, including two much longer biographies: W. Kingland's, *The Real H. P. Blavatsky* (1928), and Sylvia Cranston's *The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky* (1993). Based on their narration, we can divide HPB's mysterious 60-year incarnation into 5 main periods:

1. 1831–1848: 17 years
2. 1848–1873: 25 years
3. 1873–1879: 6 years
4. 1879–1885: 6 years
5. 1885–1891: 6 years

The first period of her life, from birth in 1831 to 17 years of age, ends at that moment she left the comforts of conventional home and family life in favor of an irrepressible spiritual quest to fulfil her life's dharma as a servant and messenger of her Guru and Master. The second period, spanning 25 years from age 17 to 41, is one about which the least is known. During these years, she tirelessly crisscrossed the globe several times, fearlessly educating, maturing, and training herself in the most remote and hidden centers of occult practice, of mystic and esoteric study worldwide. As documented by Cranston, this included at least three years in the hidden sanctuaries of Tibet under the direct training of her Masters. The third period is marked by her third arrival on American soil in 1873 where she settled for six years, eventually became an American citizen, and began her more public literary, organizational, and teaching efforts.

This was especially highlighted by the formal inauguration of the Theosophical Society in New York City on 17 November 1875. Then, after writing and securing the publication in 1877 of *Isis Unveiled*, she left the US for India in 1879, marking the beginning of the fourth stage. During this six-year period in India, under her magnetic tutelage and masterful instruction, dozens of Branch Societies were established, including the Theosophical Society headquarters at Adyar, Madras. Then, in 1885, in a coma and pronounced on the verge of death by her doctors, she was dramatically revived through the intervention of her Guru. This mysterious healing allowed her to complete the final six years of culminating effort in Europe, during which the most jeweled keynote texts and golden-age purposes of her incarnation emerged lotus-like.

1. Birth to Quest: 1831–1848

At midnight on 11 August 1831, Helena Petrovna Hahn was born in Ekaterinoslav, Russia, today called Dnipro and, since 1917, part of Ukraine. The descendant of a line of aristocrats, of German and Russian nobility, her family name "Hahn" literally means "rooster", associated in Baltic traditions with a dragon-like deity of the sun and of fire. In Ukrainian folklore, Helena's birthdate suggested she would have great and mysterious powers, and since the robes of the presiding priest caught fire at her christening, it was believed that her life would be deeply challenging.

Her mother was a direct descendant of the ninth century Grand Duke Rurik, the first tsar to govern Russia. Only 17 years old at Helena's birth, her mother was also a talented writer who later became a famous novelist. In large part, Helena was cared for and classically educated by professional tutors and her maternal grandmother, Princess Helena Palovna Fadeyev, a self-taught botanist and archeologist, as well as superb artist and musician, who studied Classical Greek and spoke five languages fluently. And it was from her grandmother's library, inherited from Prince Paul, that HPB consumed hundreds of books on alchemy, magic, and other occult sciences, all before the age of 15. HPB's father, Peter Von Hahn was an army colonel whose repeated transfers from urban centers to remote rural areas, meant that even HPB's childhood involved long 1,000-mile journeys and cross-cultural influences of the most varied sort.

By all accounts, even as a child, HPB was both telepathic and a gifted clairvoyant who could see into, converse, and interact with hidden beings and dimensions of Nature. Her sister Vera wrote:

> For Helena, all Nature seemed animated with a mysterious life of its own . . . *She heard the voice of every object and form, whether organic or inorganic; and claimed consciousness and being, not only for some mysterious powers visible and audible to herself alone in what was to everyone else empty space, but even for visible but inanimate things such as pebbles, moulds, and pieces of decaying phosphorescent timber.*

Like a trained psychometer, she would captivate the other children with long stories of events linked to the objects, artifacts, and animals around them, as though she had actually witnessed them herself. In addition, from the age of four, she later wrote, she could make bells ring, move furniture and other objects about, entirely through the use of her astral body acting independently of the physical.

Wise beings unknown to her family were also interested in her welfare. According to A. P. Sinnett, from her earliest recollections, HPB would see daily "visions of a mature protector, whose imposing appearance dominated her imagination . . . in later life she met him as a living man, and knew him as though she had been brought up in his presence." On several occasions during her childhood, Helena's life was saved in mysterious ways, apparently through her guru's timely intervention.

As a child, HPB was irrepressible, mischievous, uncontrollable, and fiery of temperament. She was full of "acute humor and brilliant wit" and loved "to joke, tease, and create a commotion". Her laughter was said to have had a sparkling authenticity and vivacity like no other. Its contagious childlike joy remained with her throughout her life. She also harbored genuine empathy for the neglected and downtrodden. Even in her childhood, Aunt Nadya told Sinnett, she displayed a pronounced indifference to the privileges of class and vain nobility. Instead ". . . all her sympathies and attractions went out towards people of the lower class. She . . . always preferred to play with her servants' children . . . and had to be watched for fear she would escape from the house to make friends with ragged street boys . . . she was so kind and so daring, that she was ready to give everything away to the needy, to do everything for a friend, and to decide upon any action in defense of the injured," while "she never remembered evil or injury to herself". At the same time, "no old scholar could be more assiduous in his study; and she could not be prevailed upon to give up her books, which she would devour night and day as long as the impulse lasted . . . " She was also perfectly at ease telling people to their faces exactly what she thought of them, much to the embarrassment of her elders. This was a trait she also carried with her into adulthood, unwilling to coddle the polite pretensions and hypocrisies of the false ego in any she encountered.

2. World-Circling Training: 1848–1873

Further defying all conventional expectations and what would have been a cultured life of luxury and comfort, at age 17 H. P. Blavatsky fled family, husband, and home life in search of what she called in one of her letters, "the philosopher's stone" and those who could show her the path or secret to "the union of soul and spirit". We know she travelled first across Europe, Greece, and the Middle East. In Cairo, HPB met Dr Albert Rawson, author of many books on religion, philology, and archeology. She revealed to him that she was "engaged in a work that would someday free mankind from mental bondage . . . This work is not mine," she said, "but his that sent me." Though only 19 years old, in the Middle East, she later wrote:

> I lived with the whirling Dervishes, with the Druses of Mt Lebanon, with the Bedouin Arabs and Marabouts of Damascus. I found it (meaning the philosopher's stone) nowhere![1]

The turning point came in 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park, London, and its famous Crystal Palace housing the latest technologies and wares of all nations. Vowed to secrecy regarding the event, it was not until two years after HPB died that this extraordinary meeting became publicly known. Amidst an East Indian delegation present for the Exhibition was a tall Indian gentleman who she immediately recognized as her Guru, protector, and "blessed Master". "He spoke

of a work he was about to undertake" which required her "cooperation" and for which she would be attacked and vilified in the court of public opinion. "To prepare for it she would need to spend three years in Tibet", she was told. From that day forward, she later narrated, everything was done in strict obedience to her Teacher. From that moment her extraordinary energies and indomitable will were focused upon one aim: to serve the Masters without fail.

That same year she traveled to Canada and America, where she passed on from Texas into Mexico, to Central and South America. Probably in the vicinity of a true Mystery School located nearby, in Honduras she met up with a Hindu-born chela with whom she traveled via steamship around the southern tip of Africa to Ceylon and Bombay. She journeyed in India dressed as a man, for to travel alone as a woman was unacceptable. She attempted to enter Tibet via Nepal, but was thwarted, as later verified by the British Major General who prevented her (Cranston, 50).

In 1854, aged 23, HPB returned to England, where according to Vera, she was detained there for a time under contract. "Having distinguished herself by her musical talents, she became a member of the Philharmonic Society." While in London, she again unexpectedly met her teacher on two brief occasions. And again that same year, she crossed the Atlantic to New York and then to Chicago where she proceeded to make the dangerous crossing of the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada with "emigrants' caravans". There were only 33 states in the union at that time and the transcontinental railroad had not yet been built.

From San Francisco, she embarked by steamship again to the Orient, arriving in India for the second time, age 25 in 1856. Not only did she meet and travel with the Mahatmas, their *chelas* and disciples on this occasion, but was also able to enter Tibet via Kashmir. In a letter to Sinnett, Master KH mentions that HPB's "ecstatic rapture" was so overwhelming when meeting her Teachers in India, that she had to be temporarily plunged into a profound sleep or "she would have burst some blood vessel, including kidneys, liver, and her 'interiors'".[2] Some of the remarkable, magical and hair-raising events occurring on both of these trips through the Indian subcontinent were described by her in a series of articles under the pen name "Radha Bai", which appeared in popular Moscow periodicals years afterward. Translated into English, portions were compiled and combined with later stories of events and occurrences into book form and titled *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan*, published in 1892. In 2012, Russian author, historian and Indologist Alexander Senkevich wrote that these essays by Blavatsky were a "stunning success" in Russia. He called them a work of "enviable erudition", a country-specific encyclopedia, which "to this day has not lost its scientific value as an objective assessment and condemnation of English colonial rule and a "psychological document reflecting

many many facets of the Indian spiritual world" and "of traditional Indian society".

Apparently, her mission was requiring her to learn firsthand, both empirically and metaphysically, the complexities and possibilities of human nature, both for good and for evil, the nature of both white and black magic. Having returned to Russia and travelling in the Caucasus, at 32 years of age she is said to have emerged from a prolonged death-struggle with a greater mastery of her faculties and control over all lesser forces.

Undaunted in any danger, in 1867 she was in Mentana, Italy, where she aided Girabaldi's revolutionary troops attempting to release Rome from the grips of the Catholic Papacy. She later showed Olcott where, in battle, her arm was broken in two places by a saber and where musket bullets were still embedded, one in her shoulder and one in her leg. By stark contrast, only one year later, she accompanied her Master in yet another trip to India for her first extended stay in Tibet, starting in 1868.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, H. P. Blavatsky explains that in 1357, a ray of Amitabha, the Dhyani of Boundless Time and Infinite Light, the same logoic being who manifested through Gautama Buddha, appeared in Tibet as the Adept-Teacher Tsong Kha Pa. To purify, preserve, and promulgate the Wisdom-Religion, he founded the Gelukpa Order from which eventually emerged the tradition of Dalai and Panchen Lamas. This was one aspect of an unfolding series of seven impulsions to occur in the last 25 years of each century, in which efforts by the Masters would prepare humanity through mental and spiritual revitalization for the distant sixth subrace. Tsong Kha Pa's direct disciple, Gedun Drupe, posthumously honored as the first Dalai Lama, also founded Tashi Lunpo in 1447, which became the largest, most vibrant monastery in all of Tibet. It was in the hidden libraries and retreat of the Panchen Lama in the vicinity of Tashi Lunpo where HPB studied the esoteric books central to the composition of *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Voice of the Silence*. (Cranston, 14, 422–425)

(*To be continued*)

Endnotes

1. *The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement*, Sylvia Cranston, 1993, published by G. P. Putnam's Sons, NY, p. 43.

2. *The Real H. P. Blavatsky, A Study in Theosophy and a memoir of a Great Soul*, W. Kingland, Published by Watkins Bookshop, 1928, p. 89.

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 us entering the higher one.

H. P. Blavatsky, *Practical Occultism*, p. 106

The Transformational Potential of Theosophy

SVITLANA GAVRYLENKO

THERE are three main directions of transformations in the consciousness of human beings, which are connected with the appearance of the sun of Theosophy on the horizon of humanity at the end of the 19th century. This is, so to speak, a social transformational potential. Then we have the individual transformational aspects. Of course such a division is quite conditional.

Therefore, the worldview factor can be considered the first and most decisive social transformational factor of theosophical teachings. (1) **The picture of the world began its stage of radical transformation**, which continues even now. Many sciences are in the process of changing paradigms — they are emerging from adolescence to maturity. Physics and psychology have overcome the shackles of materialism the fastest. Serious and authoritative scientists began to talk about the multifacetedness of the world, the multidimensionality of Nature and man, and the metaphysical foundations of understanding the processes taking place around us and in our inner world. Many advanced modern scientists may not even know H. P. Blavatsky's (HPB) name and works. When circles diverge on the water and begin to rock a small boat, it may not know where the wave came from, but the boat cannot remain in its previous state.

Through Helena Petrovna, the evolutionary teaching came into the world, which expands our understanding of the world, proclaims the principle of Unity of everything in the universe, gives a wide panoramic picture of unfolding of the universe with its elements: galaxies, suns, planets, kingdoms of Nature. The human being appears in such a picture as an organic element of this process, which has its own task, its own ways of solving this task. This picture incredibly deepens a person's perception of the world and himself. I believe that a deep understanding of this global development process, with all its details and nuances, is something we have yet to grasp in further exploration. However, even now, we can gain a certain evolutionary competence by acquainting ourselves with the timeless wisdom found in the works of HPB.

We need this evolutionary competence

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as an understanding of the global processes of the development of the universe and man. It is necessary for us to interact more responsibly with each other and with Nature, to continue the impulse of transformation that was set in motion thanks to the heroic life feat of HPB.

In order to make this first point about Theosophy and science complete, I want to mention yet another feature of it. This is the problem of ***science and morality***. Theosophy points to this important aspect in connection with scientific research. This is a moral aspect, and it concerns not so much science as a field of knowledge, but the scientist as a subject of the process of knowledge. Many areas of modern science persistently require the scientist to accept responsibility for the outcome that may result from his activities.

In ancient times, science was considered the pursuit of knowledge, morally pure. It was believed that the use of knowledge for the benefit or detriment of humanity had nothing to do with the knowledge itself. Therefore, questions of morality were not directly related to science. In addition, at those times the influence of man on the ecosphere of the planet was consistent with the recreational opportunities of Nature.

However, at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, this situation changed. Pure science has combined with technology. Francis Bacon said: "Knowledge is power." But humanity has reached such a level of knowledge and technology that its influence on the natural environment began to exceed the possibilities of natural restoration of our planet. Today, the situation is obvious, when not only the fate of the biosphere depends on humanity, but also the future of humanity itself and our planet as a cosmic being.

Instead of being the spiritual leader of the planetary civilization, worthily representing our planet in the space community, man has become a real threat to himself. This is how the outstanding contemporary thinker, founder of the International Academy of Systems Studies, Erwin Laszlo, characterized this process:

> Our time has witnessed striking changes that have transferred the main idea — the statement that our world will depend on what we, the people, think, say, and do in the future as well as now — from the realm of banal truths to the realm of scientific principles.

This poses today, to science in general and to each specific scientist, the most acute problem of morality, ethics, responsibility for the achievements they make, and for the social and ecological consequences they initiate. Today, this is the most significant turning point that science must make in its development in order to enter a new round of the evolutionary spiral. Not all scientists are ready for this nor recognize the need for such an approach.

The synthesis of truth and goodness, science and morality does not happen automatically, it must be done by scientists themselves, who are moral authorities and bearers of the moral imperative in science.

Today, a special burden of responsibility falls on those who generate new ideas, who are at the forefront of scientific research. And this is also an important component of the new worldview and those transformational processes taking place in the consciousness of humanity.

Let us go further. The principle of Unity, which is the basis of the teachings of Theosophy, offers a generalized picture of the evolutionary process, which includes a detailed description of the human kingdom of Nature and the stages of its evolutionary development. This knowledge allows us to see the one destiny of humanity and realize the one purpose of each individual human being. This knowledge has at its core a deep ideological influence capable of raising people's consciousness over the differences that separate them.

When the Theosophical Society (TS), the creator and ideologist of which was our great compatriot Helena Blavatsky, announced its first object of creating a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, this idea seemed utopian and unattainable to many. During the years of existence of the TS in the world, since 1875, the ideal of human brotherhood has already acquired visible outlines and ceased to be a theoretical abstraction.

Therefore, we are talking about the second important transformational process that is slowly happening in the world, this is (2) **the formation of new human relations**. If in the middle of the 20th century, economics and engineering were the most common majors that applicants to universities wanted to master, now it is psychology and foreign languages. This is a tectonic shift in priorities! How does humanity demonstrate its readiness to accept and implement the idea of Unity, the idea of Brotherhood?

This is done in no other way than through the art of building the right human relationships, the art of establishing non-antagonistic interaction between people, between the kingdoms of Nature, between nations, between peoples and states — in politics, in the economy, even in the process of solving acute and conflicting current problems of humanity. Together, we learn to build relationships not based on the demands of our greedy and aggressive personality, but under the guidance of our Higher Self, our true Teacher and guiding unifying principle, whose main manifestations are love and altruism.

On the one hand, these changes correspond to the divine plan and are therefore in some way inevitable. On the other hand, humanity must have a vanguard that directs such progress and points the way. The Masters created the TS precisely with this goal in mind — to gather those who can pave new paths, become such a vanguard. And this does not mean technological innovations at all. This refers to the inner qualities that people consciously cultivate inside themselves, improving all forms of their manifestation in the world, thus influencing their environment and changing the spiritual climate of society.

Thus, we can see that today we have

a very large theoretical and practical baggage to implement the idea of Brotherhood. In fact, the entire teaching of Theosophy is aimed at explaining to man the fundamental unity of all things, in particular the fundamental unity of humanity. If such principles are accepted and assimilated, they will lead to appropriate actions and deeds. And then the world around us will change. The new worldview prompts a person to accept new levels of responsibility and awakens the need for personal participation in the tasks of rebuilding life on new, more noble and perfect grounds.

In *The Key to Theosophy* HPB called "altruism an integral part of self-development". She also wrote: "The ability to know does not arise from book knowledge or pure philosophy, but mainly from the true practice of altruism in deed, word, and thought; for this practice cleanses the covering of the soul and allows light to penetrate the human mind. Since the human mind in a state of vigor is receptive, it must be purified from sensory perception, and the most correct way to achieve this lies in the combination of philosophy with the highest external and internal virtues." (*Studies in Occultism*) According to HPB, "Only altruism . . . can lead an individual to the fusion of his tiny Self with the Universal Self." (*Occultism and the Occult Arts*)

And finally, the third factor that generates global social transformational processes, also based on the Principle of Unity. This is another important area where the ideas of Theosophy are able to provide an impetus for transformation, leading to union and mutual understanding. (3) **This is the realm of religions**. It is very painful for humanity today, because more than half of the military conflicts in the world take place on religious grounds. The aspects of the common origins of religions, the identity of the moral commandments of all religious teachings, the explanation of the regularity of individual characteristics in the ways of transmitting knowledge of the Timeless Wisdom by each individual religion, all are given attention in *Isis Unveiled* and other works of HPB.

The very term "Brotherhood of Religions", adopted as a basis for understanding the commonality of these public institutions, surprisingly accurately reflects the position of Theosophy on this issue, although at the same time it causes protest and rejection by some denominations and religious organizations. The world's religions are not coping today with their task of satisfying the spiritual needs of people. It is sad, but it is religions that often become the source of aggression and conflicts in the world, supporting the fanaticism of their followers. The dogmatized knowledge of the church is closed to the perception of new ideas, does not satisfy the inquisitive mind of today's educated person, and cannot assimilate modern scientific ideas. At the same time, the idea of the Brotherhood of Religions is gaining its supporters in the world more and more actively. Theosophy asserts itself as the "Wisdom Religion" for the future planetary civilizations.

All that has been said about the social transformational processes initiated by the entry of Theosophy into the consciousness of humanity is undoubtedly related to each individual person who is the bearer of this knowledge and a model of the corresponding way of life. Now I want to supplement what was said earlier about social transformation processes with some aspects that directly concern the person who begins to study the primordial wisdom, or Theosophy. Here I want to refer to authoritative sources, which highlight the important, in my opinion, individual features of those transformational potentials embedded in theosophical teachings.

The fourth President of the TS, Curuppumullage Jinarajadasa, in his excellent book *Practical Theosophy* stated: "There are three fundamental truths of Theosophy that change a person's attitude to life as soon as he begins to apply them. . . . They are:

1. Man is an immortal soul, which through the ages grows to the ideal of perfection.

2. Soul growth occurs through learning to cooperate with the divine plan, which is evolution.

3. Man learns to cooperate with the divine plan, first of all, by learning to help his fellow human beings".

I consider these words extremely important in characterizing what distinguishes a theosophist from an ordinary man who has not yet mastered the Divine Wisdom and has not risen to the level of cooperation with evolution. We understand very well that such cooperation can only be achieved by removing our little self from its pedestal, that is, by taming and subduing our lower nature, our persona, our personality.

There is one more individual aspect that I cannot ignore. HPB wrote about it in the third volume of the *Secret Doctrine, Article 1. Warning*:

> There is a strange law in Occultism that has been witnessed and proven over thousands of years of research; and throughout all the years that have passed since the beginning of the Theosophical Society, this law has been invariably confirmed in almost every case. It is only necessary for someone to enter the path of "Proba-tion", as some occult consequences begin to appear. And the first of them is to reveal to the outside everything that was in a person until now in a dormant state: his shortcomings, habits, qualities, and hidden desires, good or bad, or indifferent . . . IN THE FIELD OF THE OCCULT THIS IS AN UNBREAKABLE LAW.

I think that each of us can confirm these words. Moreover, work on this leads to internal transformations, a deeper knowledge of oneself, one's capabilities, one's strengths and weaknesses.

Undoubtedly, I have not exhausted the topic here, describing these important, in my opinion, individual and social factors of the transformational potential embedded in the teachings of Theosophy. There are other spheres of human activity where the unifying power of the ideas of Theosophy has begun to manifest itself, and this has a great future, because we, as humanity, are entering the upward spiral of

our development. Together, these processes are heralds of the New Era and determine the basis for the formation of future culture and civilization.

Let us not despair that the tendencies towards unification and the process of synthesis are not going as fast as we would like. Haste is not characteristic of Nature. And human consciousness is the greatest value for the Creator. Therefore, we thank HPB for the opportunities given to us and will be happy for the small step that each of us personally and all of us together can take in the direction of developing our own ideas about the universe and man, and we will look to the future with hope. After all, our future is bright and beautiful!

How wonderful that you and I, living so far from each other, on different continents, have taken upon ourselves the responsibility to carry these changes, and understand and support each other on this glorious and difficult path! ✧

. . .All my youthful years are passing,
Passing to no purpose,
And my eyes are weeping meanwhile
Winds turn pale my tresses.
My heart sinks, it shuns the daylight,
As imprisoned birdlet.
What avails me all my beauty,
If I've no good fortune?
It is hard for me, an orphan,
To live on hereafter,
All my people are as strangers —
I have none to talk with;
I have no one to ask questions
Why my eyes are weeping.
I have no one to tell freely
What my heart is wishing,
Why my heart, just as a dovelet
Day and night is mourning. . .

Taras Shevchenko
Dumka, Translated by Clarence A. Manning,
St. Petersburg, 1838

The Swan

DAVID M. GROSSMAN

A robin redbreast in a cage puts all Heaven in a rage.
William Blake

IN the world of esoteric ornithology that beautiful bird we call the swan is rather unique and has captivated the human imagination for literally thousands of years. The fact is we seem to have a fascination for birds in general, partly because they can do what we cannot — FLY.

Birds also possess other qualities of note which we pay tribute to; some sing beautiful songs, or exhibit grace in flight, show strength and courage, while others are amazing pilots, navigating great distances in disciplined formations as we see with geese. Birds have impressive engineering abilities in building nests, along with their agility and beauty.

We, on the other hand, are able to spread our proverbial wings, those of the imagination, and travel far and wide, creating many things, individually and collectively, from forms of religion, to societies and forms of government, creatively expressing ourselves in the arts, applied science and technology, including designing and building flying machines. Still to some degree psychologically and physically we are earthbound creatures.

Birds are both of the earth and the air, and some birds embrace a third element, that of water, like the swan. It has been said somewhere that the "Magician" is one who stands at the shore with one foot on the earth, the other in the water, and his head in the air.

We find magical birds in mythology and literature, like the phoenix, for example, symbolizing immortality, resurrection and life after death. The phoenix is a symbol of renewal, rebirth and reincarnation. It is said that all that remains of the burnt phoenix is a shining ember representing the immortal soul, the Higher Self, the source of transformation and continuance.

The phoenix myth is found in various cultures around the world. In ancient Greek and Egyptian myths the phoenix is associated with the sun god.

There were times, other cycles, when we were more in touch with nature generally, more pantheistic in the positive sense as we see with indigenous peoples in America and elsewhere, like the Hopi people for example, expressing a deep reverence for life and Nature.

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H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) points out another bird in *The Secret Doctrine (SD)*. She says there in *SD* I, p. 262:

> The *ibis religiosa* had and has "magical" properties in common with many other birds, the albatross preeminently, and the mythical white swan, the swan of Eternity or Time, the KALAHANSA.
>
> Were it otherwise, indeed, why should all the ancient peoples, who were no more fools than we are, have had such a superstitious dread of killing certain birds? In Egypt, he who killed an *ibis*, or the golden hawk — the symbol of the Sun and Osiris — risked and could hardly escape death. The veneration of some nations for birds was such that Zoroaster, in his precepts, forbids their slaughter as a heinous crime.

This is a far cry from these gun-happy times when birds are shot and killed for mere sport.

For thousands of years the ibis has been associated with the spiritual side of life. The African ibis is associated with Thoth, the ancient Egyptian god of wisdom and writing, we are told. The ibis-headed Thoth's beak even looks like a writing instrument. He is said to be the most ancient and distinctive of the Egyptian Gods.

Then of course we should not overlook the peacock, with which one can hardly believe one's eyes, its radiant color, its fan of feathers, and mystical eyes on everyone. It seems to be more mythic than real when one is actually seen. The peacock has been used symbolically relating to spiritual ideas in various cultures. In 1963, India for example, made the peacock its official bird much like the bald eagle is for the United States.

Now let us focus on the swan, that beautiful, elegant and graceful bird, that has inspired the human imagination, the imagery of which we find throughout history in the most ancient of the Vedas, in Greek mythology, in Norse and Irish legends, in art and poetry from the distant past into the present:

> *Did you too see it, drifting, all night,*
> *on the black river?*
> *Did you see it in the morning, rising*
> *into the silvery air –*
> *An armful of white blossoms,*
> *A perfect commotion of silk and linen*
> *as it leaned into the bondage of its*
> *wings; a snowbank, a bank of lilies,*
> *Biting the air with its black beak?*
> *Did you hear it, fluting and whistling*
> *A shrill dark music – like the rain*
> *pelting the trees – like a waterfall*
> *Knifing down the black ledges?*
> *And did you see it, finally, just under*
> *the clouds –*
> *A white cross Streaming across the*
> *sky, its feet*
> *Like black leaves, its wings like the*
> *stretching light of the river?*
> *And did you feel it, in your heart, how*
> *it pertained to everything?*
> *And have you too finally figured out*
> *what beauty is for?*
> *And have you changed your life?*
>
> "The Sawn", Mary Oliver

The swan has not only been an inspiration to artists and poets throughout time, like we read here from the late

Mary Oliver, but we see it as a grand metaphysical symbolism, as HPB points out in the most ancient Vedic teachings, representing the most metaphysical concepts.

Without getting too embroiled in the complexity of the mysteries of the precosmic, the cosmic, the causeless cause and what is referred to as the first cause or Logos, and then the subsequent manifestations, let us take a look at what HPB first reveals in pp. 78–80 of *SD* I and maybe a few other comments further on.

HPB unpacks in this part of the *SD* the symbolism of the swan Kalahansa and its various manifestations, and possible misrepresentations, which she clears up through a few explanations. In the midst of the pages dealing with Stanza III on p. 77, 8 it says:

> Where was the germ, and where was now darkness? Where is the spirit of the flame that burns in thy lamp, oh Lanoo? The germ is that, and that is light; the white brilliant son of the dark hidden father.

The answer to the first question, suggested by the second, which is the reply of the teacher to the pupil, contains in a single phrase one of the most essential truths of occult philosophy. It indicates the existence of things imperceptible to our physical senses which are of far greater importance, more real and more permanent, than those that appeal to these senses themselves.

Before the Lanoo can hope to understand the transcendentally metaphysical problem contained in the first question he must be able to answer the second, while the very answer he gives to the second will furnish him with the clue to the correct reply to the first.

Then down a few lines:

> Among such appellations, given, of course, only in esoteric philosophy, as the "Unfathomable Darkness", the "Whirlwind", etc. — it is also called the "It of the Kalahansa, the Kala-ham-sa", and even the "Kali Hamsa" (Black swan).

Jumping ahead a bit to p. 79:

> The symbol of Hansa (whether "I", "He", Goose or Swan) is an important symbol, representing, for instance, Divine Wisdom, Wisdom in darkness beyond the reach of men.

The "swan or goose" (Hansa) is the symbol of that male or temporary deity, as he, the emanation of the primordial Ray, is made to serve as a Vahana or vehicle for that divine Ray, which otherwise could not manifest itself in the Universe, being, antiphrastically, itself an emanation of "Darkness" — for our human intellect, at any rate. It is Brahma, then, who is Kalahansa, and the Ray, the Hansa-vahana.

And then in *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge*, HPB states:

> *Brahmā,* the manifested Light, or the Third Logos. (*Transactions*, 119; *CW* X:379)

It is interesting how these metaphysical and spiritually symbolic ideas get passed down and are preserved in myths, stories, poetry and art right up to the present day. They also get embellished as stories, changed, and sometimes distorted, obscuring their original intent and imbedded truths. So we find various

versions of myths and stories that need to be explored to reveal the pearls and veins of truth within them.

A case in point can be seen in the art of Hilma af Klint, who although she lived from 1862 until 1944 has only really become widely known and gotten real recognition in more recent decades especially after the 1986 Los Angeles traveling exhibition titled "The Spiritual in Art." As a side note, *The Secret Doctrine* was displayed as part of that exhibition.

While trained as a classical painter she became interested in all things occult, getting involved in spiritualism and then metaphysical subjects, studying *The Secret Doctrine*, conversing with Rudolph Steiner and shifting her artwork to reflect more abstract and esoteric subjects. She created a series of paintings in 1914 and 1915 called "The Swan". These were influenced by her studies in *The Secret Doctrine* as well as other esoteric writings we are told.

At a recent exhibition of her Swan Art in Sweden an introduction begins with the following:

> The majestic swan symbolized the "grandeur of the spirit" to Helena Blavatsky, founder of The Theosophical Society, a spiritualist movement of great interest to Hilma af Klint; in alchemy, the swan represents the union of opposites necessary for the creation of the philosopher's stone, a substance believed to turn base metals into gold.

In this series, af Klint blends such established symbolism with her own idiosyncratic interpretations. As the series progresses the color range expands, and the swans are replaced with geometric forms suggestive of higher dimensions. The final painting shows the birds, once again, intertwined, and reunited. Overall one can explore and find very interesting symbolism in these paintings.

Long before thinkers like Carl Young and then Joseph Campbell and others showed that myths were not merely to be looked at as overheated imaginative fairy tales, HPB in her writings was revealing that mythology was a means in times past through which truths — physical, psychological, and spiritual — were recorded and preserved, as well as historical facts and events, and often in a veiled fashion. She emphasizes this with various statements throughout her writings.

Here are just a few of the many comments from HPB worth noting:

> Myth was the favorite and universal method of teaching in archaic times. (*Isis* II, p. 493)

> [There are examples] to support the ancient claim of the philosophers that *there is a logos in every mythos*, or a groundwork of truth in every fiction. (*Isis* I, p. 162)

> Who can forget that Troy was once upon a time proclaimed a myth, and Homer a non-existing personage, while the existence of such cities as Herculaneum and Pompeii was denied, and attributed to mere fairy legends? Yet Schliemann proved that Troy had really existed, and the two cities, though buried for long ages under the Vesuvian lava, have had their resurrection day, and live again on the surface of the

> earth. How many more cities and localities called "fabulous" are on the list of future discoveries, how many more personages regarded as mythical will one day become historical, those alone can tell who read the decrees of Fate in the astral light. (*SD* II, p. 236)

Applying the 2nd object of the Theosophical Movement, the comparison of ideas coming out of different cultures and traditions, we find two of these concerning the swan are that of Saraswati from ancient Indian mythology depicted as the wife or sometimes the consort of Brahma, the creator, and the myth of Leda and the Swan, which Westerners are more familiar with, from Greek and Roman myth. Also there have been many works of art depicting, often in very sensuous ways, Leda and the swan by artists such as Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and many others.

In this story the god Zeus infatuated with Leda takes the form of a swan and seduces and rapes her from which unfold other stories and ideas rolled out in Greek and Roman mythology. Without getting into too many details of the story Leda eventually bears two eggs, from which hatched Helen (of Troy) and Clytemnestra who became the wife of Agamemnon, and the twins Castor and Pollux, the Gemini Twins.

In Indian mythology the Hindu deity *Brahma,* who represents the power of creation, is referred to interestingly as *ekahamsa*, the "one swan". His feminine counterpart is *Saraswati,* who is also associated with the swan. As with the story of Leda, Brahma also takes the form of a swan and expresses his infatuation with her. In some tellings, according to Hindu mythology, *Brahma* the creator god did marry *Saraswati*, said to be his daughter; her own right as a goddess is of the highest order mainly known as the goddess of wisdom.

Saraswati is often depicted riding a swan, or *hamsa* in Indian art and her association with the swan is highlighted by the title *Hamsavāhini* which means "she who has a *hamsa* as her vehicle".

In the most philosophical expression of *Brahma* and *Saraswati* she represents Sophia, the divine feminine, the receptive, or that which receives the emanation or creative logos, the light from the ever-unknowable darkness, sometimes referred to as the "Black Swan."

Returning to the Greek myth of Leda and the Swan, it is thought to be at least as old as 400 BCE, when a Greek artist may have sculpted the earliest known representation of the myth. It seems to have been a well-known story closer to its own time of creation.

In a recent discovery (what goes around comes around, as Theosophy teaches) archaeologists at Pompeii found a Roman fresco depicting Leda and the Swan in 2018. Pompeii was buried under volcanic ash when Mount Vesuvius erupted in the 1st century CE. The latest find is believed to have decorated a bedroom in a wealthy home near the ancient city center. As mentioned earlier, Pompei is just one example of what were once considered fanciful myths that turned out to be true.

One parallel in both the Hindu and Greek myths is that both *Brahma* and Zeus, the creator gods, take the form of swans and are infatuated with Saraswati and Leda from which various stories emerge. Like all myths, over time they tend to be told and retold and sometimes get twisted and degenerate as societies morally dip and become more materialistic. HPB addresses this fact:

> One has to learn the reason of a symbol before one depreciates it. . . . Pan, the great god of nature, was generally figured in connection with aquatic birds, geese especially, and so were other gods. If, later on, with the gradual degeneration of religion, the gods to whom geese were sacred, became Priapic deities, it does not stand to reason that water fowls were made sacred to Pan and other Phallic deities, as some scoffers, even of antiquity, would have it (*see Petronii Satyrica*, cxxxvi.); but that the abstract and divine power of procreative nature had become grossly anthropomorphized. Nor does the Swan of Leda show "Priapic doings and her enjoyment thereof," as Mr Hargrave Jennings chastely expresses it; for the myth is but another version of the same philosophical idea of cosmogony. Swans are frequently found associated with Apollo, as they are the emblems of water and fire (sunlight also), before the separation of the Elements. (*SD* I, p. 358)

The swan, along with ancient myths the bird appears in have been kept alive in more and or less meaningful forms down the ages through various philosophers, writers, and artists. In most of these stories the swan is associated with the spiritual side of life.

Besides the Hindu *Saraswati* and Greek/Roman Leda there are other legends that revolve around swans. The legend of the Children of Lir, the Celtic swan myth, has long been told in Ireland, and adapted into many forms of art and literature. This Irish myth forms the basis of the famous ballet, "Swan Lake", composed by Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. The roots of that myth can be traced back to around 700 CE, then passed down through the oral tradition; the first written edition which is the basis of the story today is from the 1500s.

We also find the swan as a prominent symbol in Finnish folklore and mythology. In archaeological excavations done in the Karelia region, for example a child was found and its body was lying upon the wing of a swan. In Finnish mythology and folklore, the swan is the divine messenger between the living and the dead.

The Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden are referred to as the Five Swans which also figure into Norse folklore. The national bird of Finland is a swan, specifically the whooper swan, and the mute swan became the national bird of Denmark in 1984, usurping the skylark.

Artists, writers, poets, and more recently film makers have always kept alive symbolism and themes from ancient mythology. The very popular *Star Wars* by George Lucas is an obvious case in point. And, of course, James Joyce's *Ulysses,* considered a modernist classic, is a retelling of *The Odyssey*.

The acclaimed 1988 novel, *The Alchemist*, by Brazilian author Paulo Coelho has classic mythological themes through the journey of its protagonist. Many similar ideas are delved into by Joseph Campbell in his *Hero with a Thousand Faces* and other writings. Even a super successful sporting goods company is named after the flying Greek goddess of victory, Nike.

We must not forget the classic Hans Christian Anderson's children's story that has been passed down through generations since the mid-19th century, "The Ugly Duckling", a story with a mythical theme. Misplaced and misidentified at first, shunned, banished, after a lonely journey, it is transformed, so to say, through time and experience, into its true beautiful identity, as Kalahansa, the Swan. This too can be the future of our evolutionary journey.

> Saith the Great Law: "In order to be-come the KNOWER OF ALL-SELF, thou hast first of SELF to be the knower". To reach the knowledge of that SELF, thou hast to give up Self to Non-Self, Being to Non-Being, and then thou canst repose between the wings of the GREAT BIRD. Aye, sweet is rest between the wings of that which is not born, nor dies, but is the AUM throughout eternal ages.
>
> Bestride the Bird of Life if thou would'st know.
>
> (*The Voice of the Silence*, Fragment 1, vv. 19-20) ✧

Whenever the Logos becomes flesh, there is sacred testimony to the Great Sacrifice and the Great Renunciation of Blessed Teachers behind every attempt to enlighten human minds, to summon the latent love in human hearts for all humanity, to fan the sparks of true compassion, in human beings into the fires of Initiation. The mark of the Avatar is that in him the Paraclete ["advocate" or "helper"], the Spirit of Eternal Truth, manifests so that even the blind may see, the deaf may hear, the lame may walk, the unregenerate may gain confidence in the possibility and the promise of Self-redemption.

Hermes Trismegistus

What is My Aim?
Right Action on the Spiritual Path

ROSA SOPHIA GODSHALL

WHEN I arrive in Ventura on my way to Ojai, California — where J. Krishnamurti lived from 1922 to 1986 — ash is falling from a red sky. In the grocery store, the cashier says, "Be careful out there. It doesn't look good." I don a mask before carrying my bags outside. In a car on the way to Ojai, the sky begins to clear. Behind us, it still looks orange, and I am told the smoke and ash is carried on the wind from the Hughes Fire in Los Angeles County. When I arrive at the Krotona Institute of Theosophy, near the Krishnamurti Foundation in America, I meet one of the administrators who hands me an N-95 mask. I live in Florida, I tell her, but at least hurricanes — unlike fires — can be predicted.

The Krotona Institute is a gem tucked in the Ojai Valley, surrounded by majestic mountains draped in dramatic clouds. There is a stunning view just about everywhere, particularly from the bench in the library garden. On clear evenings, I can view the famous "pink moment", when the mountains sing with a soft color reminiscent of a Maxfield Parrish painting. This is my third time visiting Krotona, where I am attending a class of the Theosophical Society's Partners Program — a course that teaches participants how to share Theosophy through presentations, articles, or service to the organization.

In the morning, I reread *At the Feet of the Master*, in which Krishnamurti names four qualifications for walking the spiritual path: discrimination, desirelessness, good conduct, and love. In spiritual study groups, we often discuss how to apply spiritual principles. I aim to return to myself each day. Through twice-daily meditation, I seek to bring the concepts Krishnamurti spoke of into every part of my body. I aim to live more consciously.

Seeking the Real

In the course of daily life, most people are asleep. They act foolishly, Krishnamurti says, and they follow the unreal instead of the real. What is "the real" and how do we find it? He writes, "Until they learn to distinguish between these two [the real and the unreal] they have not ranged themselves on God's side, and so this discrimination is the first step."

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Through deep personal inquiry and meditation, we can work toward making this discernment. In meditation, I envision light moving through me. I ground myself in sensing my body.

As a poet, I like to play with forms — sonnets, ghazals, and sestinas — counting syllables and noting the tone. While it may seem counterintuitive, limiting oneself to form and structure can provide limitless opportunities for growth and evolution. By choosing to limit myself to a syllable count in a sonnet, I give myself a greater opportunity to convey a universal message. In a similar way, beginning with body-sensing in meditation helps me to expand and reach out to my higher self in ways I never could before.

While attending a Buddhist high school in Pennsylvania, I struggled during morning meditation, seated in a lotus position on a zafu mat, my thoughts a constant barrage. How to quiet them? Body-sensing opened the door to a greater clarity. By rooting myself in the body and envisioning the alignment of my chakras, thoughts became less important.

One day, during a deep meditation, I realized I could hear a voice on the other side of a closed door in another room. I knew the voice. It was Rosa, the person I am in this life. I had begun to hear my own thoughts like a distant radio. The radio never stopped, reciting everything from past experiences to tasks I would have to do later in the week and plans I had for the future. I observed this from another place — from the position of a witness — startled and amazed by the way thoughts had manifested so far away, so separate from myself.

Ever since that initial experience, whenever I meditate, my thoughts become a distinctly separate entity — like an ephemeral thing floating somewhere off to the side, unimportant, chattering unceasingly, but not at all a distraction. A witness exists within my center, observing the foundational sensing of the body. There are three parts: an active participant in sensing, a collection of chaotic thoughts, and an impartial witness.

After meditating at Krotona on the second day of the Partners Program, I listen to James Finley's *Turning to the Mystics*, a podcast produced by the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He is talking about the spiritual interpretation of the poetry of T. S. Eliot. In the midst of his interpretation, I am struck by one phrase: "The loss of awareness is suffering."

As I deepen my meditation practice, I find strength to face the challenges of daily life: money concerns, worries about my mother's health, the tumultuous end to an unhealthy relationship. I seek my center and move forward on a current of sensing. This foundational form — like a sonnet or sestina — aids in my ability to expand to a deeper creative expression.

Close your eyes and focus on sensing every part of your body. Envision the chakras and a golden thread connecting each point of energy within. Center yourself on this thread and ponder how sensing the vehicle we have been given might lead to a greater expansion of awareness.

The Need for Right Action

At the Feet of the Master remains a classic, perhaps because many of these principles are universal, overlapping with various spiritual paths. Our desires are not who we are, Krishnamurti tells us. Through careful self-observation, we can work to recognize the many aspects within ourselves which we mistakenly call "I": I like, I want, I need. "Have no desire to speak", he says, telling the reader to consider carefully before saying anything.

During a free evening, I attend an online meeting of one of my spiritual study groups. A facilitator shares something she heard recently from a friend: "WAIT", she says. "It stands for Why Am I Talking?" I jot this down in my notebook, merging it with my daily aim to always return to my center.

The four principles Krishnamurti names — discrimination, desirelessness, good conduct, and love — are important to one another. Through meditation, we can cultivate self-observation and discrimination. Desirelessness feels to me like something that comes with true dedication to a spiritual path. The more we meditate, building a daily practice, the more we discover we have no other choice.

When I first began meditating, I could not stay focused. I abandoned the practice. But when I rededicated myself, committing to meditation every morning and evening, a need for meditation arose. I had to do it. The center of gravity within my Being had shifted. Certainly, I still had an automatic nature and human desires. But something else had become more important, driving me into my spiritual practice each day.

On the second day of the Partners program, we pair up with classmates to create an outline of a theosophical talk we might present. I work with my friend Stephen, and we choose to explore "right action". As we write down ideas for our outline, I remember my reading of Krishnamurti's work that morning. This felt like an important intersection with the four qualifications. We choose a title for our talk, "Right Action in a Turbulent World", and look up a definition on the Theosophy Wiki website:

> Right action refers to the concept of acting in accordance with the principles of universal brotherhood and compassion . . . aligning with the core tenets of Theosophy which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life and the pursuit of spiritual development through ethical conduct.

We consider examples of situations in which we could have done better — times when we could have worked harder to help relieve suffering. I recall a June day in Stratford-upon-Avon in England over a year ago. I had gone there as part of a graduate study abroad program. While walking with my friend Michael, a homeless man sitting on the sidewalk waved and said something I couldn't understand.

I found myself turning my back, assuming he wanted something. In my head, I counted the money I had, not wanting to give up my last two or three pounds. Michael spoke to him as I waited nearby. When he rejoined me, I asked what he wanted.

"He just noticed we were Americans," Michael said, "and he wanted to know what part of the country we were from."

Something inside me deflated. I felt ashamed.

I had expected a pushy request. I had assumed something about a stranger. I felt overcome with a sense of sorrow and remorse. When I looked back, he was still sitting there, his legs crossed, smiling and waving at passersby.

In the school room at Krotona, Stephen and I sit with notebooks in our laps. "We want to encourage people to consider times when they could have done more — been more compassionate, done something more to help someone in that moment," he says.

I nod. "We face really difficult problems in life, and I think we need to balance right action with creating firm, healthy boundaries. That's a huge challenge."

Those who have experienced injustices or abusive situations might want to know how to apply these principles despite feeling hopeless. How does one cultivate healthy boundaries and balance this with compassion, empathy, and understanding — especially in a toxic situation? *Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankl comes to mind, in which the author recounts his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp and uses it to seek greater understanding.

In the afternoon, Stephen and I present our outline to our classmates. Our presentation, structured around a workshop format, would begin with a short meditation, then move on to discussing right action from a theosophical perspective. Much of the presentation would center around cultivating self-observation and our own personal motivations in the moment. We also acknowledge that many of us feel powerless in the face of larger-scale problems like starvation, war, and mental health crises. How can we help? During our workshop, we would lead a discussion on how we might provide aid, while informing attendees about the international Theosophical Order of Service. We would discuss volunteer opportunities in our communities. At the end of our workshop, we would have another short meditation.

During a question-and-answer session after our presentation, one of our mentors raises a hand and says: "Don't forget that meditation in itself is an active response."

Often, in meditation, I gather my energy and try to send it to someone — a friend, family member, or acquaintance. I practice Reiki, and I have added this to my meditation, too. I will even practice by sending it to those around me during social events, or even in the grocery store.

In one of the spiritual study groups I attend, we aim to meditate daily. With this meditation, we aim to be present — as present as we can be — every day. By opening up, we become a bridge for higher energies. This openness allows us to be present to provide support, whether it is to friends or strangers. It is when we forget ourselves that we make mistakes. We get caught up in everyday life and forget to remember ourselves. The machine, the body, takes over. I remember my aim. I must observe when I am taken. I always return to my center.

Love is the Most Important

Krishnamurti's final two qualifications are good conduct and love. In rereading *At the Feet of the Master*, I notice again how he ends this short book with the most significant qualification of all: "Love is the most important, for if it is strong enough in a man, it forces him to acquire all the rest, and all the rest without it would never be sufficient." The hardest part comes in nurturing self-observation and balancing these qualifications with building healthy boundaries. When faced with an unhealthy or toxic situation, I can give compassion and love to another person while still disengaging from them.

Krishnamurti writes of condemning something which goes against the love of God, while balancing it with careful thought and action, stating: "You must be on your guard against unintentional cruelty." I will not disparage anyone, but I must also speak the truth. I must always return to my center. This, indeed, is a delicate balancing act for anyone on the spiritual path.

On the third day of the Partners program, I accompany a small group of classmates to Santa Barbara. It is a winding drive along mountainsides, with picturesque views of a pink and orange sunset along the way. We drive past the unassuming turn-off at first, then double back to pull into the driveway of a Vedanta temple. We park just as the sun fully sets. We climb the steps to the temple a few minutes before six o'clock and step inside, immediately encompassed by a warm, safe energy. We take off our shoes, reminding me of my days at the Buddhist high school where we always did this upon entering the building.

We find seats in the mostly empty temple, plunged into darkness except for the soft golden glow of low electric lights illuminating the altar, above which hangs a painting of a robed man meditating. We sit in silence for a few minutes.

A nun dressed in white and yellow robes emerges from the back, sinks to her knees and bows before the altar. What follows is a ritual involving the elements — candles, a ringing bell, water, and a beautiful thing I cannot name which the nun waves around her in a precise manner. Music begins, a haunting reverberation, and it takes me a moment to realize the voices come from behind and above us, women singing on a balcony.

I sense my body, beginning with my right arm, my right leg, my left leg and my left arm. I watch with rapt attention as the nun carries out her ritual, and when it is done, she steps into the back again. The singing continues, filling the space with a light I can feel but cannot see.

When we leave the temple, only the stars light the sky. "That was beautiful", I say. Love fills me — love rises from the tips of my toes to the top of my head, bringing a sense of inner peace I have not felt in a long time.

I am grateful for the darkness, for the pain, for all the unpleasant, uncomfortable things. And with that gratitude comes something even greater: a sense that I have grown closer to unity, farther from duality, at one — and in love — with life itself.

I sense my body. I aim to return to my center. ✧

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