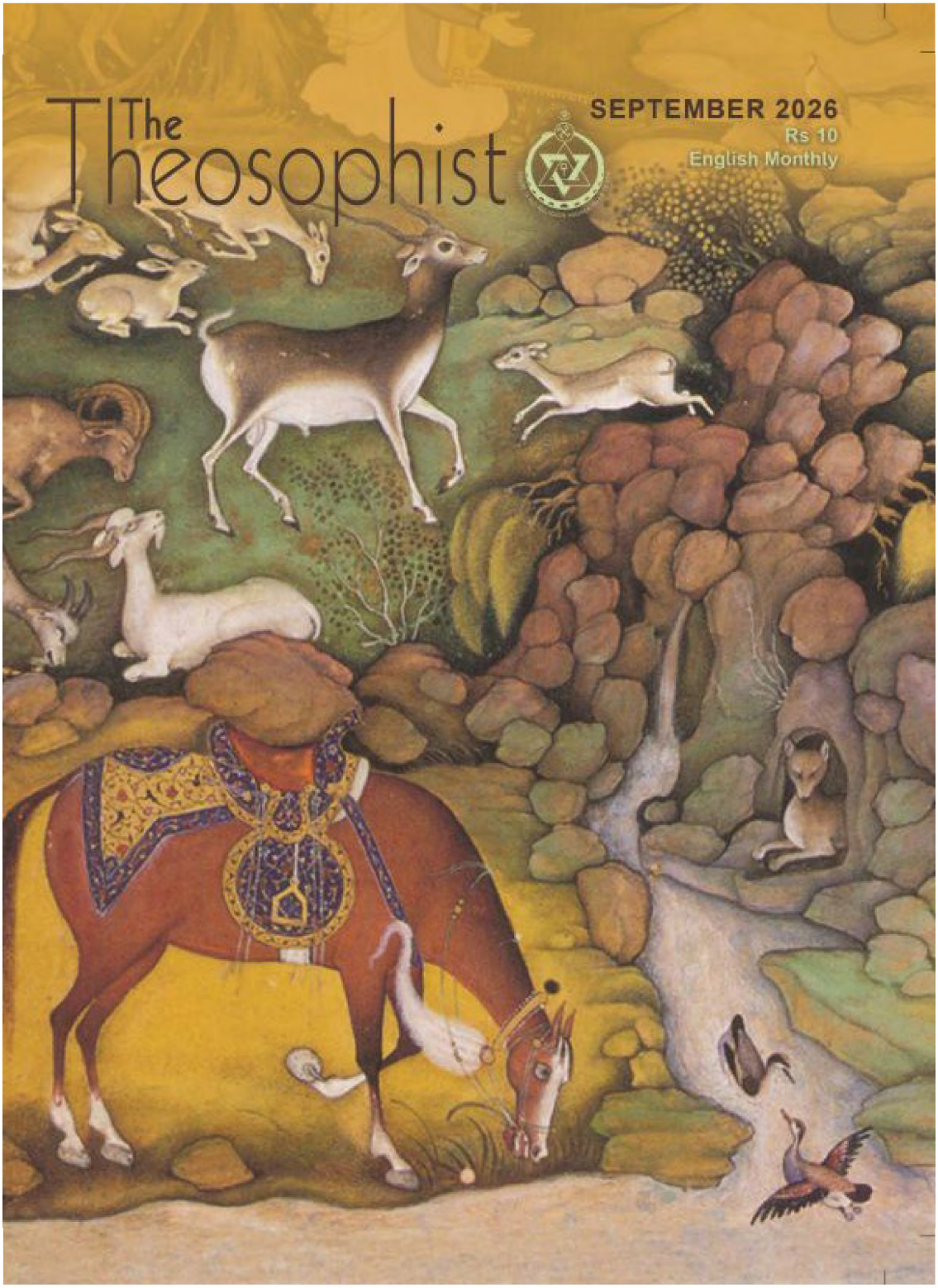

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Cover: Part of a painting from Mughal emperor Akbar's (r. 1556–1605) personal copy of Indian poet Amir Khusrau Dihlavi's (1253–1325) verses, showing various animals mesmerized by the sound of music. Painting (1597–98) attributed to Miskin and is on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. (See a related article on p. 30 of this issue.)

This journal is the official organ of the President, founded by H. P. Blavatsky on 1 Oct. 1879. The Theosophical Society is responsible only for official notices appearing in this journal.

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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The Theosophical Society is composed of students, belonging to any religion in the world or to none, who are united by their approval of the Society's Objects, by their wish to remove religious antagonisms and to draw together men and women 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 human beings to know the Spirit as themselves and the mind and body as their 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.

Are We Fully Human?

TIM BOYD

AS children we learn to perceive differences. Comparison and contrast are normal. We see people who dress like we do, and those who don't; who worship the same way and those who don't; who have different facial features and skin color; who speak languages we don't understand. When we ask questions about them the answers from our elders take root and our worldview takes shape.

At the minimum we become aware of diversity, but we are also informed of qualitative distinctions. It is the normal training of the intellect we receive from family, culture, and social context. It is a training for our capacity to analyze that brings order to the world. In combination with sensations, feelings, and the desires that arise from them, intellect is the function that guides and misguides us in our life journey. Rightly used, it leads toward liberation. In its normal, diminished use, it functions as a potent servant to the countless desires that arise and inhabit our personal consciousness. *Kāma-manas* is the term used for this mind as an instrument of desire.

There is another training possible for the intellect. Although not a normal feature of our upbringing and education, it is possible for the mind and its tool of intellect to be taught to look for, and see, commonality, shared qualities, interdependence, even inseparability from others, to see the importance of bonds of love that permit no separation.

If we are lucky, some person in our lives nourishes the seeds of such an awareness — a grandparent, a friend, a teacher. The seeds for this level of seeing don't need to be planted in us. They have always been there, unattended. For most of us this alternative education begins later in life as a process of self-learning. Its beginnings require an intense period of "unlearning" — a releasing of the hold of a lifelong training in separateness and comparison.

"We Are Not Yet Fully Human"

Many years ago, Joy Mills, a much loved, profound student and teacher of the Ageless Wisdom, made a statement which, at the time, puzzled me. What she said was: "We are not yet fully human." My initial question was: How is that possible? I have hands, eyes, a body. I think thoughts, feel emotions, have a will. How can I not yet be fully human? At the time that she made the statement she did not choose to fully answer the question, leaving it to her listeners to pursue it.

What is the missing element that completes our humanity?

One answer might be found on the

level of biology. The human being is evolving. Within the human genome there are many, as yet, unexpressed genes — more qualities and capacities are waiting to be revealed. From a material science point of view there is more ahead for us. We are not yet complete.

Evolution is normally thought of as the unfoldment of form in response to environmental demands, operating solely within the confines of the material world, but consciousness also unfolds. And the hidden potentials, the "latent powers" of consciousness are limitless.

Dehumanization

Another cause for our unfulfilled humanity can be found in our personal and social behaviors. There is a word we come across from time to time, particularly in the reporting of problems in the world. The word is dehumanize, meaning, to strip a person or a group of essential, defining human qualities.

It has been a constant feature of human history as well as a blight on our current time. It is the justification for war, colonialism, racism, genderism, slavery, caste in all its forms, hatreds and abuse of all varieties. It is also the basis for the twin illusions of superiority and inferiority, and the deluded states of mind that accompany each. In each case the sense of separation, of standing apart from humanity as a whole, and the isolation incurred by that belief, distorts our higher potential.

The Maha Chohan's Letter

Many of us have read, or are at least aware of *The Mahatma Letters*, one of the source books of the theosophical tradition. The Mahatmas, or the Masters of the Wisdom, are those fully human beings, the flowering of human kind, who have fused the spiritual and material components of their being. They remain as teachers and guides to a struggling humanity.

The Letters which comprise the book were written to A. P. Sinnett, an early Anglo-Indian member of the Theosophical Society (TS). Although all of the letters are instructive, one in particular has been recognized as preeminent, as the marching orders for the TS and the movement it spawned. It is called the Maha Chohan's letter because that is who wrote it. Technically speaking it was not written by the Maha Chohan, but was a summary by one of the Masters of a conversation with him.

Maha Chohan, of course, is not a name, but a designation of a position or status within the hierarchy of the Mahatmas, the great (*mahā*) souls (*ātma*). In much the same way as we regard the Masters, the Maha Chohan is regarded by them as the Great Master or Lord of Lords. In one of the letters, he is described as one "to whose vision the future lies like an open page".

In the Maha Chohan's letter, he comments on a deeper aspect of the ways we dehumanize ourselves and others. He identifies the two most prominent conditions of mind that block us from the humanizing connection with spirit, as materialism and bigotry (mostly religious).

Materialism is understandable to us. "Unrestrainedly indulging in the animal

propensities" is the described effect of a view that recognizes matter as the sole reality, which is to say a fixation on the satisfaction of the senses. It is not merely hedonism, or living the life of a "party animal". It also expresses as the unrestrained consumption of the planet's resources to satisfy a want for personal comfort and ease.

The Bigoted Mind

The effects of the bigoted mind he describes as "the utter deformation of the intellectual principle". In theosophical teachings we understand the "Mind" (Manas) in two aspects — the lower (concrete) mind, and the higher (abstract) mind.

The higher mind is an aspect of the Higher Self, in theosophical parlance the Higher Triad, which includes Buddhi (the intuitional/spiritual) consciousness, and Ātma (the all-pervading cosmic life). It is this Higher Self which survives the death of the body and personality, and reincarnates.

The lower mind is where the described "utter deformation" takes place. The intellect is the seat of our thinking and reasoning, our knowledge, and logic. It is this same intellect which we cultivate in order to discriminate right from wrong and set the moral compass of our living. The pathway that leads to the "utter deformation" is described in the letter as "the deliberate surrender of the intellect, and its imprisonment in the narrow grooves of bigotry and superstition". Although the words are clear, it might help to give an example.

Bigotry is defined as "the stubborn, unreasonable hatred or intolerance of people who are different. It involves strong bias against others based on their race, religion, gender, or beliefs." It can be regarded in a couple of ways. As an individual shortcoming it appears as those people (with whom we are all too familiar) who harbor active prejudices against some group of their choice. All of us have acquaintances, friends or family, who fall into this category. But bigotry is also systematic and institutionalized.

Take the example of the experience of the TS in India of the late1800s. The British colonial system had been active in India for more than one hundred years before the TS arrived. One of the features of colonialism, wherever it occurs, is the required conviction of the colonizers that the colonized people are inferior.

The British regarded all facets of Indian society as backward and in need of the saving grace of British knowledge, culture, "civilization", and especially religion. Indian science, languages, and literature were dismissed as useless and primitive. Religious practice was deemed barbaric compared to European "enlightenment". The inadequacies the British assigned were also seen as racial, inherent, and unavoidable. It is all part of the dehumanizing colonial process.

In the one hundred and fifty years since that time India has emerged as one of the leading nations in the world, surpassing England in its economy, the scope of its democracy, the global recognition of its spirituality, its sciences and literature.

But what was the effect on the bigoted intellectual principle?

The most prominent effect is that such a distortion prevents a clear perception of reality. The well-known mantra, "From the unreal lead me to the Real", is not possible for one to whom the unreality of inherently superior races, nations, and religions has become their way of seeing the world. The basis for such unreality begins with, not just the assumption of superiority, but the conviction of separateness, what has been described as the "heresy of separateness". Violence, physical and psychological, is the unavoidable outcome. Why? Because the systematic expression of such a shared "deformation of the intellectual principle" strips people of essential human qualities; it dehumanizes them, making mistreatment not just possible, but easy, even necessary. You treat a sister or brother differently than a horse or a dog, or a slave.

The Deeper Cause

In a sense, the fact of incarnating in a body and assuming all of the personal identities that accompany it, is a root cause of our disconnection from Spirit. Just to be alive and functioning in the world places powerful demands on the direction in which we focus our energies and attention. We have to eat; find shelter from the elements; do some form of work to provide for basic sustenance. Relationships with family, friends and the broader community require attention and effort. National concerns affect us. Religious observance shapes our thoughts and demands our time. It is a long list. It is little wonder that deeper aspects of our being go wanting. But mere survival or well-adjusted living alone fail to invoke our full humanity.

Our view of ourselves as separate, independent beings and the self-centered behavior that goes with it is one way that we remove ourselves from being fully human. But there is a deeper cause of which our behaviors and social arrangements are only a symptom.

What is a human being, not merely from the material or behavioral point of view?

From the perspective of the Ageless Wisdom the human being is more than biology or psychology. Stated simply, the human being is the Highest Spirit and lowest matter linked by mind. Matter and mind we understand to some degree, and this is the level to which our normal thought and function is confined. But the humanizing influence of the spiritual component that completes us, lies out of our reach most of the time. It is sensed, but for most of us is too subtle, too removed to be an active participant in our daily lives.

What Is It We Are Missing?

So, what is it that we are missing? In the *Bhagavadgitā* Krishna, as the Avatar, the embodiment of the all-embracing divine, makes the statement that he is "the Inner Ruler Immortal seated in the hearts of all beings". In the *Stanzas of Dzyan*, the basis for *The Secret Doctrine* by H. P. Blavatsky, the statement is made that as human beings we have within us "the mind to embrace the universe". In the Bible St Paul declares: "Christ in you, the hope of glory".

Across the spectrum of the Ageless Wisdom teachings the point is continually

made that it is the spiritual component of our being that elevates us to our true fully human status; and that so long as we are disconnected from it, we live as isolated, fleeting personalities in a shadow world. It is only as we open the link to the soul that new vistas and powers appear.

The spiritual traditions of the world exist to remind us of the direction for our growth. Even though we don't listen, or are unable to hear, they constantly whisper their message of return to the source; of a restoration of a lost and necessary connection. They exist not just to point the way, but to instruct in the tools required for the journey home — the self-education that, over time, leads beyond mere knowledge to understanding, wholeness, freedom, and active healing presence in the world. ✧

Every day think as you wake up: Today I am fortunate to have woken up. I am alive. I have a precious human life. I am not going to waste it. I am going to use all my energies to develop myself, to expand my heart out to others, to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. I am going to have kind thoughts towards others, I am not going to get angry, or think badly about others. I am going to benefit others as much as I can.

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

Annie Besant as Instructor and Educator

JOHN ALGEO

LEARNING is of two types, which we might call exoteric and esoteric. Exoteric learning puts facts into the minds of students and develops their skill in using those facts; it preserves and expands the traditions of a culture. Esoteric learning elicits from students an interior wisdom that they did not know they possessed; it attunes their outer minds to inner archetypal truths. Both sorts of learning are good and necessary.

One of my university mentors taught a course that was an introduction to advanced work for new postgraduate students who were studying to become college teachers. He told us: "You are the last of the Romans. The city of Rome is surrounded by invading barbarian hordes. You have only two options: you can let the barbarians overrun the city and destroy it, or you can make Romans out of the barbarians. I am here to tell you how to transform the barbarians into Romans." He was, of course, speaking metaphorically. By "Rome" he meant Western culture and by "Romans", those who had inherited that culture and valued it; by "barbarians" he meant the new generation of young people who had not yet fully absorbed the culture.

Exoteric instruction is about making Romans out of barbarians. To be sure, instead of "Rome" we can also use some other metaphor for any of the great world cultures: Indic, Sinitic, or whatever. All of the great world cultures are important; each has something to contribute to the total civilization of humanity. All those cultures need to be preserved by transforming the invading barbarian hordes of each new generation around the world into Romans or Kurukshetrans or Confucians, according to the land of their nurture. More than that, the barbarians need to know, not just about their own culture, but also about Rome, Kurukshetra, the land of Lu, and all the great cultures. For humanity is one, and the diverse great cultures are the many facets of its diamond unity.

Exoteric instruction, although fundamentally important for the future of humanity, is not, however, enough. Esoteric education is also vitally necessary. It needs a different metaphor. We are all rough

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Dr John Algeo (11.12.1930–10.13. 2019) was President of the Theosophical Society (TS) in America (1993–2002), Vice-President of the international TS in Adyar, Chennai, India, until 2008, and Professor Emeritus of English and linguistics. In 2014, he won the Subba Row Medal for his significant contributions to Theosophical literature. First published in *The Theosophist,* vol. 129, No. 1, October 2007, p. 13-17.

stones that need to become perfect ashlars so that we can assume our proper place in the Temple of Humanity. We are base metallic lead that needs to be transformed into incorruptible gold by an alchemical process of sublimation. Such a change cannot be imposed from without; it is not a matter of instruction by building something into students ("instruct" is from Latin, meaning "to build in"). It is rather a matter of true education or of leading students out of the darkness of ignorance into the light of true knowledge ("educate" is from Latin, meaning "to lead forth").

Esoteric education is the aim of all the great world teachers: the Buddha, the Christ, Zoroaster, Shankaracharya, Confucius, Plato, and the rest. Esoteric education opens our minds to what we already knew, but did not know that we knew. It switches on an interior light. It makes it possible for us to hear the Voice of the Silence. It reveals to us, not just the knowledge of time, but the wisdom of eternity. It sets our feet upon a Path that leads, not outward, but inward to the very heart of Being.

Annie Besant (1.10.1847-- 20.9.1933) was one of the world's great teachers — an accomplished instructor and a master educator. Throughout her life, she advanced the cause of learning, both exoteric and esoteric.

As a young woman, Besant worked in the National Secular Society and the Fabian Society to free her fellow Britons from the stifling chains of narrow-minded bigotry and economic exploitation. She collaborated with Charles Bradlaugh on the radical newspaper, *The National Reformer*. She worked to instruct women in matters of personal health, safety, and rights, including her ground-breaking organization of the exploited "match girls", who worked under appallingly dangerous conditions for disgracefully low pay. The union they formed under Besant's inspiration engaged in a successful strike that produced more humane working conditions and improved compensation for those women. It also showed their fellow Englishwomen and Englishmen that they could learn to better their state in life by their own endeavors.

In 1889, Besant was elected to membership on the London School Board by a decisive majority of the vote. In that role, she worked for radical reforms in the schooling of children, introducing free meals for poor and undernourished pupils and medical examinations for all elementary students. She knew that the mind cannot be instructed if the body is weak or ill. Her view of the human constitution was always a holistic one. The whole human being must be tended to if humanity is to thrive, just as all human beings must be cared for if our species is to progress.

In that same year, Besant's concept of holism was vastly expanded. She read H. P. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* because she had been invited to write a review of it for *The Pall Mall Gazette*. That review led to Besant's meeting Blavatsky and opened a new era in her life. Her emphasis changed from an exclusive focus on exoteric instruction to a combination of it with esoteric

education. Besant never abandoned the exoteric, but she enlarged her concerns to include the esoteric. She realized the importance of both outer instruction and inner education for the development of a whole human being. Under the inspiration she drew from her contact with Blavatsky and her discovery of the Ageless Wisdom of Theosophy, Besant became, not just an effective instructor, but a true educator.

After Blavatsky's death in 1891, Besant succeeded her as the spiritual leader of the original Theosophical Society and the primary esoteric educator for theosophists in her time. She first traveled to India in 1893, and thereafter that land became a major focus for her work — social, instructional, and educational. For example, in 1898, she founded the Central Hindu College in Varanasi, where students received both secular instruction and spiritual education. In 1904, she founded the Central Hindu College Girls' School and supported improved education for all women:

> India, she insisted, could never become great again unless women and men walked side by side and hand in hand, just as a bird could not fly high with one wing broken before it starts upon its flight. . . . She also spoke out against the seclusion of women, arguing that this shutting up of women is unworthy of civilization. Indian men do not deserve to be free politically, until they give freedom socially to Indian women. (Nancy Fix Anderson's "Bridging Cross-cultural Feminisms: Annie Besant and Women's Rights in England and India, 1874–1933", from *Review*, 3 [1994]: 574).

At the same time, Annie Besant continued her involvement with political matters in India. By 1914, she was editing the politically focused newspaper, *New India*. In 1916, she established the Indian Home Rule League. She had earlier become a prominent member of the Indian National Congress, founded in 1885 by another theosophist, Allan Octavian Hume. In 1917, Besant became the first woman and the first non-Indian to serve as president of that organization. Eight years later, in 1925, she was succeeded in the office by Sarojini Naidu, a poet called "The Nightingale of India" and the first Indian woman to serve as president of the Congress.

Sarojini Naidu admired both Mohandas Gandhi and Annie Besant. The Welsh Cardiff Lodge's website reports this eminent Indian artist and activist as having said of Annie Besant, "Had it not been for her and her enthusiasm, one could not have seen Mr Gandhi leading the cause of Indian freedom today. It was Mrs Besant who laid the foundation of modern India — Dr Besant was a combination of Parvati, Lakshmi and Saraswati." That is high praise indeed by one daughter of India for another, the one native and the other adopted.

Beyond all Annie Besant's social activism and exoteric instructional work, she was an esoteric educator. And her great achievement in that role is attested, among other ways, by the theosophical books she published or that were compiled from her inspiring talks. ✧

Guru Purnima and Spiritual Rebirth — I

KIRK B. GRADIN

> . . . O Disciple! Before thou wert made fit to meet thy Teacher face to face, thy MASTER light to light, what wert thou told? Before thou canst approach the foremost gate thou hast to learn to part thy body from thy mind, to dissipate the shadow, and to live in the eternal. For this, thou hast to live and breathe in all, as all that thou perceivest breathes in thee; to feel thyself abiding in all things, all things in SELF . . .
>
> Of teachers there are many; the MASTER-SOUL is one, Alaya, the Universal Soul. Live in that MASTER as Its ray in thee. Live in thy fellows as they live in It . . . Thou hast to be prepared to answer Dharma, the stern law, whose voice will ask thee at thy first, at thy initial step: "Hast thou complied with all the rules, O thou of lofty hopes? Hast thou attuned thy heart and mind to the great mind and heart of all mankind? For as the sacred River's roaring voice whereby all Nature-sounds are echoed back, so must the heart of him 'who in the stream would enter', thrill in response to every sigh and thought of all that lives and breathes."
>
> — *The Voice of the Silence*

A THEME involving Guru Purnima would not be properly addressed without first acknowledging the Teachers from whose wisdom this essay is derived. Besides *The Voice of the Silence* and *The Secret Doctrine*, there are at least three articles by H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) which are pertinent: "Practical Occultism", "Chelas" and "Chelas and Lay Chelas". Despite claims to the contrary, according to HPB's testimony, W. Q. Judge's life was that of an "accepted" chela. Among his many priceless pieces, there are at least two articles of extreme value on this theme titled "Living the Higher Life" and "The Allegorical Umbrella". And finally, we have drawn heavily from the writings of Shri Raghavan Iyer, the third volume of *The Gupta Vidya* in particular, in which we find an entire section on "The Guruparampara". This collection of his talks brilliantly covers

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seven of the worlds great spiritual traditions including titles such as "Jnāna Yoga", "Shiva and Self-Regeneration" and "The Gospel According to St John". All articles by all three Teachers can be found and downloaded online at <TheosophyTrust.org>. Many of the articles by Shri Raghavan found in this section of *The Gupta Vidya* were also printed as introductory essays in a series called "Sacred Texts", first published in the 1980s by Concord Grove Press. Finally, for those interested in a short biography of Shri Raghavan Iyer and the replaying of his stunning inaugural address for the Institute of World Culture in Santa Barbara, both can be found recently uploaded at the IWC YouTube channel: "IWCinsantabarbara".

Most students of Theosophy are familiar with the central importance of the guru, the spiritual preceptor, the guide or teacher as found in many of the great religious, philosophical, and spiritual traditions of humanity. While the modern Western intellect proudly asserts its self-reliance, its ability to pull itself up by its own mental bootstraps, Eastern and esoteric traditions regard the Teacher-Disciple or Guru-Chela relationship as the most sacred, vital and consequential of all, exceeding in importance even that between parent and child. This is because the upward are of soul evolution now facing humanity, is in fact, a life or death struggle with many tragic casualties. Just as without the nurturing protection and watchful guidance of the parent, the child would perish, so too without the true Masters of the Wisdom — the Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas, Adepts, or Seers — and their disciples, the human family would be lost.

At the same time, in the darkness of Kali Yuga, where everything is inverted, there are many false teachers as well as crowds of ersatz or failed disciples. Many wish to be thought of as teachers and awakened spiritual leaders without having been put through the fire, without undergoing the long selfless discipline of studentship, let alone the terrible trials and training of true discipleship. Our inability to recognize true servants of humanity in our midst or understand the vital function they fulfill in human evolution only underlines our present blindness.

Teachers and messengers who constitute the noble trustees of Theosophia, are exceedingly rare but vital logoic links in the great *guruparampara* chain. The spiritual rebirth they offer is not only a baptismal immersion in universal compassion, altruism, and higher states of noetic universal consciousness and intelligence, but an opportunity to crush the personal ego — to train ourselves to participate in an endless labor on behalf of the whole of evolving life. The aspiration to enter this everflowing current of divine wisdom begins with the joyous study of their teachings in circles of harmony, genuine *sanghas* of love and mutual respect devoted to universal brotherhood. In brief, this is what B. P. Wadia referred to as transforming ourselves into "the steady burning flame of the Nachiketas fire", symbol of the disciple.

In the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions, teachers of every kind are especially celebrated and remembered on a holy day each year known as Guru Purnima. The Sanskrit word *purnima* refers to the full moon day of every lunar cycle, marking a transition point of abundance, completion, and fulfillment. Guru Purnima occurs every year in the lunar month *āshādha*, which usually falls in the Gregorian calendar in June or July. This year (2026) the event fell on 29 July.

While Blavatsky repeatedly describes the nefarious astral influence the full moon can have upon the unwary, for the initiate who has begun transforming the lunar vestures to reflect the purposes of the Higher Self, the mysterious spiritual elixir called *soma* derived from the invisible moon can be used to illuminate the way for others. Concentrated adoration and abiding gratitude for those unseen hierarchies of beings and countless teachers of eternal wisdom reaching back into the night of time, of which the true Guru is the living agent, is one of the keys to discovering our way to a second or inner birth of service and responsibility.

Perhaps the oldest known origin associated with Guru Purnima is contained in the *Shiva Purāna*. Here it is depicted as the day in which Shiva became the Ādi Guru, the first or primordial Guru. Similar to what is said of Krishna in the *Gitā*, in the early verses of the *Śata-Rudra Samhita*, Shiva is described as incarnating in every Dvāpara Yuga to embody and preserve the science of Yoga, that discipline by which the individuated soul reunites with the Supreme Spirit, the Jivātma with the Paramātma. According to the Purana, from the time Shiva appeared in permanent residence on Mount Kailas, his extraordinarily radiant presence attracted many devotees. But because he never spoke or moved, people soon drifted away except for seven aspiring rishis. In time, he opened his eyes and due to their pleading gave a single beginning meditative instruction. Seven disciples devotedly practised the meditation for another 84 years (12x7). On the summer solstice that marks the advent of *dakshināyana*, the southern course of the sun, Shiva opened his eyes once again. He saw how the rishis had become shining receptacles, wonderfully receptive. He could not ignore them any longer. On the very next full moon day, the supreme yogin turned south in order to impart the secrets of his wisdom to these seven men. This is Shiva as Dakshināmurti, he who sitting at the northernmost point or pinnacle of ascent, faces south in order to impart divine wisdom. The seven who sat at his feet became known as the Saptarshis and were given the duty of sharing the science of yoga across the world.

Blavatsky referred to such ancient myths as an allegorical science rich with many levels of meaning, both cosmic and human. In the original facsimilie 1888 edition of *The Secret Doctrine*, Shiva, in addition to being a symbolic representation of the triune logos in the Vedic tradition, is also one of the many names of that nameless, ever-living presence who seeks "neither rest nor Nirvana. . .

remaining constantly on Earth" for the salvation of humanity.

> He is *the* "Initiator", called the "GREAT SACRIFICE". For, sitting at the threshold of LIGHT, he looks into it from within the circle of Darkness, which he will not cross; nor will he quit his post till the last day of this life-cycle. Why does the solitary Watcher remain at his self-chosen post? Why does he sit by the fountain of primeval Wisdom, of which he drinks no longer, as he has naught to learn which he does not know — aye, neither on this Earth, nor in its heaven? Because the lonely, sore-footed pilgrims on their way back to their *home* are never sure to the last moment of not losing their way in this limitless desert of illusion and matter called Earth-Life. Because he would fain show the way to that region of freedom and light, from which he is a voluntary exile himself, to every prisoner who has succeeded in liberating himself from the bonds of flesh and illusion. Because, in short, he has sacrificed himself for the sake of mankind, though but a few Elect may profit by the GREAT SACRIFICE.
>
> It is under the direct, silent guidance of this MAHA — (great) — GURU that all the other less divine Teachers and instructors of mankind became, from the first awakening of human consciousness, the guides of early Humanity. It is through these "Sons of God" that infant humanity got its first notions of all the arts and sciences, as well as of spiritual knowledge; and it is they who have laid the first foundation-stone of those ancient civilizations that puzzle so sorely our modern generation of students and scholars.
>
> — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 1, p. 208

Shri Raghavan adds that to meditate on such a being is to immerse oneself in a universal tradition which includes and transcends all traditions, all sectarian claims, isms, and dogmas, as well as all limiting states of consciousness and finite conditions of self identity.

> Thus, Dakshināmurti, the Initiator of Initiates, the paradigm of all Sages, the supreme incarnation of Maheśwara, is himself unthinkable and unspeakable like the Absolute. To speak of the one is to speak of the other, which is why wise human beings use meditation upon the *Guruparampara,* the sacred lineage of true Sages, as a way of coming closer to the Absolute. Every child uses the help of its mother or father or an adult to learn how to walk. That is Nature's way. That is what comes naturally to the human being, and it is that which is ultimately the Only Way, the only door to greater knowledge, greater experience, profounder apprehension, deeper comprehension and, even more, to a taste or a foretaste of *Satchitānanda.*
>
> — *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 26

In the *Hymn to Dakshinamurti*, the famous ten verses attributed to Shankaracharya, the realization of the Supreme Being and its Grace, is embodied and transmitted through the living and auspicious guru. Just as a mirror seems to reflect something inside itself, but is really outside, so too does the guru appear outside, but is really inside. Such a being does not impart or bestow, but like a spiritual mirror, activates that which is latent or which otherwise cannot be accessed by the conscious mind of the disciple. An example of such an activation is found

near the beginning of the third fragment of *The Voice of the Silence*. A wave of the hand by the Teacher of Compassion dispels the shadowy "serpent coils" obscuring the wisdom eye of the *śrāvaka* and momentarily reveals the entire ladder of the Path, including its summits lost in "glorious light Nirvanic".

Such an adept can waken soul memories impacted within the *kārana śarira* within every human being. This can only happen if the disciple has made him or herself ready. If needed, such an initiation is preceded by the Guru's timely adjustments revealing profound character defects, mental misconceptions, and vain egoistic impurities which otherwise would take lifetimes to discover or resolve.

In the *Gospel According to Thomas*, considered the secret teachings of Jesus: "He who is close to me is close to fire, he who is far from me is far from the Kingdom." To enter the orbit of such a being is to invite a battle, an intense struggle within oneself which is part of a necessary fiery purification. Shiva destroys the passions and egotism of the lunar mind to awaken and provide rebirth in the Universal Mind. As Socrates pointed out, the true Teacher is both gadfly and midwife.

In the Hindu tradition, Guru Purnima also commemorates Vyāsa, the legendary sage, poet, and author who is credited with compiling the Vedas and writing the longest poem known to history, the great epic of the *Mahābhārata*, which includes the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is also taught that Vyasa composed 18 Purānas and 108 Upanishads, finally distilling their core ideas into the concise *Brahma Sutras* and later expanding them into the 18 volumes of the *Bhāgavata Purāna*. Legend further recounts that he then went on to teach many famous disciples. Because of his immense contributions to Hindu philosophy and literature, the same full-moon day each year is also known as Vyāsa Purnima. HPB affirms, as the Vishnu Puranas do, that there have been at least 28 incarnations of Vishnu as Vyāsa, preserving and dispensing Vedic wisdom in their respective eras. The *Bhāgavata Purāna* mentions twenty-two Avatars of Vishnu, but after enumerating them, adds: "The incarnations of Vishnu are innumerable, like the rivulets flowing from an inexhaustible lake . . ." HPB says the same, equating Avatars, Buddhas, and Mahatmas as the self-conscious descent of the divine logos — "the Word made flesh". Shri Raghavan Iyer adds that each such incarnation is accompanied by a host of unseen Bodhisattvas.

> Mahatmas are always present in the orbit of the Avatar and his true disciples on earth. They ever move in their invisible forms and are known by infallible signs. This is an arena wherein there is no room for delusion or pretense. It may well be that the Bodhisattvas are recognized only by a few, but this does not alter the fact that they are sometimes more numerous as shining witnesses to the critical events of history than the visible and volatile participants.
>
> — *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 20

Irrespective of religion, in India and many parts of Southeast Asia, Guru

Purnima became the universally recognized day for disciples whether of music and dance, mathematics, astronomy, or yoga, to express gratitude to their spiritual and academic mentors for "dispelling the darkness of ignorance". Indian academics in many schools, colleges, and universities have events in which students thank their teachers and remember past scholars. This practice could simply become a mere ritualistic formality, or it could be an authentic outer representation of the constant unuttered hum of the heart.

A deep and abiding sense of the debt owed to the sacrificial efforts of all our teachers, whether those who taught us to eat, walk, read, count, add, pronounce the alphabet, write and express ourselves legibly, as well as those who taught and guided us through higher forms of education, spiritual wisdom, and creative expression, all belong to the *guruparampara* chain. The elementals of base ingratitude for mentors, predecessors, and ancestors must be dispelled if we would be worthy links in that chain and contributors to the welfare of the unborn humanity of the future. In the writings of Shri Raghavan, the crucial test of whether a person is nearing the portals of the Mysteries, or distant from them, is the posture of gratitude and reverence towards teachers, or lack thereof. Those who have passed the threshold of what *The Voice of the Silence* calls the "Heart Doctrine", the Bodhisattva path of sacrificial wisdom-service, are ever repeating "Thus have I heard", acknowledging those from whom they have derived illumination and understanding.

A striking example of this posture is that of the extraordinary mystic George William Russell, also known as the Irish Theosophist. Having had a series of golden visionary experiences as a young man, when he read *Isis Unveiled* he realized he was not unique, that many mystics throughout the ages, from the rishis of ancient India, the lamas of Tibet, to the Greek Pythagoreans, had repeatedly confirmed what he was seeing. A key figure in the Irish literary renaissance, he was both painter, writer, and orator. Over a 41-year period of his adult life, he published 16 books of poetry, a play, a handful of pamphlets, many letters of correspondence, and over 120 articles for 3 philosophical journals. In addition, he wrote extensively for two of the most widely read and influential weekly periodicals of his day. All this while he was also serving the poor through the revival of Celtic mythology and the development of communal farming cooperatives across rural Ireland. Still, at the end of his life, he wrote:

> I had no private doctrine: nothing but HPB eked out, for beginners by W. Q. Judge; the *Bhagavadgitā*; Upanishads; Patanjali; and one or two other classics . . . My own writing is trivial, and whatever merit is to be found in it is due to its having been written in a spiritual atmosphere generated by the study of HPB and the sacred books of the East.
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> *The Canadian Theosophist*, Vol. XVI, Aug. 1935, pp. 163-4

(*To be continued*)

The World in Turmoil: Turning the Ship Around

JANNE VUONONVIRTA

A World in Turmoil

If you read the news today, it is hard not to worry. The world seems more turbulent than in decades. Ukraine and Russia have been at war for over four years; in the Middle East lasting peace seems wishful thinking; and tension between great powers such as the US and China keeps rising. Democracy is in crisis, and populism is on the rise. It is no longer those with the wisest ideas who are heard, but those who shout the loudest and are willing to tell whatever lies that serve their purpose. This is the defining feature of modern times that has come to be known as the post-truth era. Meanwhile the climate is changing rapidly, biodiversity is decreasing, and nations are not doing enough to make an actual change.

The Roots of the Crisis

If we look at the roots of the crisis, and especially the climate issue, perhaps the single biggest reason for it on the material level is that since the Industrial Revolution the human population has grown from one billion to more than eight. But it is not only our numbers that matter, but also how much each of us consumes, for one person today uses far more than a person did a century ago. Earth Overshoot Day marks the point at which we have spent the Earth's annual ecological budget — all that the planet can renew in a year. The date has crept steadily earlier, and we now typically exhaust that budget by midsummer.

Our society also embraces ideals that can be harmful. Chief among them is the illusion of endless growth. We tend to believe that more growth means automatically more well-being, but that is true only up to a point. When people are very poor, more resources truly help; but beyond a point, more money no longer brings well-being, and there can be no never-ending growth on a planet of finite resources.

But is the root deeper still — on a spiritual level? What imprint do we leave upon the world when we do not know our own deepest nature? Maybe it is not only through carbon dioxide that we disturb

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the world, maybe we do so with our thoughts as well?

A Dream

About twenty years ago I had a striking dream that I would like to share with you. In the dream I was high above the Earth. Many others were there with me, including my mother, and together we watched a great river flowing below. Upon the river were many flagships, engaged in fierce battle, firing upon one another. They were so consumed by the conflict that they did not notice where the current was carrying them. But from above, the course of the river was clear: ahead lay a vast and terrible waterfall, like Niagara Falls.

The flagships remained oblivious to the danger. From above we cried out to them: Stop! Can you not see that you are going in the wrong direction? You must turn back. We could see that if the ships reversed course, another current — another channel of the river — would carry them safely onward. But to reach that safer way, the battle had to cease; the ships had to turn backwards. Yet no matter how loudly we shouted, they could not hear us. Then I woke up.

The symbols of the dream are straightforward. The flagships represent the nations of the world. Sometimes the battle is an actual war, but mostly it is allegorical — it is constant pursuit of greater wealth, more power, and the protection of our material way of life. The waterfall may symbolize the climate crisis already unfolding around us. The nations can see the danger, yet what we have done so far has not been enough. There is always something that seems more urgent, usually the economy, and politicians are often unwilling to make difficult decisions that might threaten their careers. So we continue to postpone the actions needed and changing the course becomes increasingly difficult.

Nations Are Made of Individuals

The nations are made of individuals, and changing our own habits is not easier at the individual level. Consider a smoker: he knows that smoking is not healthy, yet he keeps smoking, because the health cost lies in the future while the pleasant sensation is here, now — the present feels more vital than a distant consequence. We all have such biases: we eat too much even if we are not hungry; we mean to be present with our loved ones, yet sit with a phone instead when we visit them; or we intend to deepen our spiritual practice, but end up telling ourselves, tomorrow. And so the years pass, until we notice we are growing old and the chance is lost.

As individuals we are ruled by our habits and conditioning. They are products of our own history — products of a karmic cycle repeating itself from lifetime to lifetime. Whatever we do now builds the next moment. To change our future we must begin by changing our thinking and behaviour, creating new causes instead of repeating the old. If we want to change the course of the karmic stream, we must act differently — here and now. This applies both to individuals and to nations.

The Oneness of Humanity

In the Mahatma Letters the Theo-

sophical Society is sometimes called a brotherhood of humanity. To put Theosophy into practice means, above all, to express the oneness of humanity in all we do. In *The Key to Theosophy*, Madame Blavatsky writes:

> It is an occult law, moreover, that no man can rise superior to his individual failings without lifting, be it ever so little, the whole body of which he is an integral part. In the same way, no one can sin, nor suffer the effects of sin, alone. In reality, there is no such thing as "separateness".

Nothing we do happens in isolation. When we do good, we encourage others to do the same. When we do harm, we also give others permission to act likewise. And when we do nothing, we strengthen indifference. Whatever we do, say, or think, someone is touched by it.

Finding Peace in the Inner Self

To help the world, we must begin with ourselves and find peace within. Lasting peace comes only through spiritual practice. As long as we identify with the personality, we are affected by whatever touches us personally. If an unkind word wounds us, we react in one way or another, sometimes only by sending heavy thoughts into the world. Through spiritual practice we gradually see that we are not merely our personality. When someone wounds us, it is only our feelings, our personality, that has been hurt — not our true self. True self cannot be wounded.

Hatred Does Not End with Hatred

A meaningful change happens only by cultivating compassion and love with wisdom. Jesus taught us to turn the other cheek and to love our enemies; the Buddha taught the same. This becomes possible only when we understand who we really are. As long as we identify with the personality, non-violence is difficult because we feel we must defend ourselves and things we consider valuable. But the paradox is that the ego is never truly safe. However fiercely we fight to protect it, it is destined to perish.

Nations follow similar thinking pattern as individuals. Around the world we spend more and more on weapons, believing that the more powerful they are, the more safe we will be. But is that really true? In 2025, global military spending reached 2,887 billion US dollars — 41 percent higher than a decade earlier, and the largest increase since the Cold War.[1] Conflict may sometimes be difficult to avoid, yet violence cannot ultimately be overcome by violence. Instead, what is needed is genuine human connection: to see that whichever side of the border we live on, we are fundamentally the same, and that there are more things that unite us than things that divide us.

Choosing love and non-violence does not mean accepting injustice or allowing others to hurt us. But to work for peace we must let go of hatred, guard our hearts against resentment and refuse to condemn others. It is easy to let past wrongs cloud our judgement, yet holding on to resentment never helps us move forward. If we truly want peace, can we come to see that there is no other — that the light within every being is reflection of the one Light?

Flashes of Hope

When you read the news, it is easy to become pessimistic because the media tends to focus on what is wrong. Yet good things are happening too. Although deaths from war have risen in recent years, the long-term trend is downward, and numbers are lower than at almost any other point in human history. In addition, extreme poverty, hunger, and child mortality continue to decline, most of the world's eight billion people can now read, and renewable energy is expanding rapidly. For example, every year China adds enough new solar power to produce more electricity than Finland uses in an entire year. In many ways, real progress is under way.

Be the Change

Mahatma Gandhi said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." In my dream we were all up above, shouting down to people who could not hear us. That kind of help was not very effective. Real change cannot come from the outside. We must walk among the people, step onto those flagships, and accept the worries and dangers that await us there. While we are here, our task is to remember who we truly are — sparks of divine fire, of eternal Light — and to remind others of their own light. If we want to help others, we must carry peace within and let it radiate outward.

A Peace Mantra

I would like to close with a peace mantra composed more than a hundred years ago, during the Finnish civil war, by the theosophist Fredrik Heliö. In Finland, many lodges conclude their meetings with these words to allow a beneficent force to radiate in all directions.

May light shine into the darkness.

May righteousness prevail over violence, injustice, and selfish gain.

Peace to all beings.
Peace to all beings in the east.
Peace to all beings in the south.
Peace to all beings in the west.
Peace to all beings in the north.

Peace among the peoples.
Peace to the leaders of nations.
May war and strife cease.
May everyone see a brother in every human being.

Peace, peace, peace. ✧

Endnote:

1. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), "Global military spending rise continues", 2026, <sipri.org>.

I am in turmoil. The world is so vast and the cosmos more so, yet it is not the things outside of me that leave me so uneasy; it is the things within me.

Neal Shusterman
(Author of young adult fiction)

Freedom in Uncertainty

CARLOS PÉREZ MENÉNDEZ

WE live in a time of convulsions. We are affected by many global conflicts such as wars, economic and power disputes, fanaticism, terrorism, and cultural battles, driven by ideologies of various kinds. In our day, the order established by laws and international treaties seems to have collapsed; the United Nations, at present, appears to be ineffective.

Uncertainty is painfully great. Yet the history of humanity shows us that conflicts and unexpected events have always existed, giving rise to profound disorientation. Uncertainty is especially linked with the future, since it springs from our inability to predict what is to come. So many variables are at play that it is extremely difficult to glimpse what will happen. Politicians, sociologists and economists, try to shed light on the future, but there are as many predictions as there are analysts in each field.

On a personal level, we also experience this uncertainty: will everything turn out as we expect? And in our relationships with others, things become even more complicated. Even in quantum mechanics we encounter Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, which states that we cannot know with total precision the position and momentum of a particle at the same time, since the very experiment used to measure it alters its state. In addition, there have always been, and will continue to be, unforeseeable natural disasters that shake human life and Nature, such as those caused by volcanoes, tsunamis, floods, hurricanes, or earthquakes — like the one that has just affected thousands of human beings and animals in Venezuela.

Uncertainty is a mental state

Uncertainty and certainty are, in reality, **mental states** related more to our **perception of reality** than to reality itself. It is the perception that we cannot fully predict the future or the outcome of our actions that plunges us into that state. There are many variables beyond our control, as well as unknown factors because we do not yet fully understand the laws of Nature. And there are mysteries that are simply not knowable to our finite mind.

A distinction should be made between

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uncertainty and insecurity. The first refers to the inability to know tomorrow with exactness, whereas insecurity is associated with the perception of risk, of the possibility of suffering harm, whether physical or psychological. We thus find ourselves before two clearly distinct pairs of opposites.

Uncertainty — **certainty** (relating to knowing)

Insecurity — **security** (relating to risk)

Positive or negative freedom

What do we commonly associate with the idea of freedom? We think of a range of activities in which it is recognised as a fundamental right: freedom of expression, worship, movement, or association. Sometimes, when we observe the grace of a bird in full flight, we think: "I wish I were as free as that." However, we fail to realize that the bird is also subject to laws and needs like any other being: it must seek food, nest, rear its chicks and protect them and itself from its predators.

When we imagine freedom, we often conceive of it as the absence of bonds, limits, or obligations. This is **negative freedom**, or "*freedom from*". However, if we examine it closely, we shall see that purely negative freedom is impossible. We are all interconnected and mutually dependent: we depend on the oxygen produced by trees, on water, sunlight, nutrients, and even the bacteria that live in our bodies and without which we would be unable to digest food. In short, we are part of Nature, embedded in an ecosystem of constant relationships and exchanges.

Life in society means that behind every object we consume there is a network of people who have collaborated to bring it to us. Behind a simple loaf of bread are the farmers who grew the wheat, the collectors who stored it, the millers who turned it into flour, the distributors who delivered it, and the bakers who kneaded and baked it before we bought it in the shop. We all, without exception, share social needs and duties.

There is another way of conceiving freedom: as "*freedom to*" achieve an end. It is the release of an inner force or reality that lies imprisoned in a potential state. It is akin to the release of water contained in a dam or to the germination of a tree that is potentially "enclosed" within a seed. This is **positive freedom**. It refers to liberating our inner power, our spiritual nature, which is imprisoned by the limitations of everyday personality owing to multiple conditioning factors.

Freedom implies responsibility

Freedom implies the ability **to make decisions** without compulsion and, therefore, to be **responsible** for their consequences, accepting the inevitable risks that arise from them. It means acting creatively and spontaneously, being genuinely oneself, without falling into imitation of others or submitting to imposed mandates. This state of freedom undoubtedly requires a certain degree of maturity or inner development.

Despite how inspiring this ideal sounds, the responsibility of choosing and the possibility of making mistakes often generate fear of the consequences. Many

times, we prefer to sacrifice the freedom to decide and adhere to guides, precepts, or beliefs that clearly tell us what to think, what to say, and what to do. Unconsciously, we seek a form of tutelage similar to that which we received from our parents, an authority that relieves us of the burden of deciding for ourselves.

This phenomenon was profoundly analysed by the psychologist Erich Fromm (1900–1980), who in 1941 published an essential reference work: *The Fear of Freedom*. In it, Fromm offered a social and psychological interpretation of freedom in the light of the populist and totalitarian movements of his time. He observed that alongside the desire for freedom there coexists a fear of the moral solitude it entails. Faced with this, human beings often seek the false security of bondage. It therefore takes great courage to be truly free and embrace uncertainty.

Evasions of freedom

Because of this fear, human beings constantly seek to escape from freedom. They long to belong to socially accepted groups: a football club, an urban tribe, a town, a political party, a religion, an ideology, or even some sect or dogmatic belief system. In our day we see the rise of identity-based ideologies, processes in which history is falsified and certain regional or national identity traits are magnified in order to instil in the population a distinct tribal consciousness. This ends up separating communities from their fellow human beings and fosters fanatical adherence.

All these evasions provide a false sense of security. As a rule, we are willing to adopt them to calm the anxiety caused by our inability to accept the risk of making mistakes when deciding for ourselves. However, these escapes only generate **authoritarianism** and **dependence**. Human beings often prefer to be told what to think and what to do rather than make the effort to think for themselves.

Ideologies, whether economic, political, right-wing, left-wing, gender-based, "*woke*", or of any other kind, are the scourge of our age. Human beings tend to polarise themselves in order to enrol in one ideology that is in conflict with others. They believe that in this way they are helping to improve society, but what they are actually doing is increasing confusion and conflict. Hidden behind an ideology lies the desire to evade the responsibility of observing and thinking for oneself.

The powers that dominate the world, whether openly or from the shadows, take advantage of our fear of freedom in order to try to condition and manipulate us for their own interests. To do so, they make use of the mass media, advertising, education, social networks or the steering of consumption. They create fake news and conspiracy theories to instil fear and bewilderment, thereby achieving political control and power. A fearful population is far more likely to accept restrictions on its rights and freedoms in order to feel secure — restrictions that, under normal circumstances, it would never tolerate. But this is a false renunciation of freedom.

The Spanish writer, thinker and economist José Luis Sampedro (1917–2013) rightly observed:

> Freedom of expression is of no use if there is no freedom of thought. Because otherwise, what are you going to say? What they told you that you have to think and say?

Freedom and uncertainty

If we accept uncertainty as something natural to existence, we become fully responsible for our own path. True learning consists in deciding freely and assimilating the lessons of the consequences. This requires the **humility** to know that we are learning and that we may make mistakes. To embrace uncertainty is a quality that requires courage.

Freedom, in principle, requires real alternatives. If there is freedom, there is the possibility of choice; this means that the future is open and, therefore, unpredictable. That openness is, in itself, uncertainty. Without freedom, life would be reduced to a script already written, which we would merely enact as actors in a play; there would be no room for creativity. Therefore, **freedom and uncertainty are two sides of the same coin**. We cannot enjoy freedom if there is no uncertainty about the outcomes of our actions and undertakings.

Of course, in everyday life we carry out many tasks whose outcome is highly predictable. We board a train knowing what destination we will reach. However, there is always a small possibility that an incident, a delay, or a line closure due to works will arise. Being able to predict what will happen gives us confidence, but this confidence contains a degree of illusion. We must learn to trust ourselves more than the outcome of events, and more in our own ability to resolve whatever unforeseen circumstances that may arise.

What keeps us bound?

Freedom is much more than choosing products in a supermarket or selecting which publications to read. It is not enough to be able to decide in order to be free, because there is a deep psychological dimension that we must consider. In order to decide freely, we must free ourselves from the bonds of the past. Fears, psychological wounds, traumas, prejudices, and blind beliefs chain us and push us to tread the paths to which we are accustomed. They create our fenced garden, our comfort zone.

These bonds lie submerged in the unconscious mind. Normally we do not perceive them, until a stimulus affects us and triggers a compulsive reaction that surprises us, or leads us to make decisions without clearly understanding the hidden motives. Our own psychological nature is conditioned by what in Theosophy are called *skandhas*. This concept, derived from Buddhism, refers to the tendencies, attributes or aggregates that our personality has generated both in previous incarnations and in the present one. The *skandhas* shape our likes and affinities beyond the moulding of childhood, the home, or education, determining our particular perception of reality.

> [After death, the *Skandas*] remain as Karmic effects, as germs, hanging in the

> atmosphere of the terrestrial plane, ready to come to life, like vengeful and resentful enemies, attaching themselves to the new personality of the Ego when it reincarnates.
> Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*

Although past experiences have been happy or painful, they have already passed. If we live tied to them — longing for their repetition or denying their existence — we will remain chained to what already was, missing the present, the only time in which we truly live. In this way, the known can become our prison: tastes, beliefs, traditions, ideologies, habits, and the very image of the self. The key does not lie in denying the known, but in **disidentifying** ourselves from it.

We can also find ourselves chained to the future, even though it has not yet arrived. We place hopes, fears or plans in it that may or may not materialise; nevertheless, we think, feel, and act as though they were already reality. That anxiety about the future inevitably conditions us.

There are also the conditionings arising from our present circumstances: limitations of health, economic position, or family and work duties. These constitute our *karma* and represent the learning environment chosen for this life. It is wiser to accept those circumstances if we cannot change them, than to live resentfully and embitteredly because we do not possess the idealised setting we desire. We cannot choose tomorrow's weather, but we can choose how we will make use of the day.

Only genuine knowledge and acceptance of what we are, with our light and shadow, can help us break free from these bonds. The greatest conditioning we must transcend on the path to freedom is the structure of the separate "I". The personal self longs for security and continuity; it identifies with possessions, ideas, and emotions, and ceaselessly seeks success, pleasure, comfort, and growth, whether material or even spiritual, thereby keeping us bound.

The challenge of uncertainty

To recognise one's own ignorance is the beginning of wisdom. It is the indispensable requirement for asking the right questions. Socrates already stated it with his famous "I know that I know nothing". The point is not merely to *tolerate* uncertainty, but to *embrace* it as the starting point for discovering and learning something new. As Maggie Jackson rightly notes in her work, *Uncertain: The Wisdom and Wonder of Being Unsure*:

> When something goes wrong, or when we encounter something new, or when there is a problem we do not know, uncertainty challenges us, prompts us to think about something we must reflect on at that moment. So uncertainty is the springboard to greater thought.

Jiddu Krishnamurti declared in his famous address dissolving the Order of the Star in 1929: "Truth is a pathless land." We do not possess absolute certainties. And, as the poet Antonio Machado immortalised it: "*Wayfarer, there is no path, the path is made while walking.*" We settle into our comfort zone, but life, with its impermanence and perpetual flow,

ends up expelling us from it and hurling us into the unknown. Fear prevents us from viewing uncertainty with **curiosity**, as an opportunity to learn something new. We should not treat circumstances as a threat, but as a challenge, as our *dharma* or our mission in life.

What attitudes make us free?

We can actively cultivate attitudes that lead us towards freedom and allow us to transcend our own bonds. Among these, a sincere attitude stands out, together with an open mind but with a critical spirit in the philosophical sense of the term. We should not accept propositions merely because of the weight of authority, popularity, or tradition. It is vital to cultivate the willingness to ask ourselves questions, sincerely and humbly. There is no fixed method. We need constant self-inquiry: observing ourselves without any intention of changing, judging, or justifying ourselves. This requires mindfulness and complete presence.

Likewise, it is essential to give life meaning. To have the sense that we have a mission, that we are here for something, even if we cannot know it exactly or express it in words. Here we once again encounter uncertainty, but there may be a subtle intuition that arises from our transcendent nature and impels us in the right direction.

Let us remember that we are the architects of our own future. It is essential to trust in universal laws, because although we know them only partially, they guarantee the germination and flowering of the divine seed that we are, in essence.

A primary attitude to cultivate is to become progressively conscious of the **Unity of Life**. The Whole is present in each fragment of the Universe and therefore in ourselves and in every being. The freedom and fulfilment we seek is also the profound longing of all beings.

Nelson Mandela said a memorable phrase:

> To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.

We must be **flexible** in dealing with uncertainty. It is wise to draw up plans and foresee needs, but we must be willing to correct course when difficulties or unforeseen events arise. It is the same situation as someone walking towards a destination and finding a fallen tree blocking the path, forcing them to take a detour. What matters at that moment is not to lose motivation or the idea of where we wanted to go.

Let us not devise rigid plans that admit no modification. Let us remain open to the unexpected, since what is unforeseen may reveal itself as something illuminating rather than a distraction. What is essential is to preserve the objectives; plans are merely a path to reach them, and that route can be altered as many times as necessary.

Our greatest uncertainty

Our greatest uncertainty is knowing who we really are and why we are here, what the purpose of our life and of the Universe is. To know ourselves, self-inquiry is necessary. We need to observe

ourselves as we are, without trying to change, blame, or justify ourselves. It is not a matter of comparing ourselves with some supposed pattern or model of what we believe we "should" be. We cannot imitate anyone. Each of us has our own path.

In self-inquiry, prefabricated, apparently safe answers based on the authority of others are of no use. We must find our own answers in a continuous process throughout our lives. Our destiny is to be ourselves, and this requires us to liberate the transcendent power that resides within us.

Jiddu Krishnamurti stated:

> Intelligence, indeed, comes only when we are free to investigate, to consider things carefully and to discover; in that way our mind becomes very active, very alert, and clear. Then we are fully integrated individuals, not fearful entities who, not knowing what to do, feel one thing inwardly and conform to something different outwardly.

In summary

- Uncertainty is a feature of life, and without it there is no freedom. We fear uncertainty.
- Evolving life needs freedom to create and experience, to express itself and develop its latent faculties.
- To evolve, we must accept the challenge of uncertainty, free ourselves from the limitations that bind us, and allow our inner light to emerge.
- Our greatest challenge is to face uncertainty by accepting it as an opportunity, with curiosity to learn.
- We are the owners of our future, as individuals and as humanity. ✧

We are completely free
only when we are free from ourselves.

N. Sri Ram

Animals as Spiritual Teachers

SHAMA SHAH

THIS is a topic close to my heart. *Before humans had philosophy, we had animals. And we watched them closely.* I have always had a deep love for animals, and for many years now have been delving deeper into the understanding of spirituality.

It is easy to think of "spiritual teachers" as extraordinary human beings; people who speak in calm voices, write books and hold sermons, and sit cross-legged for long periods of time, unperturbed by the chaos around them. However, long before those humans existed, humans were learning from a more ancient, quieter source: animals.

The idea of *animals as spiritual teachers* certainly sounds mystical at first, but it is actually very modest — it simply means that by observing how animals live, we can learn something about life and living ourselves. Animals do not give long sermons (thankfully), nor do they write articles or publish books. They demonstrate, very clearly and consistently, ways of being that humans often struggle with: presence, balance, boundaries, and connection. Animals, therefore, are not instructors; they are examples.

Learning Without Words

One of the most outstanding things about animals is that they do not overthink their lives. A dog is not lying awake at night wondering why its owner pretended to throw the ball but did not. A cat is not feeling sorry that it refused to give emotional support that the owner needed that evening. Animals live in alignment with their nature.

We humans, on the other hand, have a unique talent for doing the exact opposite. We overthink, overanalyze, and often (quite dangerously) override our instincts. We struggle to rest without guilt, to say no without explanation, or be present without distraction.

We then ironically pay good money to relearn these skills. Meanwhile, the nearest animal is quietly doing all of this for free.

Everyday Teachers

Let us look at a few examples that would be familiar to most readers.

A dog is a master of presence. When a dog greets you, it is fully there, no divided

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attention, no mental to-do list, no running back and forth from one task to another. It does not hold grudges or replay past arguments. If anything, it reminds us that being present is one of the simplest and most powerful forms of love.

A cat, on the other hand, is an expert in boundaries. It does not perform for approval. It rests when it wants to, leaves when it has had enough, and does not apologize for either. In a world where many of us struggle to say "no", the cat offers a quiet but firm lesson in self-respect and boundary setting.

Elephants show us something deeper, emotional intelligence. They mourn their dead, return to the bones of lost companions, and live within strong family structures. Their behavior reminds us that grief and memory are not weaknesses, but expressions of connection.

Birds teach us about trust. Many species migrate thousands of kilometers without maps or instructions, guided only by instinct and natural forces we cannot see. They move when it is time to move. Not when everything is perfectly certain, but when something within says "go", they go. This applies equally to other animals, such as fish and sea mammals.

Wolves demonstrate cooperation. Despite popular myths, wolf packs are not ruled by constant dominance. They function through collaboration, shifting roles, and shared responsibility. Strength, in their world, is collective.

And finally, there is the tortoise, unhurried, steady, and long-lived. In a society obsessed with speed, the tortoise gently reminds us that slow does not mean stagnant. It often means sustainable.

Are Animals Really "Aware"?

At this point, a fair question arises: are we simply projecting meaning onto animals?

Interestingly, modern science suggests otherwise. In 2012, a group of neuroscientists signed what is known as the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness. It stated that many animals including mammals, birds, and even octopuses, possess the neurological structures needed for consciousness.

This means animals are not unfeeling, mechanical beings. They experience pain, fear, joy, and attachment. Apes, elephants, orcas, dolphins and the Eurasian magpie actually recognize themselves in mirrors. Crocodiles and crows have been known to use tools and plan ahead, whilst rats and chickens show empathy. I suspect that many more such discoveries await us!

So when we observe animals and feel that there is "something there", we are not imagining it. We are responding to a form of intelligence (different from ours, but real nonetheless).

A Wisdom Shared Across Cultures

What is fascinating about this topic is that this idea is not new. Across different cultures and time periods, humans have consistently recognized animals as sources of insight.

In many indigenous traditions, animals are seen as teachers and equals rather than resources. Knowledge is gained

through observation, watching animals hunt, rest, relate, and survive.

In Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism and Jainism, animals are considered sentient beings, capable of suffering and deserving of compassion. The emphasis is not on what animals can do for us, but on how we coexist with them.

Across parts of Africa, animal symbolism appears in stories, proverbs, and clan totems. A lion may represent courage, an elephant wisdom, a tortoise cleverness. These are not just stories for entertainment, they are ways of teaching values and behavior.

Different cultures, languages, histories, and yet, a similar conclusion: animals have something to show us.

A Note of Skepticism

Of course, not everyone agrees with this perspective, and that is okay!

Some argue that animals act purely on instinct, not wisdom, some point out that human intelligence is far more complex, and others state that humans are projecting their feelings onto the animal world.

Certainly, even if the lessons we draw from animals are partly interpretive, they still shape how we live. If observing a cat helps someone develop healthier boundaries, or watching birds encourages someone to take a leap of faith, the outcome is meaningful regardless of the source. Additionally, instinct itself should not be dismissed so quickly. It is, in many ways, a refined form of intelligence, one that humans have, poignantly, become disconnected from.

Coming Back to Ourselves

In the end, animals do not try to teach. They simply live — perhaps that is the most important lesson of all. They remind us to be present without effort, to rest without guilt, to act without overthinking, and to exist without constantly questioning our worth.

Seeing animals as teachers does not mean placing them above us. It means recognizing that we are part of the same living system, and that wisdom is not limited to human language or human thought. It also changes how we treat the world around us. When animals are no longer seen as "lesser", but as fellow beings with their own ways of knowing, our relationship with Nature becomes more respectful, and perhaps more humane.

So the next time you see a tortoise sit still, a bird taking flight, or a cat walking away from something it does not like, observe for a moment. There may not be a grand lecture or an obvious message, but there is always a quiet and undeniable lesson to learn. ✧

The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.

Mahatma Gandhi

A Letter to the TS in Kyiv

DAVID MACDERMOTT

JUST to give you some background about myself, I first discovered Theosophy thirty years ago at the age of twenty-three. However, it has only been in the last two years that I have become a member of the Theosophical Society (TS) in England. I think one of the reasons for this delay was that I privately empathised with Groucho Marx when he said, "I would never join a club that would have me as a member!"

Subsequently, I have discovered the great pleasure of meeting like-minded people and I recognise the deep affinity we all share as a fraternity. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all in advance for responding to a question that has weighed heavily on my mind for some time.

How do we attract younger people to Theosophy?

Let me first begin by explaining the origin of my question and why it is relevant for any brotherhood that shares knowledge. As theosophists we are each of us benefactors of a disseminated truth that shares its origin from the source of Creation. We have chosen to recognise the virtue of this revelation not just because we are impressed by the discovery of the unknown, but because we intuitively resonate to its vibration.

Theosophy is the Science of Spirituality; it is constantly in movement and therefore constantly evolving. It is the timeless compendium of life and should therefore be the first subject taught at school and the only book found in the bedside cabinet in your hotel room. But, unlike religion which has so successfully propagated its dogma of mortality and death, Theosophy remains an enigma in the ocean of human perception.

In an age where it seems that the moral compass guiding our planetary governance has gone awry, why isn't Theosophy at the vanguard of a new world order?

We are not a secret society, neither are we an elite club for the privileged few.

The Theosophical Society was founded on inclusion and the beauty of its core purpose was to share a grandiose vision of the Universe with the schematic construct of all life within it. Yet this message and the bulk of the teachings remain completely unknown to the majority of humanity.

Mr David MacDermott is a contemporary theosophist, environmental humanist, healer, and writer. He is a self-published author of four books available on Amazon under the pseudonym of "David Cheese". This article is based on a letter written seven years ago to the Theosophical Society in Ukraine.

Is it not our duty to actively promote Theosophy to a wider audience?

The old adage that Theosophy finds you when the time is right and only when you have achieved a certain degree of Spiritual Maturity may now have to be seriously challenged. The danger of conventionality and its resistance to change is that as a movement Theosophy will stagnate and eventually crystallise.

I am not advocating the destruction of the bedrock upon which we stand, but the building of a new structure that has the dynamic energy and vision of youth. Even as long ago as the 1920s Annie Besant wrote a warning against the onset of apathy and complacency. She recognised the inherent dangers of human nature when we cease to push forward and challenge existing concepts and ideas.

What can we do? That is the big question.

Each theosophist, each society, and each country is uniquely different in its perception of what Theosophy is. This must be our strength. Can we not, each of us, find a way to give expression to the teachings and tell this story from our own theosophical perspective? We need to implement the will of spiritual action. Inspiration will come from the positive ideation of change. Therein lies the enormous potential for creativity.

Theosophy was not founded on small ideas or a limited perception of the Universe. It tells one of the most fantastic stories known to man. But behind nearly all the great events in modern human history stands a Master of the Wisdom. It is because of their tireless work and eternal connection to mankind that we evolve and progress upon the evolutionary arc. It is due to their impetus and directive force that mankind has overcome the greatest of obstacles and challenges. I understand a certain reservation in promoting the subject of the Masters, but if we take an objective overview of the Spiritual Hierarchy governing our planet, surely we must use this plan to exemplify the highest ideals and goals of an aspirant upon the path.

We are witnessing right now a revolution of young environmental activists inspired by a phenomenal child called Greta Thunberg. One solitary 15-year-old girl has inspired the largest environmental protest movement in the history of our planet. Over a million children responded intuitively to the message of "emergency on planet Earth". My own son, who is 18, took part in his school's "strike for climate" where 11,000 students protested in the city of Nantes, France.

Environmentalism has its own dynamic momentum which is driven by the powerful force of magnetic ideation. The young people of today have a heightened sense of interconnectivity and are very receptive to the changing paradigms of traditional governance. The challenge as I see it for Theosophy is to address a new audience of younger inquiring minds with a radical message that resonates on both a physical and metaphysical level.

Recently, during my two-month stay at the Krotona Institute of Theosophy in Ojai, California, I had the opportunity to meet and talk with a young resident

theosophist. I asked him what first attracted him to Theosophy and he simply said, "It just makes sense." I then asked him how he discovered Theosophy and being a man of few words but of a deeply inquiring mind he said, "Wikipedia." I had to laugh. Subsequently this young man confided in me that he was starting a new radical Theosophical Society in response to what he saw as heavily entrenched traditions and a dogmatic resistance to "new ideas". And I have to say that I encouraged him.

For me, so much energy and time has been concentrated on consolidating the foundation of the Ageless Wisdom that we have forgotten to build a new lighthouse to attract people to its teachings. For every great civilisation this was the beacon that attracted spiritual travellers to its door. If we continue to "teach to the converted" we will reach a point of contraction that will eventually make Theosophy obsolete.

I believe we have an opportunity and a responsibility to work together to find a solution to this problem. If we begin to coordinate a positive strategy to promote Theosophy in all its forms and use the technology of today to share these Teachings then we can overtly bring it to the attention of a wider public. The days of seeking esoteric truths by undertaking an arduous journey across the Himalayas in search of Shambhala are over.

But, by bringing Theosophy to the people we are telling a wonderful story that invites the discerning participant to investigate for themselves the source of this Truth.

And of course this process should in no way infringe upon the principle that governs "Free Will" or each individual's right to self-determination. It is primordial then that each person creates their own path to self-knowledge and recognises their own true life's purpose.

Despite all the suffering and turmoil in the world, I remain an eternal optimist for the future of humanity and our planet. And I am confident that just like Aart Jurriaanse's book, we can build "Bridges" to transcend all ideological differences and that we can find creative solutions that uplift both our hearts and our minds.

To conclude, I would just like to say that these are just my preliminary thoughts and ideas and are in no way meant to be seen as fixed or preconditions for future dialogues. We are exploring a theme that I think concerns most theosophists around the world. This is not an easy fix and, as you can see, I have not put forward any concrete solutions, but it is a first step to determine whether we have a responsibility to act and, if so, how. ✧

Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage, you can't practice any other virtue consistently.

— Maya Angelou, American memoirist, essayist, and poet

Strings of Consciousness

S. RAMKUMAR

ROHIT was the Vice President of Finance in a large company. Calm and composed, he lived with a deep sense of spirituality. He believed that all living beings were connected by a thread of consciousness — a higher energy that bound everything together. Meditation and mindfulness were part of his daily life. For Rohit, Oneness was not just a belief; it was a way of life.

In the same office worked Swarup, the Vice President of Marketing. Swarup was full of energy, always laughing, joking, and socializing. He was a natural in marketing — a go-getter, always chasing results. He never gave much thought to spiritual ideas. He neither believed in them nor rejected them. Life was about action and achievement for him. But life had taken a turn. Over the past year, Swarup faced one setback after another. His father passed away, his wife's health deteriorated, and his teenage son was falling into bad habits. The pressure at work didn't help. Swarup, once full of life, now looked tired and anxious.

One day, over coffee, he said to Rohit: "You once mentioned a Swamiji you visit. Can you take me to him? Maybe he can help me understand what's happening in my life." Rohit agreed without hesitation.

That Sunday, they visited the ashram. A young brahmachari welcomed them and said: "Swamiji is in meditation. Please wait." Swarup chuckled and said: "Meditation? Isn't that just another word for sleep?" He laughed loudly and added: "What's the difference anyway?"

Rohit smiled gently and replied: "Sleep is when we lose awareness. Meditation, is when we become fully aware. Sleep is unconscious rest; Meditation is conscious stillness. One heals the body, the other heals the soul."

Swarup was curious now. "What are the levels of consciousness?" he asked.

Rohit explained: "There are four. The waking state — Jagrat — when we're aware of the outside world. The dream state — Swapna. Then deep sleep — Sushupti — where there's no awareness. Beyond all this is Turiya — pure awareness, the silent witness beyond thought."

Swarup nodded thoughtfully.

Just then, Swamiji stepped out. Peace

Mr S. Ramkumar has been a member of the Theosophical Society (TS), Adyar, for many years, and is former General Manager of the Adyar estate..

seemed to flow from his presence. He welcomed them warmly and asked why they had come. Swarup opened up, sharing his troubles, his confusion, and his pain. He spoke with emotion, something he hadn't done in a long time.

Swamiji listened quietly. After a pause, he said: "Life brings many waves. Some small, some overwhelming. Don't try to fight every wave. Learn to float. The wave that once scared you will carry you forward." He continued: "Start with ten minutes of silence each day. Don't try to change everything at once. Just sit with yourself. Listen to your breath. You'll find answers within."

That day planted a seed in Swarup. Slowly, he began sitting in silence each morning. The problems didn't vanish, but he no longer felt lost.

One day at work, he told Rohit: "That silence . . . I don't know what it is, but it's helping me breathe again."

Rohit smiled: "That silence . . . is you."

". . . from Ignorance spring the samkharas [tendencies of the mind] of threefold nature — productions of body, speech, and thought. From the samkharas springs consciousness, from consciousness springs name and form, from this spring the six regions (of the six senses, the seventh being the property of but the enlightened); from these springs contact from this sensation; from this springs thirst (or desire, kama, tanha) from thirst attachment, existence, birth, old age and death, grief, lamentation, suffering, dejection, and despair. Again, by the destruction of ignorance, the samkharas are destroyed, and their consciousness, name and form, the six regions, contact, sensation, thirst, attachment (selfishness), existence, birth, old age, death, grief, lamentation, suffering, dejection, and despair are destroyed. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering."

Gautama Buddha
From *The Mahatma Letters to* A. P. Sinnett
ML-10, no. 88 in chron. edn.
Notes by KH quoting the Buddha.

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