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## CONTENTS


Next Steps — I **5**
*Tim Boyd*

Embracing Spiritual Wholeness **10**
*Deepa Padhi*

Strengthening the Core of Theosophical Work **14**
*Vicente Hao Chin, Jr.*

The Adepts' Dream for Humanity **20**
*Pedro Oliveira*

Annie Besant's Vision of Dharma: A Theosophical Perspective **26**
*Rekha Rakesh Parikh*

Is a Guru Necessary: The Silent Teacher Within **32**
*Yajñavalka Banerjee*

International Directory **40**



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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.

# Next Steps — I

TIM BOYD

I WOULD like to share a few thoughts about the Theosophical Society's 150-year history, a history that has been momentous and challenging. Also, we are here to talk about the future and about the moment in which we find ourselves now. There is an expression with which we are all familiar: "Those who fail to learn from the past are doomed to repeat it." I take it as an advice, but for those who think that human nature is static and unchanging, the formula that the future equals the past is a gloomy arithmetic.

Rupert Sheldrake, a member of the Theosophical Society (TS) and also a noted scientist, was once asked: "Why are things the way they are?" His response? "Things are the way they are because they were the way they were." For some it could be viewed as humor, or as an answer that attempts to evade the question, but his point is that in the absence of some energy which shifts, even slightly, the momentum of a thing, it continues unchanged. If you want to know what the future will be, take a look at what we are putting into the worlds of thought and action right now. It is a restatement of the idea that we must learn from the past.

Part of the function of educational systems around the world is to help us understand the past. That is the ideal, but we could ask if the methods are effective. If your educational experience resembled mine, the schools you attended placed great emphasis on memorization of data. We were taught and tested on dates, the stories of "good" people (nation builders, warriors, law makers, religious figures) and "bad" people (warriors who lost the war, who broke the laws, who attempted to divide the nation, alternative religious figures to our local culture), social, political, and economic systems, and so on.

If this is an accurate description of the educational conditioning that we have all been exposed to, it is fair to ask how has this been working? To see how our education has worked along that line, we look to the present. Have the fears related to the threat of wars diminished? Has our adverse impact on other species and global climate diminished? Has the glorification of violence, or fragmentation and separation among people and nations diminished or accelerated?

When the TS was founded in 1875 one of the greatest concerns of its inner founders was that the internal causes of an ever-increasing societal fragmentation

Talk delivered at the 12th World Congress of the TS, Adyar, held in Vancouver, Canada, on 25 July 2025.

be addressed. On the one hand the influence of an unthinking, superstitious approach to religion was having a "degrading" effect; on the other side "brutal materialism" was described as "still more degrading". The divisive influence of conventional religion and the growing importance of a reductive science required a third, or middle way, which addressed the complete human being from a position of knowledge. The reintroduction of the Ageless Wisdom in the form of Theosophy was seen as that "leavening" influence.

Institutional education has adopted an approach to learning that is incomplete. The dependence on the cultivation of intellect alone limits one's ability to know deeply — to understand. Albert Einstein made the statement that "Any fool can *know*, the point is to *understand*." Anyone can pick up a book, and read it. With a good enough memory, one could quote from it, repeat it line by line, even going beyond those who might have studied it for years.

However, knowledge is surpassed by Wisdom, which is the focus of Theosophy, the Ageless Wisdom. And Wisdom manifests in a very different manner. In our attempt to learn from history the intellect has been trained, focused, and set to work on analyzing the past. It has been charged with assembling the relevant facts out of which some greater knowledge can arise.

All because we are aware that knowledge has a special value — knowledge is power. The fact that knowledge (properly applied) is power is demonstrated every day. It is our knowledge that prevents us from eating foods that are harmful to health; that allows us to follow a map's instructions to our destination; that makes space flight and cancer research possible. But the power of knowledge is confined to its level. No one would make the mistake of asking the most knowledgeable carpenter in the world to perform brain surgery, or the best surgeon for advice on the stock market. This type of knowledge has been glorified. Understanding has been ignored.

It is not that we are being denied access to it in our normal education processes. As members of the TS, the schools we attended and the educational process we were exposed to, are the same as those that trained everyone else to glorify intellectual knowledge beyond the limits of its usefulness. It is rare for someone to have been taught by someone with a genuine understanding, someone who could recognize the existence of our latent potentials; someone capable of leading us beyond the mere activity of the intellect to an intuitive approach to learning. We believe we are learning and that we know because we are comfortable within the limitations imposed upon us by our training.

If we consider the popular saying, "No problem can be solved on the same level at which it was created," it holds true. When we look at the problems we face in every corner of the world, there is sufficient knowledge available to address them. If knowledge is power and is sufficient to address human-created problems, why are

the obvious inequalities that exist in all our societies fostered and perpetuated? Why do we live in a world where we knowingly poison the water we drink and the air we breathe; where we are destroying the life forms that have collaborated with us in shaping this world from its beginnings? How can we do this if the knowledge and approach to knowledge that has become accepted are accurate? If it ever becomes clear to us that our approach is not merely inadequate, but toxic, we are faced with a challenge.

Part of the purpose for the founding of the Theosophical Society was to address the challenge of redirecting our attention from a path of thought and action clearly leading to dire consequences. The TS was founded by individuals who were not merely intelligent or knowledgeable, but by Masters of the Wisdom, who recognized its potential as an experiment whose time had come. Regardless of its success or failure, it was worth attempting. As long as it could maintain its integrity, it could influence the misguided directions that were becoming increasingly prevalent.

A few years ago I was invited to have a conversation with Michael Murphy, an American writer and co-founder of the Esalen Institute in California, which was a leader in the Human Potential Movement in the 1960s and '70s. An evening was set aside for Michael and me, and the assembled audience to talk about ideas. His life and work have had an enormous impact on the consciousness movement in the West, and he was full of fascinating stories. After our conversation, the audience participated in a Q&A session. At that time a gentleman stood up to ask a question. Often at such events questions can turn into lengthy statements, but in this case the question came from someone who was clearly well versed in the TS's history. Really, it was two questions that he asked. One of them related to the TS's focus on Unity — Universal Brotherhood. It went something like this: "In its history, the TS has experienced so many different splits and divisions within the organization. How can an organization that cannot itself remain whole claim to stand for Unity?"

My answer to the question then would be the answer I would give now: "In these supposed splits and divisions that happened over the history of the TS, most of the time it was precipitated by a sincere person, devoted to the cause and study of Theosophy and the theosophical movement; someone who had a profound vision or understanding which became so strong within them that it required a different platform in order to be shared. It has happened a number of times. What he named as splits and divisions, to me, were in fact the broadening of the theosophical movement. There were more voices in more places with various points of view to speak on specific aspects of One Universal Truth. No one person could embrace it all. A tree grows from a seed, but if it remains a seed, it does not become a tree. It puts down roots, and it puts out branches. Is a branch separate from the tree?"

The second question was preceded by a statement of fact: "So much of the foundation of the teachings of Theosophy traces back to the Masters of the Wisdom, but only a few people in the past, and no one in the present can report having seen or talked to any of the Masters. The question he asked was: "How can the theosophical movement be built upon such a questionable foundation?"

In *At the Feet of the Master*, written by a very young J. Krishnamurti, this statement is made: "You must trust in the Master and you must trust in yourself. If you have seen the Master, you will trust in him to the uttermost, through many lives, and many deaths." So I ask, what does it mean to see a Master?

From her youth H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) repeatedly had visions of her Master, but not once did she have the confirmation of meeting him in the flesh. At the age of twenty she was in London, and while there, while walking on the street she encountered a parade that was passing by. It was a procession that included Rajput princes from India. While watching, for the first time, she saw and recognized the person she had seen in visions and whose presence she had felt on numerous occasions. HPB was so overcome that she was moved to rush forward and throw herself at his feet. The way it is described, he gave her an indication with his hand, preventing her from going to him. Later that evening she met and was counseled by him.

The crux of the matter is that HPB saw her Master, but she was not the sole witness. Hundreds of people lined the street, observing the parade, who saw the same man, yet they failed to recognize his true identity. To them, he was an exotically dressed prince from a distant land. They saw the body, but not the person, the Master. Clearly, that is not what Krishnamurti intended by having "seen the Master". Although I have never laid eyes on the Buddha, Jesus, or Krishna, I have seen them. Intuitively, I have sensed their reach, touch, expression, and character through their teachings, making them as real, if not more real, than someone in a physical body. Ralph Waldo Emerson made the point: "Who you are speaks so loudly, I cannot hear a word you are saying." We have the capacity to perceive, hear, and comprehend at levels that surpass physical sight. We acknowledge this; however, we are willing to let it remain unexpressed because we have been conditioned in a specific manner.

As members of the TS, this gentleman's two questions crystalized important issues that we face. We seem to have a need for a physicalized Master. An exalted consciousness that associates itself with a body, if and when necessary, does not seem to satisfy our need for a person operating in the material world. Even though we "know" that the smallest fraction of the "real world" falls within the range of our five senses, we repeatedly fail to embrace that knowledge. In addition, there are the many phenomena that occurred during HPB's time — precipitated letters, objects, and other "supernatural" occurrences. For many people

these things hold immense importance. Without a doubt, phenomena point toward something deeper than normal science and practicality, but they are like a finger pointing at the moon. The finger is not important; looking in the direction it indicates is the point. If we are talking about our role in shaping the future, and about learning from the past, it would not be inaccurate to say that our dependence on externals, on people, personalities, and phenomena has been an obstacle to a deeper understanding. Our deeply engrained dependence on externals can only be addressed by cultivating an ever-increasing connection to our intui-tive capacity — the gateway to wisdom.

(*To be continued*)

**Intuition is a key aspect of spiritual growth and self-discovery.
It is the natural state of being, and it is through intuition
that one can connect with their true self and the universe.
By letting go of the ego and seeking to understand the self,
one can access the deeper truths of reality.
We should engage in self-inquiry and remain open
to the guidance of our intuition, which is often
the first step towards spiritual enlightenment.**

Sri Ramana Maharshi

# Embracing Spiritual Wholeness

DEEPA PADHI

EMBRACING spiritual wholeness is both an ancient and modern state of mind. In Mabel Collins's *The Idyll of the White Lotus* there is an invocation to meditation, "The Three Truths", the first verse of which reads:

> The soul of man is immortal and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendor have no limit.

In fact, this quote emphasizes the boundless potential of our inner self, perfect for encouraging spiritual wholeness. Living in this noisy world filled with distractions, divisions, discriminations, one feels fragmented. We are pulled in countless directions by responsibilities, expectations, ambitions, and stress as well. Yet, the ancient wisdom tradition including Theosophy, reminds us that wholeness is our natural state. It is not something to acquire; rather it is something to be aware of.

Wholeness is the integration of all dimensions of life-physical, mental, emotional, ethical, spiritual and interconnectedness with all beings and things. There is nothing conceivable outside of it. It is all inclusive. An appropriate expression of wholeness is found in the *Isha Upanishad* of Eastern philosophical literature which says:

*purnamadah purnamidam,*
*purnāt purnam udachyate.*
*purnasya purnamādāya,*
*purnameva avaśishyate.*

This means: "That" is whole, and "this" is also whole as "this" has come out of "That" whole. Here, "this" refers to the manifest world which is not other than "That", the Absolute. Wholeness cannot produce anything other than wholeness. Wholeness is not just the sum of the parts; it is undivided totality. As we know, this physical world is nothing but the manifestation of that Whole. There is nothing beyond Wholeness. Thus, wholeness is Truth and Truth is One.

The motto of the Theosophical Society, (TS ) as we know, is "There is no religion higher than Truth". There are many religions but truth is one. This motto of the TS itself is a call to spiritual integrity and universality, which is the key element of spiritual wholeness. Spiritual wholeness begins from within. To embrace spiritual wholeness is to recognize that we are not just physical bodies or personalities; we are souls, we are sparks of the One Life.

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This Truth is not something we find outside of ourselves. It lives within us as the Higher Self.

Spiritual wholeness is not tied to any particular religion or tradition. It can be pursued within or outside of religious frameworks. As Alan Watts says: "The infinitude of the Divine makes it possible to have infinite ways to the Divine." To embrace spiritual wholeness is to begin the journey of integration, of bringing our outer life into harmony with the deeper spiritual reality that lives within us all.

Before we proceed, I would like to mention the very subtle difference between Oneness and Wholeness. Oneness refers to the essential unity of all existence. This includes minerals, plants, animals, human beings, even Consciousness.

Wholeness, on the other hand, refers to the integration of all aspects of being into a harmonious totality. It emphasizes completeness rather than loss of individuality. Well, we can say: Wholeness is Oneness as it appears in form, whereas Oneness is Wholeness as it exists beyond form. They are not two separate realities, rather two perspectives of the same underlying truth.

Now, what is Spiritual Wholeness? From a theosophical point of view, the human being is not just a physical body or a personal ego. We are a seven-fold being with layers of consciousness, ranging from the physical, astral, vital and emotional to the higher mental, spiritual and Divine. Spiritual wholeness is the alignment of these parts, when our thoughts, feelings, actions, and intentions reflect the light of the Higher Self. It is the unfolding of the inner unity within ourselves and the greater Whole.

In Theosophy, the path of evolution is not only outward but also inward. We are here not merely to exist, but to consciously evolve, to awaken the inner flame, the Divine spark. As H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) said, the self of matter and the Self of Spirit can only be united through the practice of conscious living (paraphrased from *The Voice of the Silence*).

We need to ask ourselves: Am I living in alignment with the truth of who am I? Do my actions reflect compassion, wisdom, and unity? This is the discipline of the spiritual path: To live not for the separate self but for the greater good, the One Life.

Spiritual wholeness relates to a deeper sense of inner harmony. It involves a feeling that is aligned with our inner truth, moral values, and the ultimate purpose. It involves a connection with the universe or a sense of cosmic unity which may not be connected to any doctrine or Laws. We can say, it is about inner alignment and connectedness that transcends religious boundaries. We are all connected to the universe, Life, and the inner self, or consciousness. This consciousness is within us and outside of us. Spiritual wholeness is beyond all religions.

Religious wholeness, on the other hand, refers to the sense of living in alignment with the beliefs, rituals, and community of a particular religion. It is about living in harmony with a specific tradition or communal belief.

Theosophy not only believes in

Universal Brotherhood, it emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living and non-living beings, as we are all parts of one cosmic web. A key theosophical teaching is that all life is One, and there is no real separation between us and others, between the human and the divine, even between spirit and matter. Blavatsky reminds us: "The whole order of Nature evinces a progressive march towards *a higher life.*"(*The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 1, p. 277)

The great saint Rumi rightly said: "You are not a drop in the ocean, you are the entire ocean in a drop." Each drop in the ocean, while it carries its individuality, merges with the ocean — the unity underlying diversity. In embracing our interconnected nature, we acknowledge the intrinsic bond that unites all living and non-living beings.

I would like to mention some theosophical practices necessary for those who are focused on embracing spiritual wholeness:

1. Self-awareness is the foundation. Through study, meditation, and selfless service, we need to recognize the false self, that is, personality, or ego, and connect with the real Self (*ātman*).

2. Alignment with our purpose and meaning is important. Intellectually we should be awake, having alignment of actions with purpose.

3. Acceptance is very important. Acceptance of all dualities like birth-death, happiness-sorrow, knowledge-ignorance, perfection-imperfection, and so on, as wholeness includes all these. Spiritual wholeness often brings a sense of peace and balance even in the face of hardship. This does not mean that we do not feel pain or face problems, but one feels a deeper sense of acceptance.

4. Integration: Wholeness is realized by purifying the lower vehicles — our thoughts, emotions, and desires, beliefs, actions, and behaviour. These need to be consistent with each other.

5. Feeling of connection is possible only through compassion and love. Spiritual wholeness is often marked by compassion, love, and empathy for others, and a recognition of the dignity and worth of all beings however small they may be. Service is the natural expression of spiritual realization. As Madame Blavatsky says, the one who lives for self, lives in vain; the one who lives to serve others, lives in Truth (paraphrased from *The Voice of the Silence*).

6. Meditation is a must. In silence, the voice of the soul is heard. The practice of meditation lifts our consciousness beyond the astral and into contact with the buddhic, or spiritual, level.

7. One should live in harmony with Nature. By honouring the laws of Nature and living in simplicity, we align with the spiritual laws of the Universe.

Theosophy is rooted in the idea of Spiritual wholeness. It teaches that all human beings are on a path towards the realization of their divine, unified and whole nature. The core concern is the unity of all life, the spiritual evolution of the soul and the inner wisdom available to all. What I understand, Spiritual wholeness means being fully connected, integrated and at peace with one's inner self, or consciousness, as well as

connected to the Universe as a whole.

It includes experiencing our oneness with all beings and the cosmos. In Theosophy, wholeness means aligning the seven principles of our being in the service of our higher nature and the universal good. A person is "whole" when these layers are aligned, balanced and function as a whole. Self-transformation is the path to Spiritual wholeness.

In the present day, people, particularly the younger generation, do not like to be identified with any particular religion. This does not mean faith is disappearing, rather it is being redesigned. Science and spirituality are converging. Neuroscience and consciousness studies are giving a new shape to our understanding of spiritual experiences, and reinforcing the connection between the mind, body, and the Universe.

In fact, recently a new science is developing which seems to be rooted in wholeness. Laura Domenech says:

> Wholeness speaks of the origin of the universe not as a starting point from which it emerges, but as an ongoing, active process. It invites us to view the universe as a dynamic unfolding, a deeply interconnected, relational, and coherent state of existence where differentiation and diversity do not fragment the whole but instead enrich it. The parts are unique, distinct, and unrepeatable, yet they remain inseparable and inherently connected to the whole.

Wholeness is the intrinsic nature of the Universe.

Therefore, the journey towards the whole is not only a spiritual quest, it is also a scientific one. Spiritual wholeness invites us to act not only to find peace and bliss within, but to bring that peace and happiness into the world. When we feel spiritually whole, we naturally become more loving, kind, patient, truthful, empathetic, and compassionate. We begin to see others, even non-humans, not as strangers, but as co-travellers, each carrying their own inner light.

To embrace spiritual wholeness is not to escape life, but to live it more fully with awareness. It is to remember that we are not separate from others, nor from the world around us. It means recognizing that each part contains the whole, which is universal Consciousness, a sacred unity. Theosophy reminds us that the journey to wholeness is not limited to one lifetime. Our spiritual development unfolds over many lifetimes, through the laws of karma and reincarnation. We are evolving over many incarnations, gradually unfolding wisdom, love, and compassion. As the saying goes, each soul has its own rhythm.

Therefore, embracing spiritual wholeness means accepting something fully with openness and connecting with our true self — the Higher Self. It is about feeling complete within, not missing any part of who we are inside. In fact, the real "I" within me, is the Whole. "Look inward: Thou art Buddha", says *The Voice of the Silence*. ✧

# Strengthening the Core of Theosophical Work

VICENTE HAO CHIN, JR.

DURING the last Theosophical World Congress in 2018, I had shared five areas of focus for our work in the 21st century, as follows:

**1.** Globalize Theosophical Work.

• We must not work as separate Sections or countries but rather as a global movement.

**2.** Programs for the Public (Applied Theosophy).

• We need to actively link the teachings of the Ageless Wisdom to the problems of the world — both for individuals and for societies.

**3.** Establish Theosophical Schools

• The key to social transformation is through educational reform around the world, because the future is the young people of each generation. The Theosophical Society (TS) must set the model for schools that will make a difference in producing well-balanced and productive individuals.

**4.** Draw Young People to Theosophy

• We need to prepare for the next generation of theosophical leaders.

**5.** Work Towards Religious Reform

• This has been the mission of the TS since the beginning. Religious divisions continue to be one of the most violent sources of wars and hostility.

Several of these areas of work are already being carried out. Our President, Tim Boyd, has introduced practices within the TS that have internationalized theosophical work in major ways. **First** are the twice-a-year meetings of the General Council, one of them addressing the strategic work directions, where more than 20 leaders of the TS meet for four days to thresh out new directions of our global work. This has been a very significant development in the past decade.

**Second**, he has strengthened the internal capacity of the TS by establishing a strong financial base that will enable the TS to widen its work. **Third**, he has initiated many projects that enhance the effectiveness of TS work in various aspects, such as the establishment of a successful theosophical school in Adyar, doing extensive renovations and construction at the international headquarters, launching an environmental program, and initiating a social

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media program, among other initiatives.

Today, I would like to focus on two areas of our work that require long-term implementation but are essential to achieving greater effectiveness:

**1.** The continuous and systematic training of core groups of theosophists who will be teaching Theosophy to members and the general public.

**2.** To promote practices or institutions that will apply the principles of the Ageless Wisdom to help solve the problems of individuals and society. This is applied Theosophy.

**Training of Theosophical Workers**

First, let us look into the need for coninuous training of leaders, speakers, writers, and workers.

The effectiveness of the Theosophical Society (TS) depends on its advocates, exemplars, and volunteers in various corners of the world. It is a living philosophy and not merely an academic study. A living philosophy means that there are living human examples of the philosophy. Theosophy is learned not just by reading books. It is by exposure to people who have endeavored to live the higher life. In fact, such exposure often has a greater impact on the life of an aspirant than the reading of many books. Thus, the presence of more people who are worthy representatives of theosophical wisdom becomes an essential part of our work.

How are such exemplars to emerge generation after generation? It can be by chance or by deliberate nurturing. When we depend on the fortuitous or chance emergence of devoted theosophical advocates or workers, then the effectiveness of the work will fluctuate — sometimes active, sometimes inactive. And this can often lead to unhappy outcomes.

Through many decades of traveling around theosophical Sections, I have witnessed instances of national leaders who were not well-grounded in the wisdom teachings, which led to the decline or demise of Theosophy in those countries. In one case, the leader had really weird ideas that were very distant from Theosophy. Fortunately, he is no longer active in the TS, but, very unfortunately, this led to the demise of the entire theosophical organization, such that, today, the TS is no longer active in that country.

In another instance, the leader was more inclined towards another movement, such that when I visited the country decades ago, he brought me to the meeting of the other movement rather than organizing a theosophical meeting. It was then that I realized that it was a hopeless case. He was too committed to the other movement. Theosophical activity has also died there, and has remained inactive for more than twenty years up to this time.

In another country, Theosophy was once super-strong with many Lodges, and had in fact become part of the national culture. But today, virtually only one Lodge remains, struggling to survive. Had there been a long-term program for the resuscitation and sustenance of the Section and Lodges, such effort would have succeeded because the culture of the country was ideally ready for Theosophy.

The TS is a global movement for

humanity, not just for any country. Its strength lies in its international presence. If it is strong in two or three Sections but weak elsewhere, then its probable destiny is to dwindle because it seems unable to make itself relevant to the needs of the larger world.

In many countries, the quality of theosophical leaders is often a hit-and-miss process, depending on circumstances and the people available. I think this is where the International Headquarters can make a crucial difference in the future of such national Societies. I would even say that we must make it a duty of our global organization to make such a difference in a (1) systematic, (2) continuous, and (3) measurable way.

**Best Practices**

How do global organizations and businesses train their national CEOs to make their international branches become solid and strong? It is not by hit or miss; they make it happen by systematic, continuous, and measurable policies and procedures. This is true of Rotary Clubs, religious organizations, or multinational business entities. We need to do it, too.

There is a large organization in the Philippines that is a part of a global network. It lamented that many leaders of the branches lacked core knowledge and capabilities. So, it established a permanent institute with a faculty that conducts courses and training for its members all over the country. Sometimes more than twenty seminars per year are conducted, reaching several thousand members each year. Later, it even required that officers who would be elected as local leaders should have undergone the seminar before assuming certain key positions. This has been going on for more than twenty years and has proven to be very effective in making the members become not only more knowledgeable but also more committed to the mission of the organization. The speakers are offered an honorarium for conducting the lectures because it is held quite frequently, where the speakers have to take time away from their regular work or duties.

Most of us are aware of how active religious organizations train their pastors and preachers. I am reminded of a person I know who worked as a vehicle driver for forty years, did not have much education, and upon his retirement, became a full-time preacher of a church. This happened because, for years, he was deliberately trained by the church every Sunday to become familiar with the doctrines, to live the life, and develop communication skills.

Religious organizations are very good at this. They set up seminaries and training institutions with well-designed learning modules. In this way, they are able to send preachers and workers to many parts of the world year after year. This is how they sustain their effectiveness through the centuries.

The training of key people will have to be on two levels: the national level and the local Lodge level.

I believe that this training on the national level has to be initiated by the International Headquarters at Adyar

because most Sections do not do any planning on the training of national leaders, lecturers, or workers. They just rely on those who are available, since it is mainly voluntary work in most countries. Some Sections are able to provide a reasonable honorarium and residence for their national leaders so that they are focused and truly active in the work of the Society; but these are relatively few.

**Training Content**

It is necessary that we create a continuing program deliberately meant to train and nurture theosophical lecturers, writers, and workers. The program will have to cover at least three areas:

a. A knowledge of Theosophy and related fields (comparative religion, mysticism)

b. The living of the theosophic life, and

c. The development of communication skills.

These competencies are not easy to find in one person. But we increase the possibility of having more such people if we deliberately and continuously nurture potential theosophical teachers around the world. Such training will take years. The training process has to be established as a permanent institution or academy.

Currently, the recurring international course that we have is the School of the Wisdom. It used to be an in-depth course on Theosophy that would last for two months. Today, it has been made topical, where special subjects would be presented by chosen speakers for two weeks. Thus, it is no longer intended to be part of a training program for theosophical workers.

**Current Efforts**

At present, I am involved in the planning and preparation of an online training program to be launched by the Krotona Institute of Theosophy, perhaps next year — a training program with an international faculty and open to any theosophist around the world, and will take two years for each participant to complete. It will be in-depth, intended to help the participant become prepared in the dissemination of the teachings, even if not yet the management of groups. It will cover at least two areas: theosophical knowledge and the theosophical way of life. Later, those who are willing to help in theosophical dissemination will be guided on communication skills.

This can be a pilot effort that can be studied by Adyar and perhaps adopted for such an international training program.

In the Philippines, we had previously planned an online Master's degree in Theosophy to be offered by the Golden Link College with an international faculty and open to international students. But the requirements of the Philippine Commission on Higher Education for graduate programs are still difficult for us to meet. We then proposed to the Indian Section to have such a course at their college in Varanasi, which already has graduate programs and is accredited by the Banaras Hindu University.

It is also important to mention that such a training program should try to focus more on young theosophists.

**Local Training Programs**

The existence of such an international

training program will pave the way for the establishment of local training programs at Lodge levels, which can be a similar program on a smaller scale.

This is the second stage in setting up our training institutions. The training of local speakers is as vital as the training of national speakers, because local resource persons are the source of the vitality of the Lodge, and they are the keys to the spreading of theosophical seeds in far-flung areas of the world.

In the Philippine Section, for example, while we have core workers and lecturers at the national capital and headquarters, this is often not the case in the outlying Lodges. The Lodges are very important in making the presence of the wisdom teachings strong and felt in outlying areas. Where there is at least one active worker and lecturer in a Lodge, the Lodge is sustained and can even grow. Where there is none, the Lodge tends to weaken and eventually fade. The presence of such local leaders often spells the life and death of a Lodge or study group. In the past many years, when I have been asked to speak and travel to more than 30 Sections or national theosophical groups, I have observed the same thing.

**Theosophy as a Way of Life**

Let us look into a second aspect of this training and nurturing process: the establishment of continuing practices and institutions that will sustain Theosophy as a living philosophy.

As mentioned, Theosophy is not just a body of knowledge, but a way of life, for which reason it is also referred to as Wisdom Teachings, because wisdom is the application of the knowledge.

A way of life is something that is continuously being practiced or applied, in personal life, in the family, at work, and in society. To sustain this, there is a need to have recurring practices or living institutions that continue to nurture such a way of life.

As a simple example, the pleasant dinner together every night by a family becomes a daily practice that nurtures the harmony and bonding of family members. It is not something that happens once in a while, but regularly and continuously.

Going to school every day is another example of an institutionalized practice that will cultivate, strengthen, or deepen certain qualities in a young person until such qualities become deeply ingrained. Montessori continues to be a living educational philosophy because of the thousands of Montessori schools around the world today, institutions that apply the principles in the actual growing-up process of children.

It is then vital that if we wish a set of teachings to be a living and thriving philosophy, it must be supported by continuing practices and functioning institutions that demonstrate its effectiveness in the affairs of life.

Here are examples of such applications:

• Recurrent practices: regular group meditation, regular philanthropic or outreach work, Lodge meetings, retreats, outings, group travels, regular talks, conventions, and so on.

• Institutions: these are regular practices

with more formalized structures, such as schools, retreat centers, libraries, foundations, lodges, youth groups, members' fellowship groups, choir groups, committees, Sunday schools, children's activities, group advocacies, and so forth.

- Of the four top universities in the Philippines, three are run by Catholic orders. They produce leaders, legislators, and influential people in Philippine society who shape public opinion, and whose views are heavily molded by the Catholic Church. From this, you will better understand why the Philippines is the only country in the world, aside from the Vatican, that does not allow divorce.

- Recurrent study courses: on Theosophy, meditation, comparative religion, personal growth, and so on.

- Sustained media activity: book publications, social media, e-books, periodicals for the public, and so forth.

A key principle is that there are recurrent activities and involvement of individuals that would apply and demonstrate the philosophy, as well as nurture and sustain wholesomeness in one's daily life.

The extent and sustainability of such practices and institutions will depend upon the availability of core workers and speakers within the TS. That is the reason why the first goal of developing core workers is essential in increasing the effectiveness of the TS in carrying out its mission.

**Summary**

It is vital that we focus on the establishment of two programs in the TS to strengthen and widen the effectiveness of our global work.

1. The continuous and systematic training of core groups of theosophists who will be teaching Theosophy to members and the general public.

2. To promote recurrent practices or permanent institutions that will apply the principles of the wisdom teachings to help solve the problems of individuals and society.

When these are established and widened to include training programs on a national level, the Theosophical Society will have a more solid system of nurturing theosophical speakers and leaders in the coming generations. We shall become more prepared to be more effective in our global mission. ✧

**Education should be so revolutionized**
**as to answer the wants of the poorest villager,**
**instead of answering those of an imperial exploiter.**

Mahatma Gandhi

# The Adepts' Dream for Humanity

PEDRO OLIVEIRA

I ONCE asked Radhaji (Radha Burnier, seventh international President of the Theosophical Society (TS) at Adyar from 1980 to 2013): "I know that liberated souls in Sanskrit are called *jivanmukta-s*; what is your translation of this word?"

She said: "*Jivan* means life, *mukta* means freedom. A *jivanmukta* is a liberated life." In that person the one life has become completely liberated from the illusion of separateness. That's what an Adept is, according to their own words. So the Adepts' vision for the future of humanity remains hopeful according to their own letters.

I must start with a passage from a letter of Swami T. Subba Row to Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (HPB):

> It should be strongly impressed on the minds of the English theosophists that these men [the Adepts] are not very anxious to get their existence recognised by them.[1]

Not surprisingly, they do not have an email account, or a website, or any social media account, including Instagram, but there are many who claim that they represent them. On a more personal level, HPB writes to A. P. Sinnett:

> Remember only that He suffers more, perhaps, than any one of us. And you do not know how right you are in saying that "Well as He loved, He will love me truly — Yea even better than I love Him", for even *you* can never love him as well as He loves you — *that particle of Humanity which did its best to help on and benefit Humanity* — "the great orphan" He speaks of in one of his letters.[2]

The Adepts show an uncompromising, even personal, regard and concern for humanity as a whole, and they made clear that such syntony is a qualification for any possible communication with them. The quotes below are very well known; they are from *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, and *The Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*. The reason why I represent them is because there may be a sense in which revisiting them again may bring more clarity. I am reminded of what Marcel Proust said: "What we need are not new landscapes, but new eyes." This is what the letters from the Mahatmas present. They are all from the chronological edition, originally published by the Theosophical Publishing House in Manila, the Philippines, edited by Vicente Hao Chin, Jr.

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> The term "Universal Brotherhood" is no idle phrase. Humanity in the mass has a paramount claim upon us, as I try to explain in my letter to Mr Hume, which you had better ask the loan of. It is the only secure foundation for universal morality. If it be a dream, it is at least a noble one for humankind and it is the aspiration of the *true adept*.[3]

The word Brotherhood means: "community feeling uniting all humankind" (Online Etymology Dictionary); "friendship and understanding between people" (Oxford Learners Dictionary). This is remarkable because it shows that they do not have an ideology to sell us, or the world. They are committed to the upliftment of humanity as a whole.

Master KH (Koot Hoomi), in a long passage talks about his view of humanity, its travails, its sufferings:

> Until final emancipation reabsorbs the *Ego*, it *must* be conscious of the purer sympathies called out by the esthetic effects of high art, its tenderest cords respond to the call of the holier and nobler *human* attachments. Of course, the greater the progress towards deliverance, the less this will be the case, until, to crown all, human and purely individual personal feelings — blood ties and friendship, patriotism and race predilection — all will give away, to become blended into one universal feeling, the only true and holy, the only unselfish and Eternal one — Love, an Immense Love for humanity — as a *Whole*! For it is "Humanity" which is the great orphan, the only disinherited one upon this Earth, my friend. And it is the duty of every man who is capable of an unselfish impulse, to do something, however little, for its welfare. Poor, poor humanity! It reminds me of the old fable of the war between the Body and its members: here too, each limb of this huge "Orphan" — fatherless and motherless — selfishly cares but for itself. The body uncared for suffers eternally, whether the limbs are at war or at rest. Its suffering and agony never cease. . . .[4]

This could be an editorial opinion for the major newspapers in the world. Nothing is more important than ending humanity's suffering. Then he clarifies what is meant by "humanity". He says:

> Therefore whenever I speak of humanity without specifying it you must understand that I mean not humanity of our fourth round as we see it on this speck of mud in space, but the whole host already evoluted.[5]

So an Adept can see the future of humanity. It is not a question of believing it. It is a question of knowing it. Master KH's brother, Master M. (Morya), not only restates the commitment to humanity, but he delves into the issue to how self-centeredness and selfishness are credible, real impediments in this world. He says:

> . . . men who join the Society with the one selfish object of reaching power, making occult science their only or even chief aim, may as well not join it — they are doomed to disappointment as much as those who commit the mistake of letting them believe that the Society is nothing else. It is just because they preach, too much "the Brothers" and too little if at all *Brotherhood*, that they fail. How many times had we to repeat, that he who joins the Society with the sole object of coming in contact with us and if not of

> acquiring at least of assuring himself of the reality of such powers and of our objective existence — was pursuing a mirage? I say again then. It is he alone who has the love of humanity at heart, who is capable of grasping thoroughly the idea of a regenerating practical Brotherhood who is entitled to the possession of our secrets. He alone, such a man — will never misuse his powers, as there will be no fear that he should turn them to selfish ends. A man who places not the good of human-kind above his own good is not worthy of becoming our *chela* — he is not worthy of becoming higher in knowledge than his neighbour.[6]

His stance is uncompromising, radically inclined. For him the core idea of Brotherhood is to live for humanity uncompromisingly, to be of service, to be able to listen, to be able to forget personal life. This He presents as a condition for coming nearer to them. In another passage Master KH says:

> Poor, poor Humanity, when shalt thou have the whole and unadulterated truth![7]

It seems to imply that unless there is this full realization of Brotherhood, we have partial and adulterated truths. Apparently, the present world presents very convincing evidence of this. Social media is being used to create a world view that all those who are in power are right. If you are not in power you are not right, you do not really matter. From this point of view the Adepts were radicals. Then there are some views from the Master of the Masters, the Mahachohan, who sent a communication to Mr Sinnett and to Mr Hume when their views of the TS were rather disparaging to the Masters:

> The TS was chosen as the cornerstone, the foundation of the future religions of humanity. To achieve the proposed object a greater, wiser, and especially a more benevolent intermingling of the high and the low, of the alpha and the omega of society, was determined upon.[8]

I do not need to convince you, I do not want to convince you that social justice remains elusive in this world. Then he gives an advice which would protect theosophical committees worldwide of problems. He says:

> All of us have to get rid of our own Ego, the illusory apparent *self*, to recognise our true self in a transcendental divine life. . . .
>
> To these there must be somewhere a consistent solution, and if our doctrines will show their competence to offer it, then the world will be the first one to confess *that must* be the true philosophy, the true religion, the true light, which gives *truth* and nothing but the *truth*.[8]

After Master KH came back from his retreat he wrote to Mr Sinnett and he said: "I am 'self'" once more. But what is *self*? Only a passing guest, . . . a mirage of the great desert. . . ."[9]

And it was Radhaji, many years ago, who shared in a talk at Adyar a teaching of the Lord Buddha to his disciples about the householder and the stranger who came to him at night, asking for food and rest, and after some time after he stayed he walked into the householder's bedroom with a knife and killed him. The Lord Buddha said: "The stranger is the

self." And Radhaji used to say: "We indulge in horse trading with the self."

It is easy for us to self-justify ourselves when it is convenient and we believe that the self is not dangerous, but in the self is enshrined all the monumental negative powers of vanity, hatred, division, and lies, that divide not only people, but families and nations, too.

> Perish rather the Theosophical Society with both its hapless founders than that we should permit it to become no better than an academy of magic and a hall of occultism. That *we* the devoted followers of that spirit incarnate of absolute self-sacrifice, of philanthropy, divine kindness, as of all the highest virtues attainable on this earth of sorrow, the man of men, Gautama Buddha, should ever allow the Theosophical Society to represent the *embodiment of selfishness*, the refuge of the few, with no thought in them for the many, is a strange idea, my brothers.
>
> To be *true*, religion and philosophy must offer the solution of every problem. That the world is in such a bad condition morally is a conclusive evidence that none of its religions and philosophies, those of the *civilised* races less than any other, have ever possessed the *truth*. The right and logical explanations on the subject of the problems of the great dual principles — right and wrong, good and evil, liberty and despotism, pain and pleasure, egotism and altruism — are as impossible to them now as they were 1,881 years ago. They are as far from the solution as they ever were but, ——[8]

This was written in 1881. Mr Jinarājadāsa said that the "Maha Chohan's Letter" was the Magna Carta of the TS. Of course, he spoke of his personal view. Who is an Adept? How does an Adept describe himself?

> The Adept is the rare efflorescence of a generation of enquirers, and to become one he must obey the inward impulse of his own soul irrespective of the prudential considerations of worldly science and sagacity.[10]

An Adept is the rare efflorescence of a generation of enquirers. The Society was founded on this principle. It was not founded as a belief-based organization. It was founded as an enquiry-based organization. There is a very famous discourse of the Buddha, when he went to visit the Kalamas — it is called the Kalama Sutra:

> 10. "Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher'. Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are good; these things are not blameable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them."[11]

It could be argued that the Wisdom Teaching that we call Theosophy was never a belief-based teaching, because in the summing up of Vol. I of *The Secret Doctrine*, Madame Blavatsky talks about the sources of Theosophy, and the initiated seers who transmitted it from generation to generation. She said: "Every new gen-

eration of seers would not just accept the teachings of a previous generation. They would inquire, they would test, and would verify." That is how this teaching has arrived here, and perhaps we should honour that tradition. Master KH offers a glimpse of the nature of an Adept's consciousness:

> Believe me, there comes a moment in the life of an Adept, when the hardships he has passed through are a thousandfold rewarded. In order to acquire further knowledge, he has no more to go through a minute and slow process of investigation and comparison of various objects, but is accorded an instantaneous, implicit insight into every first truth.[12]

Two Teachers seem to have resonated to this: Sri Ramana Maharshi, when he suggested an inquiry into the nature of Self. When he was dying of cancer for the second time, an old lady devotee from his ashram said to him in Tamil and in tears: "How come that you are going to leave us?" Ramana looked at her and said: "Why do you say I'm going to leave you? Where would I go?" His consciousness was everywhere.

The second Teacher, J. Krishnamurti, is perhaps still reverberating with some members of the TS with what happened in 1929, when he dissolved the Order of the Star in the East. He also spoke about this direct insight, which is non-mediated by any description, by any category, and in that sense, it does not belong to any teacher. But there are many Christian and Muslim mystics who report the same. *The Cloud of Unknowing* suggests that in order to know God one has to go through an unknowing, a letting go of everything that has been accumulated by the brain. Jalal-ud-din Rumi said that the Beloved is all in all, and the lover is a dead thing. The President mentioned in his speech this morning about how motive is everything. Right at the beginning with the correspondence with Sinnett and Hume, Master KH affirmed:

> To our minds then, these motives, sincere and worthy of serious consideration from the worldly standpoint, appear — *selfish*. . . . They are selfish, because you must be aware that the chief object of the TS is not so much to gratify individual aspirations as to serve our fellow men, and the real value of this term "selfish", which may jar upon your ear, has a peculiar significance with us, which it cannot have with you. Therefore, and to begin with, you must not accept it otherwise than in the former sense. Perhaps, you will better appreciate our meaning when told that in our view the highest aspirations for the welfare of humanity become tainted with selfishness if, in the mind of the philanthropist, there lurks the shadow of desire for self-benefit or a tendency to do injustice, even when these exist unconsciously in himself. Yet, you have ever discussed but to put down the idea of a universal Brotherhood, questioned its usefulness and advised to remodel the TS on the principle of a college for the special study of occultism. This, my respected and esteemed friend and Brother, will never do![10]

I would like to suggest that we take

to heart a question: "Why is it difficult to look at our own motives in daily life?" In his final quote, Mahatma KH writing to Mr Sinnett presents his very strong view of how pervasive selfishness is:

> There was a time, when from sea to sea, from the mountains and deserts of the north to the grand woods and downs of Ceylon [now Sri Lanka], there was but one faith, one rallying cry — to save humanity from the miseries of ignorance in the name of him who taught first the solidarity of all men [the Buddha]. How is it now? Where is the grandeur of our people and of the one Truth? These, you may say, are beautiful visions which were once realities on earth, but had flitted away like the light of a summer's evening. Yes; and now we are in the midst of a conflicting people, of an obstinate, ignorant people, seeking to know the truth, yet not able to find it, for each seeks it only for his own private benefit and gratification, without giving one thought to others. Will you, or rather they, never see the true meaning and explanation of that great wreck and desolation which has come to our land and threatens all lands — yours first of all? It is *selfishness* and *exclusiveness* that killed ours, and it is selfishness and exclusiveness that will kill yours — which has in addition some other defects which I will not name. The world has clouded the light of true knowledge, and *selfishness* will not allow its resurrection, for it excludes and will not recognise the whole fellowship of all those who were born under the same immutable natural law.[6]

I said before what Master KH felt about humanity. This is what Master M. feels, and with this I conclude this presentation:

> I am, as I was and, as I was and am, so am I likely always to be — the slave of my duty to the Lodge and humankind; not only taught, but desirous to subordinate every preference for individuals to a love of the human race. [13]

## Endnotes

1. *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, Letter from T. Subba Row to HPB, 3 February 1882.

2. Ibid., Letter from HPB to A. P. Sinnett, 19 August 1885.

3. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* (chronological edition), letter #5 (ML-4).

4. Ibid., letter #15 (ML-8)

5. Ibid., letter #67 (ML-15)

6. Ibid., letter #33 (ML-38)

7. Ibid., letter #49 (ML-48)

8. Ibid., appendix #1. Also, *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, First Series, letter #1

9. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* (chronological edition), letter #47 (ML-45)

10. Ibid., letter #2 (ML-2)

11. *Kalama Sutta — The Buddha's Charter of Free Inquiry*, translated from the Pali by Soma Thera.

12. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* (chronological edition), letter #17 (ML-31)

13. Ibid., letter #29 (ML-29)

# Annie Besant's Vision of Dharma: A Theosophical Perspective

REKHA RAKESH PARIKH

> "There are no others; it is my Self in all". When all men say this, the world will have its Golden Age. . . . We are brothers, but more than brothers. Brothers have only a common father; we have a common Self. In all around us, then, let us see the Glory of the Self, and let us remember that to deny the Self in the lowest, is to deny it in ourselves and in God.
>
> — Annie Besant, *The Brotherhood of Religions*

## Introduction

Can spirituality and social responsibility coexist? Annie Besant believed they must. Few figures in modern history have so seamlessly integrated spiritual wisdom with social action. A visionary thinker, reformer, and theosophist, Besant saw Dharma not as passive contemplation but as active engagement with the world. For her, true wisdom was incomplete unless it translated into selfless service — where spiritual evolution and societal upliftment go hand in hand.

Her foundation of morality was deeply utilitarian, as she asserted in her autobiography:

> The true basis of morality is utility; that is, the adaptation of our actions to the promotion of the general welfare and happiness; the endeavor so to rule our lives that we may serve and bless humankind.

Rejecting blind adherence to tradition, Besant urged individuals to ensure that their actions contributed to the collective good. This alignment of personal Dharma with universal Dharma became the cornerstone of her Theosophical philosophy.

Besant believed in an all-pervading divine presence, declaring in *The Ancient Wisdom*:

> [God] is immanent in every atom, all-pervading, all-sustaining, all-evolving; He is its source and its end, its cause and its object, its centre and circumference; it is built on him as its sure foundation, it breathes Her concept of Dharma thus

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extended beyond human boundaries to embrace all sentient life. She emphasized that true spiritual progress is inseparable from compassion towards all beings. In *Vegetarianism in the Light of Theosophy*, she argued that the suffering we inflict on sentient beings hinders human evolution, reinforcing that ethical responsibility extends beyond human interactions to our treatment of all life forms. For Besant, thus, Dharma was an all-encompassing principle that upheld the unity of existence and the moral obligation to protect and nurture all life.

Initially a staunch atheist and socialist, Besant underwent a profound transformation after becoming a disciple of Madame H. P. Blavatsky and embracing Theosophy. This shift led her to recognize that true social progress cannot be sustained without a strong ethical and spiritual foundation. She came to see Theosophy as a path that integrates ethical living, selfless service, and the pursuit of truth — an approach she believed was essential for both individual and collective evolution.

Crucially, her journey from materialistic rationalism to theosophical spirituality was not a rejection of reason but an expansion of it. She came to see Dharma not as a rigid dogma but as a living, dynamic principle, one that adapts to time and context — a concept that remains profoundly relevant even today.

For Besant, Dharma was never passive or abstract; it was an active force shaping both individual conduct and societal structures. Her tireless work in education, women's rights, and India's freedom movement demonstrated that spirituality is not an escape from worldly duties but a guiding principle for ethical action. Her life exemplified the idea that spirituality and social duties are not exclusive, but deeply interconnected. Besant firmly believed that no soul can progress alone. We rise by lifting others into light and peace.

Besant's legacy challenges us to reconsider Dharma not merely as a philosophy but as a practical path toward selfless service, universal brotherhood, and ethical living. In a world increasingly divided by materialism and conflict, her vision of Dharma offers timeless guidance, proving that spiritual wisdom and social action must go hand in hand.

Besant's theosophical vision of Dharma, in a nutshell, emphasised selfless service, universal brotherhood, and the integration of ethical action with spiritual wisdom — a message as urgent today as it was in her time.

## Theosophy as Brahma-Vidya: A Higher Understanding of Dharma

Annie Besant's embrace of Theosophy marked a profound transformation in her worldview. She saw Dharma not as a rigid religious doctrine but as a universal moral law governing both the cosmos and human conduct. In *Theosophy in Relation to Human Life*, Besant asserted that Theosophy is Brahma-Vidya — the supreme wisdom — not merely the intellectual pursuit of truth, but its realization through ethical action.

For Besant, true religiosity was not

about blind adherence to rituals or dogma but about living ethically, prasticing compassion, and striving for self-purification. She reinforced the idea that the highest Dharma of life is to serve humanity while advancing one's spiritual evolution. At the core of her teachings was the belief that Dharma is not merely a personal spi-ritual pursuit but a profound commitment to societal upliftment — extending to humanity, Nature, and the larger cosmic order. This dynamic view of Dharma resonates deeply with ancient Indian philosophy, particularly the *Bhagavadgitā 's* teachings on Karma Yoga — selfless action performed in service of the greater good.

**Universal Brotherhood: Dharma as Collective Duty**

Annie Besant saw Dharma not as a passive spiritual pursuit but as an urgent call to compassionate action. Central to her theosophical philosophy was the principle of universal brotherhood, which she viewed not as an abstract ideal but as a fundamental law of existence — a force as real and binding as any physical law. To her, the interconnectedness of all beings was not merely a mystical concept but a necessary foundation for social harmony and progress.

For Besant, Dharma was not a rigid set of individualistic duties but a unifying moral force — one that bound all beings together in a web of spiritual interdependence. Her deep involvement in political and social reform stemmed from her belief that injustice, inequality, and oppression were direct violations of Dharma. She envisioned a world where differences of race, creed, sex, caste, or color would not divide people but instead serve as threads in the greater tapestry of human unity. This principle formed the core of her theosophical mission — to establish a nucleus of humanity built on harmony, justice, and mutual respect.

Unlike political revolutions driven by conflict, Besant championed what may be called a peaceful and silent spiritual revolution — a transformation of hearts and minds rather than just laws and institutions. She believed that true progress — both personal and collective — could only be achieved through the theosophical principles of peace, love, empathy, patience, and spiritual evolution. Her vision of Dharma was not confined to national or religious boundaries; rather, it encompassed all of humanity and extended to the welfare of all sentient beings. This holistic outlook stemmed from her belief in the divine presence within all life.

At the heart of Besant's teachings was the conviction that love is the universal language of the soul — the key to breaking down barriers and fostering true understanding among people. She saw love as the highest expression of Dharma, urging humanity to move beyond selfishness and embrace selfless service. To her, ethical action was not merely a moral obligation but a spiritual necessity — a vital path to self-realization and collective upliftment.

By rooting Dharma in universal brotherhood, Besant articulated a vision of ethical living that remains profoundly

relevant today. In an era of division and discord, her teachings remind us that true spirituality lies not in retreating from the world, but in uplifting others, embracing diversity, and working toward a shared destiny of peace and progress. For Besant, serving others was not just an aspect of Dharma — it was the highest form of spiritual practice itself.

**Ethical Action and the Will to Serve**

From the ongoing discussion, the question then arises; what is spirituality? Is it about personal salvation or about service to humanity? Annie Besant believed the two were inseparable. Deeply influenced by the *Bhagavadgitā*'s principle of Nishkāma Karma — selfless action performed without attachment to its rewards — she argued that true Dharma is not a retreat from the world but an urgent call to serve it.

For Besant, Dharma was not about passive contemplation but active ethical engagement. She rejected the notion that spirituality was confined to prayer, meditation, or personal salvation. Instead, she insisted that true wisdom must manifest as social responsibility — that the path to the other world is traversed through serving this one. Her reformist activism — whether in India's freedom struggle, education, women's rights, or theosophical teachings — stemmed from this conviction. To her, selfless service was not an option but a moral necessity.

Her famous words in *Annie Besant: An Autobiography* encapsulate this philosophy:

> Someone ought to do it, but why should I?
> Someone ought to do it, so why not I?

Between these two sentences, Besant argued, lie whole centuries of moral evolution. The first reflects apathy; the second, transformation. Dharma, in its truest sense, demands the latter. This belief in service-driven spirituality shaped her entire life.

**Right Thinking as the Foundation of Right Action**

Besant's activism was not merely reactive; it was deeply rooted in philosophical and spiritual inquiry. She was convinced that ethical action could not exist in isolation from truthful thinking and spiritual clarity. In her lectures on *The Wisdom of the Upanishads*, she stated:

> Out of right thinking comes right practice. It is not true that it does not matter what a man believes. It is not true to say, as many say, that a man's beliefs do not matter, it is only his conduct which is of importance; no lasting right conduct grows out of wrong belief. If you think falsely, you will act mistakenly; if you think basely, your conduct will suit your thinking.

Besant argues that our actions reflect our beliefs — wrong thinking leads to wrong actions, while true wisdom leads to ethical behavior. For her, ethical action was not just an individual choice but a reflection of collective consciousness. She believed that a society plagued by injustice often results from distorted ideologies, false narratives, and spiritual ignorance. Therefore, true Dharma demands not only right action but also right thinking. This belief drove her deep investment in education, public discourse, and spiritual revival, as she saw them as a essential

for shaping a just and enlightened society.

**The Karma Yogi: Balancing Spiritual Growth with Social Responsibility**

Besant exemplified the ideal of the Karma Yogi — one who serves humanity while remaining spiritually rooted. She believed that spiritual evolution and social progress must move hand in hand. Her activism was not driven by personal ambition but by an unshakable sense of duty. She never sought power or recognition, only the fulfillment of her Dharma through service.

She envisioned a world where individuals, guided by wisdom, would shoulder the responsibility of uplifting others, ensuring that spiritual evolution and social progress remain interconnected. Today, as societies grapple with rising inequality, ethical dilemmas, and materialistic excess, Besant's call to align Dharma with social action remains as urgent as ever.

True progress, she reminds us, is not measured by personal enlightenment alone, but by our ability to uplift humanity as a whole.

**Dharma and Education: Shaping Ethical Individuals**

Annie Besant believed that true social transformation could only be achieved through education. For her, knowledge was not merely an intellectual pursuit but a sacred tool for awakening moral consciousness. She saw education as a means to shape ethical individuals who would contribute meaningfully to society. This conviction led to her pivotal role in founding the Central Hindu College, which later became Banaras Hindu University (BHU), a lasting testament to her vision of blending modern education with ancient wisdom.

Besant's holistic educational philosophy integrated scientific inquiry with spiritual wisdom, ensuring that students were not merely trained for careers but nurtured into responsible and ethical citizens. She firmly believed that education should instill in students the principles of self-discipline, self-sacrifice, and a deep sense of duty toward society. In *Theosophy in Relation to Human Life*, she advocated for a "fourfold education" — spiritual, moral, intellectual, and physical development — emphasizing that education must nurture the whole individual rather than just impart knowledge.

Her vision of education resonates strongly with contemporary approaches, including India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes a well-rounded, value-based approach to learning. Just as Besant championed an education system that nurtures both intellect and character, modern educational frameworks increasingly recognize the importance of integrating ethical consciousness with academic excellence.

In today's rapidly evolving world, where education often prioritizes material success, Besant's insights remain profoundly relevant. Her advocacy for character-building, ethical awareness, and the integration of spiritual wisdom with modern knowledge continues to inspire holistic education models that emphasize not just academic excellence,

but also moral and ethical consciousness.

## Conclusion: The Relevance of Besant's Dharma Today

Annie Besant's life exemplifies the idea that Dharma is not merely a path to personal enlightenment but a force for collective upliftment. For her, the path to true happiness is to selflessly serve others — where the soul forgets itself in the joy of lifting others into light and peace. Her teachings emphasize that spirituality devoid of social responsibility is incomplete — wisdom must translate into action.

For Besant, Dharma was never static or confined to rituals; it was a dynamic and evolving principle that called for ethical engagement with the world. Whether advocating for India's self-rule, championing education, or spreading theosophical teachings, she lived by the conviction that knowledge carries a moral responsibility. She proclaimed in *The Laws of the Higher Life* (1903):

> If we lead that life of sacrifice, if we lead that life of renunciation, if daily, perseveringly, we pour out ourselves for others, we shall find ourselves one day on the summit of the mountain.

Besant's vision of Dharma offers profound relevance in today's world, as we navigate the complexities of modern existence, fractured by materialism, social divisions, and ethical dilemmas. Her teachings compel us to ask: What is our Dharma? How can we align our ethical values with our actions?

Besant's vision of Dharma, urges us to move beyond a self-centered approach and act with wisdom, service, and compassion. Dharma, in her view, was not about retreating from the world but about transforming it.

Besant's challenge to humanity remains as vital as ever: "Better remain silent, better not even think, if you are not prepared to act." For her, thought was not merely intellectual but a catalyst for action — the foundation upon which character is built. In *The Spiritual Life*, she reinforced this idea, asserting: "Spirituality does not depend upon the environment; it depends upon one's attitude towards life."

May her vision continue to inspire us — not just for personal growth, but for the greater good of humanity, and the realization of universal brotherhood, the highest form of Dharma. ✧

**Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is a something that our mind cannot grasp and whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly and as a feeble reflection, this is religiousness.**

Albert Einstein

# Is a Guru Necessary: The Silent Teacher Within

YAJÑAVALKA BANERJEE

IN India, the guru has long been treated as a near-divine, the living conduit of truth, the one who confers a seed-sound, or *bīja-mantra*, and sets the disciple to practise until insight blossoms into attainment (*siddhi*). Yet the common reader's doubts persist and deserve air: "Do we, in fact, need a guru? If we cannot identify a worthy guru, what should we do then?" If the guru's highest function is to plant the seed or *bīja* and guard its growth, can the seeker still mature without that rite? Can discipline, study, and life itself supply what the institution withholds?

This inquiry proceeds by example and text; Ekalavya (see below) mastered by inward devotion rather than personal tutelage; Swami Vivekananda interpreted Newton as a *karma-yogin*, emphasizing that discovery arises from within; Śankarācharya's *Vivekachūḍāmaṇi* affirms the value of a qualified teacher while insisting that discrimination and liberation cannot be delegated; J. Krishnamurti offers severe counsel that truth is "a pathless land"; and finally, Theosophy (H. P. Blavatsky, *The Mahatma Letters*, Annie Besant) honours genuine guidance but emphasizes the importance of the teacher within, or *antaryāmin*. Therefore, *our question is not guru versus no guru*, but how to move forward with integrity, under guidance when it helps, and without it when it does not.

Tradition assigns the guru a single concrete office: to discern the disciple's temperament and, by initiation (*dīkshā*), confer a fitting *bīja-mantra*, "unlocking" it, so practice is neither misapplied nor inert. When given correctly, that *seed-sound* steadies attention, clarifies feelings, and quickens insight; however, the rite serves as a means rather than an ultimate goal. Where no worthy guide is at hand, the path does not lapse; one proceeds by the universals: ethical purification and service (*śravaṇa-manana-nididhyāsana*). The rule is blunt: "A mantra without right living is sterile; right living ripens even without conferment." *A true guru does not replace labour; he accelerates it.*

## Ekalavya: The Self-Taught Archer

One of the *Mahābhārata*'s earliest set-pieces interrogates guru-authority. In the *Mahābhārata* ("Udyoga-Parva", Vol. I),

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Ekalavya, a young Nishāda prince, asks to study archery with Droṇa, the tutor of the Kuru princes. Droṇa refuses, citing birth and, tacitly, the threat to his royal pupils. Ekalavya withdraws to the forest, erects a clay effigy of Droṇa, and, through self-training (*svādhyāya*) and relentless practice, reaches extraordinary proficiency. The famous vignette of the hunting dog, its mouth closed by seven arrows without injury, exposes Ekalavya mastery and triggers Droṇa's favourite pupil, Arjuna's complaint. To preserve a prior pledge that none would surpass Arjuna, Droṇa exacts a grim *guru-dakshiṇā* (offering to the teacher): Ekalavya's right thumb, thereby disabling his art and securing Arjuna's preeminence.

The episode is typically read as exemplary devotion (*śraddhā*) to a guru, even a symbolic one. Yet its analytic force lies elsewhere. Ekalavya becomes an expert without instruction, correction, or access. Droṇa, the orthodox teacher, who first excluded him, later suppresses him. The scene therefore lays bare a duality within the guru ideal. In theory, the guru "dispels darkness"; in practice, an unenlightened or partisan instructor may act from status anxiety, prejudice, or self-interest, impeding a deserving student. Droṇa's demand is best understood not as spiritual discernment but as institutional favouritism masquerading as principle. If such gatekeeping is considered "guruhood", then the honorific may become inflated, being granted too easily to those in positions of authority rather than to those who possess true insight.

From a *theosophical vantage*, the salient question is not "Who taught Ekalavya?" but "What in him learned?" The pedagogic agent was his own concentrated will, one-pointed attention, and austerity (*tapas*), and he used the idea of Droṇa merely as a mnemonic locus. Karma and self-effort, properly harnessed, can make even a clay effigy function as a "guru", because discovery is endogenous and instruction catalytic.

In the *Kaṭhopanishad,* a dialogue between a teacher, Yama (the Lord of Death), and Nachiketas (an uncompromising boy-seeker), the theme is the way to the imperishable Self. We see, almost in laboratorial clarity, how a true guru functions. Yama first tests Nachiketas's fitness to learn by offering lower boons, then separates the merely pleasant (*preyas*) from the truly good (*śreyas*), then instructs, not by conferring enlightenment as a commodity, but by pointing the mind inward and delineating the discipline by which insight ripens.

HPB's own training and teaching enact the *Kaṭha* pedagogy, that is, the guru tests, points inward, and refuses vicarious enlightenment. In the article, "Chelas and Lay Chelas" (1883), she describes *chelaship* as probation and "unhelped exertions" before any aid; eligibility (*adhikāra*), not appetite, governs instruction. In *The Mahatma Letters,* the Master Koot Hoom (KH) likewise offers presence but not shortcuts, help being strictly proportionate to fitness. *The Key to Theosophy* preface is explicit, "Each man must progress by his own efforts. The writer cannot do the reader's think-

ing for him." And in "Occultism versus the Occult Arts" (1888), HPB separates true occultism (ethic and renunciation) from technique, warning that without the life, no rite or master will avail. In short, her record shows the guru as a catalyst, *not a surrogate*, precisely Yama's method with Nachiketas.

## Newton's "Guru": The Light of His Own Mind

Leaping from ancient myth to modern history, we find a parallel insight in the story of Sir Isaac Newton, albeit in a completely different context. Newton is often humorously said to have been "enlightened" by a falling apple. As Swami Vivekananda keenly observed, Newton's discovery of gravitation was not delivered by any teacher or even by the apple itself, but by Newton's *own mind*. Vivekananda, the 19th-century sage who interpreted Indian wisdom for the modern world, invoked Newton as an example in his treatise on Karma-Yoga. He argued that what we call *learning* is a form of *unveiling* of inner knowledge. "What a man 'learns' is really what he 'discovers' by taking the cover off his own soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge," Vivekananda writes. All external experience serves merely as an occasion to trigger this inner cognition. "We say Newton discovered gravitation. Was it sitting anywhere in a corner waiting for him? It was in his own mind; the time came, and he found it out," Vivekananda explains. The falling apple was a *suggestion* that prompted Newton to study the ideas already latent in his intellect. He "rearranged all the previous links of thought in his mind and discovered a new link among them, which we call the law of gravitation". In other words, the *external* world only provided stimuli; the *real* work of discovery happened *within the recesses of Newton's thinking self.*

This view, remarkably consonant with certain yogic and theosophical ideas, asserts that all knowledge is in the human mind, the mind being an "infinite library of the universe" awaiting unveiling. Newton needed no human preceptor to hand him gravitation; Nature and his own concentrated inquiry were the tutors. In effect, his "guru" was disciplined attention, guided by what theosophists would call the higher mind or intuition. As Swami Vivekananda clarifies: "The Guru is the transmitter of spiritual power; the soul can only receive impulses from another soul; he quickens, he does not create; he catalyses what must arise within." (*Complete Works*, Vol. I, *Bhakti-Yoga*, "The Need of a Guru"). An external guru, when present, can stimulate or point to inner truth but cannot bestow anything fundamentally new. Thomas A. Edison caught the same asymmetry in jest: "Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration." The falling apple is the 1%; the other 99% is the mind's own labour.

The theosophical interpretation would suggest that Newton's intense focus attracted assistance from the universal mind (or *ākāśic* record of knowledge); effectively, Nature taught him once he was ready to learn. As Radha Burnier notes in *No Other Path to Go*, "A Guru cannot

help a person who is not ready to be helped, and it is only when the disciple is ready that the teacher appears." Newton was ready, and the "Master" that appeared was the inherent law of Nature revealing itself through a flash of insight.

## Guidance and Self-Realisation: Śankarācharya and J. Krishnamurti in Counterpoint

Mythic and modern cases suggest that a seeker may advance without a resident preceptor; yet the classical consensus affirms the value of a *qualified* one. *Vivekachūḍāmaṇi* enjoins the aspirant to approach a wise teacher, not as a dispenser of ready-made illumination but as an *expert reader of consciousness* who diagnoses obstacles, interprets scripture, and prescribes practice. In Śankara's wider corpus (for example, *Upadeśa Sāhasrī* and the *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāshya*), the teacher's authority is rigorously defined, he must be trained in the textual *pramāṇa-s* (*śrotriya*) and established in realisation (*brahmanishṭha*). His function is hermeneutic and catalytic, *to remove ignorance and to unfold what the student already is*, never sacerdotal or magical. Even so, Śankara makes two limiting claims: (i) no teacher can substitute for *adhikāra* (inner eligibility); (ii) liberation is effected not by the guru's will but by self-knowledge arising through study, reflection, and contemplation. The guru accelerates; he does not replace.

This comports with theosophical pedagogy. Burnier's gloss is exact: awakening occurs through one's own preparation and work; the truest guide points inward and then recedes. Hence, *Vivekachūḍāmaṇi* honours the preceptor while insisting on the nondelegability of discrimination and practice; grace (*kṛpā*) fructifies only in a prepared consciousness. In short, the guru is best conceived as catalyst rather than surrogate.

Set against this, J. Krishnamurti advances a radical corrective. Dissolving the Order built around him in 1929, he declared truth a "pathless land", not capturable by organisation, ritual, or tutelage. For six decades thereafter, he taught by dialogue and inquiry, stripping the guru of psychological authority and returning the locus of discovery to the learner's *direct seeing*. Methods and lineages, he warned, risk conditioning the mind into secondhand understanding; the only nonderivative knowledge is freshly realised insight. Teachers may converse; they must not be obeyed.

Read together, the two strands refine rather than cancel one another. Śankara articulates the conditions under which a teacher is beneficial; competence, realisation, and a strictly pedagogic brief, while denying salvific transfer. Krishnamurti exposes the modern tendency to idolise personality and outsource judgment, insisting that *freedom cannot be vicarious*. The synthesis is exactingly practical: "Accept guidance when it genuinely illumines (textual clarification, ethical correction, method), but do not defer the work of seeing — the *śravaṇa-manana-nididhyāsana* — that only the seeker can perform". When a worthy guru is present, he hastens ripening; when none appears,

the path does not lapse. Either way, progress turns on inner eligibility, disciplined inquiry, and a mind schooled to recognise its own light.

## Theosophical Perspectives: Masters, Self-Responsibility, and the Inner Teacher

It is fitting to turn now to Theosophy, since it straddles the apparent opposition between reliance on gurus and self-reliance. Theosophy, from its founding in 1875, challenged the blind faith and priestly authority of established religions, yet it also introduced the world to the existence of hidden adepts or "Masters of the Wisdom" who ostensibly guided HPB and others. How does Theosophy answer our question, "Do we need a Guru?"

First, Theosophy strongly asserts the principle of self-responsibility on the spiritual path. A famous axiom often cited in theosophical literature states: "Each man is his own absolute lawgiver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself; the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment." In other words, no guru or deity can *save* you from the consequences of your own thoughts and actions; *you* shape your destiny through the law of karma. This corresponds to the Eastern maxim that the guru can point the way but cannot absolve your karma or do your inner work.

*The Mahatma Letters*, correspondence from the adepts, Master Morya (M.) and KH, to A. P. Sinnett, repeatedly stress that *moral and spiritual evolution cannot be deputed.* Wisdom comes only to those who apply themselves to "the daily conquest of Self", the Masters wrote. They explicitly refuted the notion of vicarious salvation or spoon-feeding of truth. A Master can help a disciple, but only insofar as the disciple's *own* spiritual development "forces" their attention. In one letter, the Master remarks that aspirants often want *occult knowledge* cheaply, without personal discipline, but "we do not want moral weaklings". The doors of wisdom open only to those who have strengthened and purified themselves through effort.

In Theosophy, blind belief is anathema. HPB and her teachers insisted that truth must be understood, not accepted on authority. "The Wise Ones never impose their will on a disciple. They do not tell him what he must believe, because believing has no meaning," writes one expositor, summarizing the *Letters*. Mere belief, they warned, can devolve into empty fanaticism or superstition.

Religion is too often used as a crutch; instead, we must learn to be self-reliant and free. These statements uncannily anticipate Krishnamurti's critique. In fact, decades before Krishnamurti's rebellion, the Masters had already declared that Theosophy should not become a dogma or personality cult. The Society's only motto has been: "There is no religion higher than Truth." And truth, as Theosophy sees it, is not the property of any one teacher.

Does Theosophy reject gurus, then? Not exactly. Theosophy makes a distinction between *true spiritual teachers* and *false gurus*. The true gurus (the Masters or *mahātma-s*) are exemplars of wisdom

and compassion who may guide humanity from behind the scenes; but they neither seek worship nor permit slavish dependence. They temper their aid to what the aspirant has earned. By contrast, Theosophy was scathing in its criticism of charlatans, miracle-mongers, and self-proclaimed holy men who encourage fanatic adoration. A century ago, a theosophist observed how readily people surrender their judgment: "Because so many people find [blind faith] to their taste, there are others ready to play the complementary role. There are pretenders who call themselves Gurus, who will give a feeling of security to those who ask for it."

Such false gurus often promise easy liberation in exchange for loyalty (and often money), saying in effect: "Just surrender to me, perform the rituals I prescribe, and you will be protected — no need to change your habits or take responsibility." This, Theosophy warns, is a spiritual sedative, not real awakening. "Turn your thoughts to me . . . and you will be protected," says the fake guru, encouraging indulgence as long as his picture is on your altar. The *real* Guru, by stark contrast, "will not offer diversions or take away the sense of responsibility for one's own actions". True teachers, in the theosophical view, aim to make *themselves* obsolete by lighting the lamp of wisdom in the student. They foster self-reliance, not dependency. As one of the Three Truths of Theosophy puts it, the soul is its own saviour.

Annie Besant, who herself had a guru (Master KH) and later accepted the role of teacher to many, spoke from experience about the value of having difficulties instead of doting gurus. She noted that while the pleasant times in her life were easily forgotten, the hardships and tests were *precious*, for they taught her the most. A genuine teacher, therefore, sometimes helps not by removing obstacles, but by allowing the disciple to struggle and learn from life's challenges. In Besant's words, she "would not wish to forego any of the difficulties" because each had yielded insight. This accords with a broader theosophical principle, *life itself is the great guru*. We are all enrolled in the school of existence, and every experience is a lesson customized for our growth. A Master might occasionally step in as a tutor, but the curriculum is administered by karma and the Higher Self.

Theosophy also teaches about the "inner Guru", often understood as the higher consciousness or divine Self *(ātman)* in each person. HPB and her successors emphasized that one must ultimately awaken this inner teacher. They drew on traditions like the Gnostic idea of the "Christ within" or the Hindu idea of *antaryāmin* (inner guide). For instance, theosophists frequently quote the Buddha's final exhortation: "Be a lamp unto yourself". Mabel Collins, in *Light on the Path*, extolled the need to hearken to the voice of one's own soul: "Within you is the light of the world . . . If you are unable to perceive it within you, it is useless to look for it elsewhere." This essentially means that the highest

guru is one's own illuminated spirit.

The Masters in the *Letters* underscore the same truth by urging aspirants to develop self-sufficiency, not leaning on external religion as a crutch. They even cautioned early theosophists not to treat their words as gospel. Mahatma KH, in one of his letters to A. P. Sinnett, remarked wryly that within a short time members of the Society were already turning the correspondence of the Adepts into a doctrine, precisely what it was never intended to be. The irony was not lost on him: the letters were written as *guidance for earnest students, not as a new scripture.* Thus, paradoxically, the very existence of genuine Masters was not meant to foster a cult of authority, but rather to inspire individuals to seek and awaken the Master within.

To summarize the theosophical stance, a Guru or Master can be of immense help as a guide and exemplar, especially in sorting through the subtle complexities of occult training. But, a guru is *not an absolute requirement* for everyone at all times, and certainly *not a substitute for one's own exertion*. The theosophical path is one of study, meditation, self-purification, and service, all of which an individual must do for oneself. The Society itself has no priesthood or required dogmas; members are free to accept or reject any teaching. The only binding allegiance is to Truth itself. In this climate, gurus are respected as fellow pilgrims farther along the path, but not as idols. N. Sri Ram, a former President of the Society, once remarked that Theosophy encourages a seeker to "follow truth, not persons". It seeks to cultivate individual discernment (*buddhi*). This approach aligns deeply with the spirit of the Upanishads, where even the guru's role is to eventually tell the disciple: "Thou art That", what you seek is already within you.

**Conclusion: When in Doubt, Walk**

If the choice today is between a counterfeit guru and solitude, the verdict is not ambiguous. Vivekananda put it with surgical clarity: "It is better to be without a teacher than to have a bad one." A false guide mortgages judgment, corrodes responsibility, and replaces interior labour with borrowed certitude. The cost is not merely wasted time; it is the quiet atrophy of the very faculties — discrimination, endurance, inwardness — on which real realisation depends.

The argument of these pages has not been "guru versus no guru", but the right relationship with a guru. Śankara's standard remains exacting; the teacher must be both competent in the means of knowledge and grounded in the thing known, and even then, his office is hermeneutic and catalytic, not sacerdotal. Krishnamurti's counterpoint adds the modern prophylactic, resist the seduction of personality and the outsourcing of judgment. Taken together, they yield a simple ethic: "Accept guidance when it illumines; refuse it when it infantilises".

What, then, of the many who cannot identify a worthy teacher? The path does not lapse. The disciplines that affect ripening, study, reflection, meditation, ethical purification, and service are not contingent on another's charisma. A well-given seed

can steady the mind, but a steady life, even without an award, still ripens. Practice is not a consolation prize; it is the road.

Here, Theosophy offers both an orientation and a safeguard. Its best counsel is not to enthrone new intermediaries, but to restore the centre of gravity to the *antaryāmin*, the Teacher within. Its motto, "There is no religion higher than truth", disallows personality cults while honouring genuine instruction wherever found. HPB's hard lesson is perennial: the universe is "worked and guided from within outwards"; so too is enlightenment. A true teacher quickens that interior light, and then steps aside.

The practical counsel, therefore, is severe and liberating. Do not squander years auditioning gurus. Read deeply. Think rigorously. Meditate daily. Serve quietly. If a worthy guide appears, let him or her accelerate what is already afoot; if none appears, proceed. The measure of any teacher is how swiftly he returns you to your own seeing. In an age of amplification, choose depth. In a marketplace of certainties, choose inquiry. And if forced to decide between a hazardous allegiance and a solitary honesty, remember Vivekananda's scalpel: "Better no guru than a bad one, and let the work begin." ✧

## Suggested Reading


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**Be patient and of good cheer, untiring labourer of the sacred Brotherhood! Work on and toil too for yourself, for self-reliance is the most powerful factor of success.**

Master Serapis

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