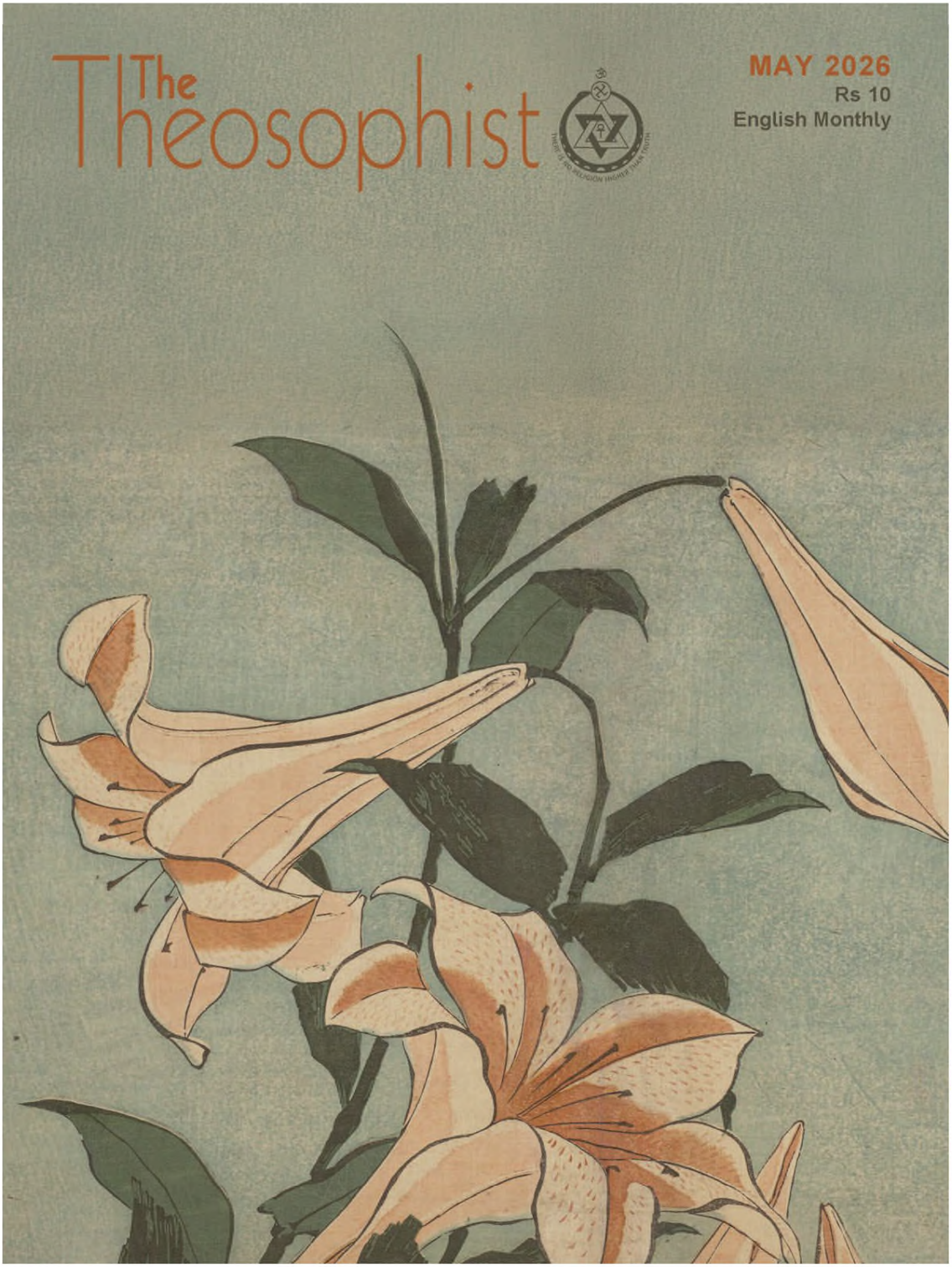
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THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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.

Doubt and Faith

TIM BOYD

THE eighteenth-century satirist and philosopher, Voltaire, was known for his sometimes cutting, but always insightful, wit. One quote from his writing is, "In the beginning God made man in his own image, and man has been trying to repay the favor ever since." It is a clever saying that points to a deeper observation about human behavior, one which confronts the spiritual seeker at every point in their journey. The problem arises as a question of what is truth, and what is human invention. It is a particularly difficult dilemma for someone making their initial steps in the direction of spirit.

An often-used term to describe someone who has had some form of spiritual experience is "awakening". For such a person it is like leaving the world of sleep and dreams to find themselves in a different world, with eyes wide open. Like anyone waking up in the morning, there can be a moment of uncertainty of which world we are currently living in. When the Buddha had his enlightenment, on coming out of the forest he met with his former fellow practitioners. The legend says that they could not recognize him because of the blinding light shining from him. When they asked who he was, he replied simply, "I am awake (*buddha*)". Depending on the depth of the experience it is also described as a "new birth", or being "born again".

While we sleep the realness of our dreams seems undeniable, and then we wake up. That is when our questioning begins. The famous Butterfly Dream parable of the Taoist philosopher, Chuang Tzu, illustrates the point. In his dream he was a butterfly, moving from flower to flower. Upon awakening he realized that he was really Chuang Tzu who had been dreaming he was the butterfly. For most of us it ends at that, but in the parable, he asks himself the question, "Was I Chuang Tzu dreaming I was a butterfly, or am I now a butterfly dreaming I am Chuang Tzu?" The short form of the question might be stated as "What is real?" It is a necessary question that many never ask because the "correct" answer not only seems obvious, but is universally confirmed through our families, education, religion, sciences, and the feedback from our own senses. How can one deny what one sees with their own eyes? Yet for a few, the question persists.

Those few who cannot let go of the question and are driven to delve deeper find their initial reward is doubt. An unpleasant sense of uncertainty, even confusion, is the necessary companion of doubt, but once it has taken hold the

itch must be scratched. Probing examination becomes the only hope for some satisfaction. Doubt is uncomfortable, and we would prefer to avoid it, but sometimes the cost is too high. No one wants to live a lie, but living in a space where we are questioning our life direction, yet have no assurance of any valid alternative, is difficult. It is a problem with which everyone is familiar on some level. Does he/she really love me? Is the doctor's advice the best option? Am I raising my child properly? Is there something more to life than being born just to grow old, suffer, and die? There is a broad range of questions that can raise the specter of doubt.

Fortunately, doubt and its accompanying discomfort need not be permanent. It is possible to see clearly. The basis of every spiritual tradition is that Truth exists, and is fully accessible when rightly approached. In fact, until one engages with doubt about life's deeper questions, Truth seems distant. "Doubt is the origin of wisdom" are the words of Renè Descartes, another French philosopher.

In most spiritual traditions doubt is regarded as toxic — something that kills relationships, fosters distrust and anxiety, prevents commitment, and clouds the mind. Buddhism lists doubt as one of the Five Hindrances to insight and mental stability. Yet, as with many things, all doubt is not equal. The Buddha himself said, "Doubt everything" — a statement that would seem to be at odds with the idea of its hindering qualities. However, his full statement did not end with the encouragement to doubt, he added: "Doubt everything. Find your own light." The quality and process he was exhorting was not a fear-based, anxious distrust of people and circumstances. The doubt he encouraged is the questioning and investigation of the reports of the body and mind that seem to affirm the permanence of phenomena. This analytical process is named *dharma vichaya* (searching the Truth), and is one of the Factors of Enlightenment in Buddhism.

H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) made a similar pronouncement: "The first necessity for obtaining self-knowledge is to become profoundly conscious of ignorance; to feel with every fiber of the heart that one is ceaselessly self-deceived." So, the prerequisite for self-knowledge is to feel deeply that one is self-deceived before one even fully recognizes the nature and the workings of that deception. It is challenging. The important feature is the recognition that even though our surroundings and our associates all seem to agree on what is real and true, the thing that binds us to their consensus worldview, called by some the "consensus trance", is our willingness to deceive ourselves. It is normal human behavior to mistake agreement for truth. If enough people with a semblance of authority declare a thing, most people accept it. But there have always been a few, determined to find their own light, who have questioned and broken through to a deeper understanding. In *At the Feet of the Master*, J. Krishnamurti gives the warning that even if "a thousand men

agree about a subject, if they know nothing about that subject, their opinion is of no value".

So, having activated a proper doubting mind, where does one turn for answers? It is a particularly daunting question when the questions relate to the fundamental nature of reality. Who really knows? The two main camps claiming definitive answers in our modern world are the fields of religion and science. Each has pronounced strengths and equally pronounced weaknesses. The huge advantage of science has been that it is evidence based, requires experimentation and is constantly refining itself as new evidence arises. Applied science has proven itself by its effects on every aspect of human life — in medicine, quality of life, agriculture, technology, and so on. Its enormous success in all practical matters has led us, as consumers of science, and scientists themselves to elevate science to a position of primacy among all systems of knowledge. So much so that labeling something as "unscientific" puts it outside the realm of discussion.

As with many things, great strengths can be the basis for great weaknesses. In Ancient Greek mythology the legend of Achilles, the greatest among Greek warriors, describes such a condition. As an infant his mother dipped him in the river Styx, a sacred river separating the world of the living from the underworld (Hades), making his body invulnerable, except for his heel, which his mother held while dipping him in the water. A combination of his anger, arrogance, and an awareness of his weak spot, his "Achilles heel", led to his death from a poison arrow. In the world of science any claim of invincibility or all-embracing authority is questionable. As human beings, we operate on levels that extend beyond the world of matter, levels which have proven to be impenetrable to material science. Questions relating to intelligence, morality, and, most notably, consciousness, find no satisfactory answer within the scientific community. A range of speculative theories have been advanced attempting to bind these capacities to matter, but all have proven inadequate. Clearly there is something more than chemical reactions, or electrical impulses, or a "fortuitous concurrence of atoms" driving such qualities as honesty, compassion, love, reverence, joy, sadness, self-sacrifice, understanding, enlightenment, and so forth. These are weak spots in the armor of contemporary science where religion lays its claim to preeminence.

"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" was the commandment of Jesus, and while in the past the local religions established themselves as the basis for all knowledge, religious and scientific, today in matters of the outer world science rules the field. The inner life is the territory of religion — good and evil, right and wrong, life, death, and the afterlife and its mechanics. And while the authority of science draws on the fact that anyone can test and verify its findings, religion employs a different method of verification — faith. But what is faith? The great psychologist (and member of

the Theosophical Society), William James, made the statement: "To most people faith means having faith in someone else's faith." This is often referred to as blind faith, a complete trust in a doctrine without tangible or experiential proof. It is a faith in which foundational scriptures and their interpretations are handed down, in which participation in rituals and ceremonies are required, in which divine and supernatural beings are described, and in which a relationship is formed with them based on offerings and supplication. At the level of daily life, it also gives prescriptions for proper behavior, family values, foods to be eaten and avoided, attire, hygiene, acceptable ways of speaking and thinking, and so on. For someone lacking direction, mired in unproductive habits such an all-encompassing system for living can be an enormous help, providing community, discipline, and reassurance. This is the realm where doubt in the form of questioning, or demands for proof is viewed as toxic. It affects more than a personal point of view, but an entire social order. The faith of this level is better described as strong belief.

In the *Bhagavad Gitā* the issue of faith is paramount. *Śraddha* is the word that is used. It expresses itself in a number of ways according to the nature of the person. One of the important ideas relates to the three qualities of matter or Nature, the *gunas*. Everything in the natural world is governed by their interaction and combination. They are *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, which basically stand for pure/harmonious, active/desire based, and dull/ignorant/deluded. The *Gitā* outlines the ascending levels of faith that typify each of the qualities. It also points to a faith that exceeds them.

In the final three years of HPB's life she produced her greatest written works. The dedication at the opening of one of those books, *The Voice of the Silence*, is brief, but worth considering when we talk about faith. It reads, "Dedicated to the few". There is another understanding of faith that cuts across all religions, forms the core of their original teachings, and is the basis for their rituals and practice — a faith that can affect social order, but does not require it; that influences personal behavior, but does not value it; that through enormous effort leads to an effortless connection with Truth, Reality, the Divine, Universal Consciousness, God.

The Ageless Wisdom tradition views faith in a different way. From this point of view faith has been described as "unconscious knowledge", but not knowledge of an ordinary type. The Universal Prayer written by Annie Besant speaks of the "hidden life vibrant in every atom"; the "hidden light shining in every creature"; and the "hidden love embracing all in oneness". This is the beginning point for the seeker along this line: an awareness of a veiled identity described by St Paul as "Christ in you, the hope of glory", in Buddhism as the "Luminous Mind" or "Buddha-nature", and by Krishna as "the immortal Inner Ruler present in the hearts of all beings". The, as yet hidden, not fully conscious nature of this "knowledge" is the driving force for those "few" to whom

HPB dedicated her book. This unconscious knowledge holds the promise of becoming the fully conscious experience of those who engage with it.

The fact of the matter is that the distinction between science and religion is artificial, another man-made attempt to separate, categorize, and maintain control over access to Truth. The root of the word science is *scientia*, a Latin word which means "knowledge", not solely material knowledge, or spiritual knowledge, but the inseparable totality of all that the mind and spirit can embrace. In their pure form, both science and religion are equally scientific.

Although they used different terms to describe it, the stated intention of both the founders of religions and the pioneers in material science is that all of their conclusions be grounded in the "scientific method" — the systematic, repeatable process to investigate observations, answer questions, and test hypotheses through experimentation. Whether applied to the processes of Nature or those of the inner life the approach is the same.

A science that limits the knowable to the known is not worthy of the name. It makes of itself a "scientism", subject to the human-imposed limitations of its scientists. A religion that insists on blind belief is equally limited by its religionists. When asked what Theosophy is, HPB once replied it is "the Ageless Wisdom, tested and verified by generations of seers". The extended powers latent in human beings can be known; can be tested and verified; the existence of a hidden life, light, and love can and should be confirmed.

There is a well-known prayer which, although it was not written by St Francis, is so aligned with his message of peace that it has taken on his name. It is a powerful prayer used as a basis for meditation across spiritual traditions. It begins with, "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace" and goes on to invoke the activities of such an "instrument". Its language is simple, profoundly simple. It lists a number of conditions, eight in total, where one's activity as an instrument of peace brings harmony by "sowing", literally scattering or planting, seeds of a harmonizing consciousness. One of the conditions listed is "doubt". Thus, "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace. . . . Where there is doubt, let me sow faith." Doubt may be soothed by belief, but it ends with knowledge, even unconscious knowledge.

The seeds of a scientific faith can be tested, verified, explored, and can lead to an ever-expanding vista of a progressively less hidden "Life, Light, and Love". There is a science deeper than what we call "science". There is a religion deeper than what we now practice. Both are sacred. Both are ours to know — by faith. ✧

Faith without Will is like a windmill without wind — barren of results.

— *The Secret Doctrine*

The Spirit of a New Humanity: Looking through the Window of Eternity — II

SHIKHAR AGNIHOTRI

A NATURAL question should arise: why is it that, despite many events unfolding across the world and much evidence placed before us by science (hence proving the statement from *The Mahatma Letters* — "Modern science is our best ally"), a majority of minds still do not find this PRINCIPLE of ONENESS appealing enough to work in this direction.

Evidences that modern science shared were the rare opportunities for humanity's understanding of its oneness — each milestone having the potential to widen our vision and deepen our sense of brotherhood and shared destiny. How much of that potential has flowered into action, is for every one of us to reflect upon.

One such milestone was arrived at, perhaps, with a single photograph taken by a human. An image taken and a word coined and added to the dictionary soon after. The picture quietly touched the collective heart of humanity, giving birth to the modern environmental movements and awakening the sense of a shared home. An event that happened for the first time in human history, when humanity saw itself from the outside. In 1968, as Apollo 8 circled the Moon, astronauts captured the now-iconic *Earthrise* image — because till then we had only heard of sunrise or moonrise — a delicate blue sphere suspended in the vast dark, without borders, divisions. "We set out to explore the Moon and instead discovered the Earth" said William Anders, pilot of Apollo 8.

Somewhat similar was the experience of another astronaut, Ron Garan: "I went to space and discovered an enormous lie. From space, the Earth is one glowing blue sphere with no borders, no divisions. Yet down here, we live as if we are separate, divided by religion, politics, and nations." That was their window of eternity.

As the decades progressed, a project that started in 1990 revealed a profound truth in 2003: human beings, across all races and nations, are 99.9% genetically identical. Its name was the Human Ge-

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nome Project. Biology itself affirmed what wisdom traditions had long whispered — that the differences we cling to, we fight for, we argue for, are tiny compared to the deep kinship we share.

Swami Anand, due to whose inspiration my mother joined the TS, used to say, paraphrasing: "Learn while Nature is offering carrots, otherwise it also has sticks." The Covid-19 pandemic was one such stick that delivered a harsh, global reminder of our interconnectedness. It revealed that cooperation and compassion are not optional — they are essential for collective survival.

These, and many other insights, are contributions of modern science that help us understand oneness. Yet even without science, a simple observation of ourselves and our surroundings reveals the same truth.

Nature demonstrates oneness through symbiosis. All human beings share the same basic physiology. In death, we all return to the same five elements, irrespective of race, religion, nationality, or gender. We share the same emotions: we laugh and cry alike, seek pleasure, avoid pain, desire love, respect, and care. Yes, our bodies are clearly diverse; but, why do we become divided and separate in thoughts in spite of so many similarities?

Maybe because of yet another aspect of our being that we all share — *the mental body wishes to think itself proudly separate, to think much of itself and little of others*. When attachment to "*I*" and "*mine*" deepens, it builds invisible walls of separation, born out of insecurity ironically to secure itself. And in constructing this pseudo-protective shell, our fundamental relationship with the rest of life quietly slips out of sight.

A small reason. But as a consequence of which, we come face to face with wars, terrorism, global climate crisis, or increasing levels of STRESS/DEPRESSION/ANGER in individuals and in relationships. Hence maybe, selfishness or the sense of separateness has been named as the SOURCE OF EVIL. In Eastern philosophy it is called IGNORANCE.

But we may ask, have we not realized our relationship now? Do we not care for our family, friends and loved ones? Yes, we all do. Yes, we all sacrifice for the family, friends, loved ones and that is in fact, the way to expand the circle of oneness from Personal to Universal, from Illness of "I" to Wellness of "We".

But it happens so often that instead of the true nature of people and things, the relationships are based on identities that we carry and expectations based on those identities. These identities or labels that are put on us right from the moment of birth are of course carryovers from the previous births. The labels of gender, name, religion, nationality, and so on. Gradually we go on adding to this list our likes, dislikes, opinions, prejudices — making the walls of the shell thicker. Behind this multilayered thick shell of labels or identities or conditionings our true nature goes out of sight.

We begin to attach ourselves to these superficial identities and the relationships too, become, in that sense, superficial

because if I identify myself as a body, my relationships will be based on that. If I think I am desires and thoughts, my relationships will be based on my likes/dislikes/ideologies, but if I begin to even faintly realize that I am none of that, instead I am something deeper, grander and universal, my relationship with others will be of completely different quality.

That quality is LOVE, which is not an emotion, not the opposite of hate, LOVE which brings THE LIGHT OF WISDOM along with it, and expresses itself as COMPASSION. A state where the I and you begin to fade and UNITY OF LIFE begins to manifest.

However, there is a question, rather a trick that the mind plays by asking frequently about this. If we feel oneness, how will we do our duties towards family or society, and so forth, that we already have.

The Story of the Disciple, the Guru, and the Elephant

A young disciple once lived in an ashram with his wise Guru. The Guru often taught him that the same divine presence lives in all beings — in humans, animals, plants, and the whole universe. The disciple was deeply impressed and tried to remember this teaching in every situation.

One morning, while returning from the village, the disciple heard a loud commotion. An elephant had gone out of control, running wildly down the path. The mahout, the elephant's controller, was shouting loudly: "Move aside! Move aside! The elephant is mad!"

The villagers quickly ran to safety. But the disciple stood still in the middle of the road. He thought to himself: "My Guru has taught me that the Divine is present in all. If God is in the elephant, then why should I fear? The elephant will not harm me."

As the elephant rushed forward, the mahout kept shouting for everyone to get away. But the disciple, convinced he was practising the teaching correctly, did not move. In a moment, the elephant reached him, lifted him with its trunk, and threw him aside. The disciple was badly injured. Later, he was carried back to the ashram. The Guru came to see him and asked gently: "What happened, my child?"

The disciple replied with pain and confusion: "Master, you said God is in all beings. I saw the Divine in the elephant, so I did not move. But the elephant hurt me. Why did this happen?"

The Guru smiled with compassion and said: "Yes, God is in the elephant — but God was also in the mahout who was shouting at you to get out of the way."

The right action in this case seems so obvious that one may even smile at the disciple's misunderstanding of the teaching. But is it so? Crusades, witch hunts, and religious conversions with threat of death. Love — not emotion but Wisdom — means recognising the divine guidance coming from every direction.

So, if a person is becoming more and more unconditional, is actually becoming more and more adjusting to others. As in the Buddha's teaching of *mettā*, personal love, is not denied but

expanded — until the love one feels for a single being embraces all beings without exception.

> Kill out all sense of separateness. . . . Yet stand alone and isolated, because nothing that is embodied, nothing that is conscious of separation, nothing that is out of the Eternal, can aid you. (*Light on the Path*)

What to do then? How to deal with this shell of sense of separateness? Let us explore some thoughts on this: Across scriptures, philosophies, different paths, one quiet call is heard — come out of the shell of the self.

> Live neither in the present nor the future, but in the Eternal. . . . This blot upon existence is wiped out by the very atmosphere of eternal thought. (*Light on the Path*)

Coming back to where we started — shrinking or dissolving the past and the future.

To shrink or dissolve the past-future duality, we need to strike at the root cause of all this. Studies show that two-thirds of human behaviour falls into the category of habit. And the most interesting and motivating thing, as I understand, is that the self or sense of separateness or egoism is also fundamentally a habit, just a way of thinking that has developed or evolved over a period of time due to continuous usage.

> It is a plant that lives and increases throughout the ages. It flowers when the man has accumulated unto himself innumerable existences. (*Light on the Path*)

So, we have to find the antidote of habit. And, looking objectively at the nature of awareness, we may safely say that "Awareness kills habitual or inattentive action".

So, the key here is to be aware of all the things happening inside and outside in any interaction with the surroundings, without the desire to change anything. Gradually when the contents of our subconscious or habits come to the surface and we simply observe without reacting, involving or judging, they begin to die down and in this process the shell of I, becomes thinner and thinner, allowing the window of eternity to open up.

Spontaneous Window of Eternity

What happens when something joyful catches our attention? When it happens, our normal reaction to that moment is appreciation. We might say: Wow! It is beautiful, awesome and so on. Basically, a thought comes and some words of appreciation come out. These days the mobile also comes out to take a photo, selfie and post on social media.

Now, tracing it back, even before the words, there must have been a thought to begin with, although it happened so fast that we may think it did not exist at all.

Let us go back a bit more, even before the thought arose in the mind. What could possibly be there between observation and thought of appreciation?

I would say that there must be a sense of wonder or joy, maybe an element of surprise, and a sense of gratitude. We can say it was a state of being and not thinking. Because the thinker has not yet risen. It does not matter if this window lasts for a few seconds, one second, a microsecond

or a nanosecond. What matters is that it does exist in the midst of the rush of our daily life.

How long this window lasts depends again a lot on our habit: whether in this fast-paced life we have developed a habit of judging or reacting to everything immediately on the basis of appearances, instead of being aware with silence and having a holistic view of the situation. And in giving this reaction, we miss the eternal now — the window of eternity — seeing the thing *as it is*.

That is why a retreat becomes so important. Retreat not only from physical routines but also from emotional or mental routines that we carry. And if a long retreat is not possible then mini-retreats at home can be considered in the busy schedule of the daily life.

And no wonder there is a phrase in almost every language of the world for it:

- Italian — *dolce far niente* (pleasant idleness)
- Spanish — *la vida tranquila* (the peaceful life)
- French — *joie de vivre* (joy of living)
- Chinese (Taoist) — *wú wéi* (effortless action)
- Sanskrit — *nishkāma viśrām* (selfless rest)

These are not just moments of laziness or entertainment, but the art of resting, because life is offering the opportunity almost every moment. All of us must have been through this as children. How full of wonder children are whether they see a butterfly, a pebble, a frog, a spider, *anything*. But as we become adults, the way of life makes us lose this capacity to feel the *wonder* in the small things of daily life.

But I must say, in spite of all the constant rush of modern living and our habits, every now and then, something catches our "attention". That "something" can be anything — it can be one of the seven wonders of the world, a leaf falling from a tree and flying hither and thither with the wind, a cactus flower fighting its way up in the middle of the desert, a smile on the face of some co-worker; and it can also be a tear falling from the eyes of a person in need. It can be anything, anywhere — that is not important.

What is important is that it opens up a window, even if it is for a fraction of a second, through which the glimpse of Truth or Oneness enters. And from that glimpse comes out the RIGHT ACTION, if we let it have its way.

When that potential moment of Eternal Now presents itself to us next time, let us try to attend to it *totally and completely* without making any noise, and probably we may get the glimpse of ONE LIFE, while looking through that window of eternity. As is often said: Truth is not grasped through dramatic moments, but through deep attentiveness to ordinary daily life.

In the Mahachohan's Letter in 1881, it is said:

> Between degrading superstition, and still more degrading brutal materialism, the white dove of truth has hardly room where to rest her weary unwelcome foot.

Humanity has come a long way since then but still that observation feels rele-

vant when blind belief and denial both exist today. It was in such a climate, 150 years ago, that the Theosophical Society was founded, not as a belief system, but as an invitation, based on the spirit of enquiry — to perceive the wholeness of LIFE, its interconnection, and its deeper meaning by opening a "small window of eternity", by lifting the "corner of the veil", as HPB says.

Today, that window still stands open, but it is up to us to look through it. We are not merely celebrating 150 years of legacy, our being here and being a part of this movement; it is an unsaid commitment to co-work with Nature in the unfolding of a new humanity — one grounded in unity, compassion, and service — beginning with ourselves. And it does not matter whether we are young or old, because life moves in cycles. Young will grow old and the old shall return as young, to reap the fruits of the thoughts, choices, and actions that we sow today. The opportunity is here and now; the response must be ours.

(*Concluded*)

If the action of one reacts on the lives of all, and this is the true scientific idea, then it is only by all men becoming brothers and all women sisters, and by all practising in their daily lives true brotherhood and true sisterhood that the real human solidarity, which lies at the root of the elevation of the race, can ever be attained. It is this action and interaction, this brotherhood and sisterhood, in which each shall live for all and all for each, which is one of the fundamental theosophical principles that every theosophist should be bound, not only to teach, but to carry out in his or her individual life. . . .

Selfishness, indifference, and brutality can never be the normal state of the race — to believe so would be to despair of humanity, and that no theosophist can do. Progress can be attained, and only attained, by the development of the nobler qualities.

H. P. Blavatsky
The Key to Theosophy

TOS: Being Humanity

NANCY SECREST

O Hidden Life, vibrant in every atom;
O Hidden Light, shining in every creature;
O Hidden Love, embracing all in Oneness;
May all who feel themselves as one with Thee,
Know they are therefore one with every other.

ANNIE Besant, the second President of the Theosophical Society (TS) and founder of the Theosophical Order of Service (TOS), wrote these words in early 1923. These words, that have inaugurated every International Convention since then, and many other theosophical programs, have come to be known as the "Universal Prayer" or "Universal Invocation". In her "On the Watch-Tower" notes from *The Theosophist* magazine of June 1923, Dr Besant explained that the prompting of some members caused her to write the above lines. She said, "I wrote . . . a few lines for daily repetition, morning and evening . . ." In talking about the lines, she further added:

> It sends forth successive waves of color, pulsing outwards from the speaker, if rhythmically intoned or chanted, whether by the outer or the inner voice, and, if some thousands would send these out over successive areas, we might create a very powerful atmosphere . . . (From "O Hidden Life . . ." by Joy Mills, published in *The Theosophist*, Volume 97, June 1976.) [Found on p. 31 of this issue.]

Annie Besant, founded the TOS in February 1908 *at the behest of members* who wanted to put the first object of the TS into action: "To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of humanity regardless of race, creed, sex, caste or colour."

Then, in the March 1908 issue of *The Theosophist*, Besant acknowledged that her inspiration for founding the TOS might be found in an article written by a Master of the Wisdom and printed by H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) in an early number of *Lucifer*. The Master's article, entitled "Some Words on Daily Life", said:

> Theosophy should not represent merely a collection of moral verities, a bundle of metaphysical ethics, epitomised in theo-

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Ms Nancy Secrest is international Treasurer of the TS, Adyar, and International Secretary of the Theosophical Order of Service (TOS). This is a TOS talk delivered at the 150th International Convention, Adyar, on 2 January 2026.

> retical dissertations. Theosophy *must be made practical*; and it has, therefore, to be disencumbered of useless digressions, in the sense of desultory orations and fine talk. Let every Theosophist only do his duty, that which he can and ought to do, and very soon the sum of human misery, within and around the areas of every branch of your Society will be found visibly diminished. Forget Self in working for others — and the task will become an easy and a light one for you. (*The American Theosophist*, Feb. 1942, p. 39).

What does this mean for us today? When the TOS was founded, Besant cited a twofold purpose which remains the same today as at its inception:

- The unselfish service of the needy and suffering.
- The inner transformation of the server.

In carrying out its first purpose, TOS workers worldwide give humanitarian aid in several principal areas of concern: education, peace, social services, healing, arts and music, animal welfare, the environment, and emergency relief.

In this article, I also have two purposes. To present some of the specific service activities that have been done this year by our TOS groups in the various TS Sections and countries, and, to talk about what we can do to further humanity along the path to the Unity of all life as related by the TS mission statement:

> To serve humanity by cultivating an ever-deepening understanding and realization of the Ageless Wisdom, spiritual self-transformation, and the unity of all life.

Actually, one could say that my second purpose is an elaboration or enhancement of the original second purpose, which is "the inner transformation of the server". We will go further than that. We will be talking about the realization of all of humanity to the Unity of all life.

In July 2025, many of us attended the Fifth International Conference of the TOS which was held in Vancouver, Canada. There we experienced presentations from eleven TOS countries, four short talks and two addresses by active members. One hundred and twenty-one members from twenty-two countries participated.

In sharing our countries' attempts to help the needy and suffering, we see that the world is not such a big place after all. Our globe is home to 225 countries. These countries differ in their cultures, religions, and forms of government. Wars have been and are being fought because of these differences. We also know that with the ease of travel and the use of the internet we have more and faster contact with each other no matter where we call home. As the world gets smaller in this way, it is easier to see that we all share the same basic needs and have the same basic rights to shelter, food, clean water, opportunities to provide for ourselves and our families, human dignity, respect, justice, freedom and the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment.

The smaller the world becomes for us and the easier it is to connect with each other, the better we understand each other. The more we understand each other, the more apparent the oneness of all life

becomes to us. At least it would appear so to intelligent, discerning human beings.

At our recent TOS Conference, the keynote address was given by Vic Hao Chin of the Philippines. He spoke of "The Root Causes of Global Suffering", and suggested ways to end global suffering. Citing studies by the United Nations and others, Vic walked us through the causes of suffering, some of which are hunger, poverty, war, lack of education especially for girls and women, and the unequal treatment of women. I have just called these the causes of suffering. However, it would be more correct to say that they are the *symptoms* of global suffering. I think that we all know that the *underlying causes* of human suffering are greed and the quest for power by governments and other prominent groups and individuals. The populace is kept in line by the lack of basic survival necessities like food and shelter, and as a result of wars often fought in the name of religious and traditional, yet perhaps outdated, cultural values.

Vic went on to tell us several things: first, that even though people are starving in some countries, we, meaning the whole world, already produce enough food to feed everyone on the planet. I have heard this from other sources as well. We just need to get the food to those who need it.

In fact, the United Nations has already drawn up the means to end world hunger through:

- Agricultural productivity
- Sustainability
- Rural infrastructure
- Decrease of trade restrictions on food, and so on.

What about poverty? Can we end poverty in the world?

According to the UN – YES! It would only take 3%-12% of the military budget worldwide to end poverty by the year 2030. *THAT'S ONLY FIVE YEARS FROM NOW!* Could that really be possible? Realistically speaking, I would say probably not with our current mindset. It would take a miracle. *Do we have a miracle within us?* Maybe not individually, but collectively? It has been said that ideas rule the world. What if the ideas to end world hunger, poverty, and war were introduced to the minds of humanity, through the collective unconscious? Do you remember what Besant said of the Universal Invocation? That "if some thousands would send those words out over successive areas, we might create a very powerful atmosphere . . ." *What if it were millions sending out this message?*

As Annie Besant also said, "There is no other in this world. Each is a different form, but One spirit lives and moves in All." In other words, **we are** *Humanity.* It follows then that a part of TOS work is to help the world to heal itself. Our twofold purpose has us serving the needy and suffering with humanitarian aid on the physical plane. This is important work that needs to continue. Our second purpose, the inner transformation of the server results, unconsciously, from the first. We live in days of worldwide turmoil. We are also living in a time when more and more people are becoming aware of

universal consciousness. Can we not expand our second purpose to include the inner transformation of our world?

You may be interested to know that we are not alone in this idea of helping the world. Nor is it a new idea. Forty-six years ago, I was in an audience of 5,000 people listening to noted scientists and religious leaders talk about how to avoid a nuclear war. At that time, it had been said that there was an 80% chance of such a war within the next ten years. All kinds of ideas were presented. The Dalai Lama said that meditation and the waves of influence it produces was the answer. He then proceeded to teach the audience, all 5,000 of us, how to meditate. I guess it worked, because we did not have a nuclear war.

I heard a talk given by the Pope, the leader of the Roman Catholic church, not long ago. He presented to all "A Call to Unity and Hope". He indicated that it is possible to unify the world in peace and understanding if individuals devote prayer and meditation to healing differences and seeing the world as a whole.

Someone like a Dalai Lama or a Pope has enormous influence. Their ideas can reach millions of people. That makes it easy to think — I am just one person; there is nothing I can do. However, I thought, wait a minute, I do have a little bit of influence. I can do *something*. Maybe I can reach others who can carry this message even further.

We spoke of ending world hunger and poverty citing plans put forth by the United Nations. What about war? Would it ever be possible to end war?

Albert Einstein was another person whose words wield a lot of influence, especially in scientific circles. Did you know that he advocated the establishment of a world government? He suggested that countries continue their sovereignty but give up their armed forces. That is a big leap — scary territory for many governments. He suggested instead that a global peacekeeping force be established by an entity like the UN. We do have peacekeepers within the UN. It seems that part of his plan was taken to heart. It will take more convincing, I think, for governments to give up their armed forces. Just think, though, if 3 to 12% of the worldwide military budgets were used to end poverty, and then, the armed forces were done away with, that would free up the other 88 to 97% of the worldwide military budget. Hmm . . . spending that instead on such things as education and healthcare come to mind. How could that be accomplished?

The Theosophical Society, as well as other NGOs, have their spheres of influence as well. I just finished reading Tim Boyd's book, *On the Verge of Wisdom*. One of the things he relates is having been asked to write a message in a bottle. He wrote, "Trust. Be open. Do something." In his book, he explained what he meant by those words.

- Trust — "in yourself . . . the Higher Self, the unobscured Universal Self whose consciousness and power have brought this personality into being."
- Be Open — "to the 'still small voice' of that Higher Self which is continually

whispering as intuitions within us messages of Love, Oneness, Inspiration, and possibilities."

• Do Something — "Every action rooted in Love is freeing and moves us closer to our true identity as divinely empowered messengers of the Highest."

It is the "Do Something" part of his message that I find motivating. Tim is a big advocate of gratitude. Whatever we do needs to begin with gratitude. Then, the sky is the limit, as they say: for us, the vast universal sky. We are grateful for the founders of the TS, and for the inner heads, the Masters, and the messages and motivation they provide. We are grateful for all of the TOS workers worldwide, the far-reaching service ideas they generate, and the empathy and compassion with which they work.

Today the TOS is active in thirty-eight countries doing humanitarian work based on spiritual concepts. Now, as in the beginning, TOS workers find a joy and a freedom in their work.

Let us look at some of it as it relates to our discussion so far: feeding the hungry, addressing poverty, education, women's empowerment, and health-related issues.

In the USA, the Philippines, Mexico, and other countries providing food to those in need is a constant activity. TOS members, both at the group and individual levels support programs to aid the hungry as well as providing vegetarian cookbooks and cooking classes to those who are interested.

Addressing poverty takes several forms, as the causes of poverty are varied. Besides food, people also need basic shelter such as that supported by the TOS-USA on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, which has the highest rate of poverty of any place in the USA. Also, while giving children who attend the Lakota Waldorf school at the Pine Ridge Reservation a basic education, the children also plant gardens. In the process, they learn about farming. It is fun for them, and the children take home the fruits (and vegetables) of their labors, thereby adding to their families' dietary needs as well. Coats and warm clothing are provided by TOS groups in the USA, India, Hungary and many other countries. Costa Rica is only one of the TOS countries making life a little brighter for children and families by providing gifts at Christmas and other holidays.

Last year the Odisha group in India started a low-cost clothing shop where clothing and small household articles can be purchased by those who need them. Other groups have followed Odisha's lead in this venture offering needed items at low-cost or even free.

The empowerment of women is one of the things on the UN's list needed to address poverty. In the TOS, focus is put on safety, self-defence, education for girls and women and economic empowerment. Many TOS groups, worldwide teach skills to women such as sewing, tailoring, weaving, hair-dressing and nail care that they can utilize to help support their families.

Other opportunities unique to a specific area are being enhanced through

the actions of the TOS groups; such as a paper-plate-making machine that was provided to some poor families in a village near Odisha in order to help them increase their income. Attention needs to be given by other groups to discover similar assistance that can be given to promote economic opportunities for the poor in their areas.

War can cause devastation even in formerly stable areas, turning prosperity into poverty in an instant. As a result of armed attacks on Ukraine and damage to civilians, residential buildings, and communications, many humanitarian problems have arisen. While the TOS does not involve itself in politics, we are dedicated to giving humanitarian aid wherever necessary. Twenty or more of our TOS countries have sent economic aid to Ukraine. Acquaintances and strangers expressed support, sympathy, and peaceful intentions. A grant from the TOS-USA was just one of them used to provide numerous displaced families with essential needs and services.

The TOS Italy continues to actively support Syrian refugees. The Italian TOS has sent medicine, food, clothing, and ovens to those in camps and settlements.

The TOS – USA continued support to <anera.org>, an American nonprofit helping refugees in Gaza with:

- Shelter supplies
- Clean water
- Emotional support
- Hygiene kits & diapers
- Fresh vegetables
- Warm blankets and winter clothing
- Plus, mattresses, tents, and building supplies

Increased educational opportunities are considered to be the most important element necessary to alleviate poverty. Many TOS groups focus their attention on providing or supporting schools, particularly those that teach the children theosophical concepts and virtues. Helping children is close to the hearts of many theosophists. Of course, the largest and most successful of these efforts is the Golden Link College. The Golden Link School, established by the TOS in the Philippines, has been providing transformational education for less privileged children since 2002.

Besides teaching core academics, the school teaches meditation and focuses on developing character, integrity, and self-confidence in its students. At the college level, courses in Theosophy are part of the core curriculum. It is thought that these qualities of character will be communicated to others throughout the students' lives with the potential of causing positive changes in the world that promote peace and harmony.

The Adyar Theosophical Academy (ATA) has followed suit. The school is located on the Society's campus in Adyar, Chennai, India. ATA is now in its fifth year of operations, and added an 8th standard this year. We have now broken ground at the new campus planned in the Kirby Gardens section of the TS campus. The new campus is scheduled to open Phase One in June of 2026. Once completed, the campus will house the

1st through 12th standards. Such schools are in the planning stages in Brazil and Argentina as well.

The TOS in Pakistan provides fifteen home schools for 300 children, focusing on girls who would otherwise not be able to get an education. The TOSes in Australia, New Zealand, and Italy all support individual home schools there. It costs US$ 1,100 per year to support a home school.

The schools of literacy, founded by the TOS in Pakistan, take their distinctive name from "Qandeel", which means lantern and symbolizes the light of knowledge.

The TOS provides them with whiteboards, mats for children to sit on, stationery, and so forth. The children learn basic educational tools of reading, writing, arithmetic and various social skills.

The TOS in Finland, along with other TOS groups, supports the work of the Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School (OMHSS) and the Social Welfare Centre (SWC) at Adyar, Chennai, India. The OMHSS, begun in 1894 by Col. Henry Steel Olcott, provides a solid education for underprivileged boys and girls in Adyar, a neighborhood of Chennai in India. The SWC cares for small children from the local area, allowing their mothers to attend the Vocational Training Centre, where they learn fabric arts, such as sewing, tailoring, embroidery, and weaving. Many other TOS groups, particularly in India, run schools or educational programs for children, and TOS members around the world sponsor the education of many hundreds of others. These include a school in The Democratic Republic of the Congo sponsored jointly by the French TOS and the Liberal Catholic Church.

The TOS in Italy helps to support the Little Flower Convent School for the deaf located in Chennai, India. Founded in 1926 by the Missionaries of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Little Flower Convent was recognized by the Government of Tamil Nadu in 1931. It became a secondary school in 1968. It welcomes 800 deaf children and young people, giving them the opportunity to obtain a recognized diploma. The convent also welcomes blind people, otherwise condemned to survive on the margins of society in conditions of poverty, and gives them the opportunity to work..

In Sweden the TOS helps orphans and street children. Also many TOS groups, such as those in Costa Rica, offer school supplies to children.

The TOS in Spain has continued with its support to the NGOs Comparte and Personas, both working in Central America, and involved, mainly, in providing education to the most disadvantaged children, kids, and youngsters, in different parts of Latin America.

Yet another item on the UN's list for eliminating poverty is increased healthcare for individuals in depressed areas. TOS groups in India assist with medical devices, and mobility aids. Other groups aid individuals with medical costs. The TOS-USA helps to support Joseph's House in Washington DC where hospice care is provided to dying individuals.

The TOS Healing Network operates around the world. In many places healing groups get together, usually weekly, to perform a ritual and a healing meditation that calls the Devas to assist in healing, or a peaceful transition from this life. Names of those in need of healing are submitted by family or friends, and are now shared internationally. TOS groups from around the world also participate in peace meditations online.

On 21 December 2025, I participated in a Global Meditation, via YouTube, organized by <heartfulness.org>. There were 357,335 people from all religions, or none, meditating together. Heartfulness meditation is very simple, where one envisions a light in one's heart.

Annie Besant said that chanting the Universal Invocation "sends forth successive waves of color, pulsing outwards from the speaker, if rhythmically intoned or chanted, whether by the outer or inner voice. If some thousands would send these out over successive areas, we might create a very powerful atmosphere . . ."

Also, on Sunday, 4 January at 10 a.m., Shikhar and Catalina Agnihotri presented a Global Meditation for those attending the TS's 150th Convention to do as a group.

Whatever meditation we choose to do, can the TS and TOS join with others around the world to create the kind of atmosphere directed toward a peaceful world? Ultimately, a world without hunger, poverty, or war? A world that recognizes the Unity of all life? Are we willing to try? ✧

The root of happiness is altruism — the wish to be of service to others.

Dalai Lama

We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.

Winston S. Churchill

The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.

Mahatma Gandhi

Toward Insight and Wholeness: Our Role in Shaping the Future — I

ELIZABETH MAY

I AM quite honored, at the same time, humbled and overwhelmed to be invited to the Theosophical Society and to a big congress like this with people from so many countries, because, as you know from what is in your program, I am hardly a normal type of speaker and am described in your program as a lawyer. Yes, that is true. I love to practice law and am also described as a member of parliament and leader of the Green Party of Canada. So, I am either a disreputable politician, or have a disreputable career called politics. I do not know which rates lower, a used car salesman, a paparazzi, or politicians, and, depending on what country you are in, most of them should be in jail.

I want to share with you some observations that are essentially in answer to the question: How does this conference, potentially this theosophical movement across so many countries, how does it shape the future? How do we collectively attune to something bigger than ourselves, that is outside ourselves, that some might call faith or religion or at least spiritual practice? I will situate myself for you on that spectrum. For you, if you are from the United States, call me an Episcopalian; if you are Canadian, I am an Anglican. But I am basically not anything in particular. I would like to have a home base that is not about money.

One of my favorite American economists, David Korten, was once at a conference with me, and he said: "You know, we talk about communism or socialism or capitalism, but we are not in a contest of isms anymore. Right now, we are in a fight between life and money." I think, *that* summarizes where I see that we are.

I come from an ecological background. I was for many years executive director of an environmental group, the Sierra Club of Canada. And I did not want to go into politics. I did not even join a political party till I was past 50. But I had a lot of involvement in trying to influence politicians to do the right thing. I was blessed by happenstance and coincidence to be part of the Canadian negotiations. I was negotiating on behalf of the government of Canada for a treaty that

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Ms Elizabeth May is a Canadian politician, environmentalist, lawyer, activist, and author. She is a long-term member of Parliament and the former executive director of the Sierra Club Canada. Talk given at the 12th World Congress of the Theosophical Society Adyar on 25 July 2025.

actually worked and is worth celebrating, because sometimes people feel you cannot get anything accomplished.

But in 1987, we achieved what was called the Montreal Protocol. It still exists and it actually saved the ozone layer. It actually worked. It stopped the destruction of the ozone layer by banning the chemicals that were causing it. Their negative impact was dismissed when they were first discovered, of course, as is always the case with scientific discoveries where there is profit involved. They were a miracle chemical — chlorofluorocarbons — they do not break down at all, are completely benign, they are so safe that you could use them to deliver to the most sensitive tissue of the lungs, medication to help you with asthma.

They were a wonderful drug, a wonderful chemical. It turned out that they were so benign and so safe that they did not cause any trouble at all until they floated all the way up to the stratosphere. And then when they started interacting at the stratospheric level, the ultraviolet light was strong enough to break them down, then the chlorine molecule got loose from the chlorofluorocarbon, and they operated sort of like the video game, Pac-Man, going gobble, gobble, gobble. One molecule of chlorine could gobble through over 80,000 molecules of the protective layer of the ozone layer.

This is worth holding on to because what I am also going to talk about is pretty bleak. The US White House at that time had Ronald Reagan as President and his Secretary of the Interior, Don Hodel (1985–89). And as we started the negotiations in Montreal in 1987, he tried to undercut the head of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, who was a fine human being. And Hodel said: "We do not need to ban these chemicals; we just need broad hats and sunscreen." And you try to point out to someone like Don Hodel that you are not going to have any agriculture if you do not have an ozone layer because of the UV radiation. Anyway, we managed to get this agreement across the finish line. Countries around the world decided to ban the production and use of these chemicals that were destroying the ozone layer.

It was one of those things that I think of as miraculous. One of the things I take from my faith is a literal belief in miracles, which is one of the only reasons I can be leader of the Green Party of Canada. I remain hopeful. I am the only member of parliament for our party right now. But I would cut back to the Green Movement because I am not going to be partisan at all.

In terms of the kind of world we are in right now, it has occurred to me for a very long time that everything about politics and for that matter, everything about capitalism and an economic growth model is about the opposite of wholeness. Everything about the economic model is to make as much money as possible, as quickly as possible. So, the consumer model, you picture it in this way: let us say we have a neighborhood where everybody went to the same laundromat to do their laundry. So, it is a community

thing. Everybody did not have to own their own washer/dryer. But now, to increase consumption, it is much better to break down a neighborhood into individual households where everyone would have to have their own washer/dryer. So less community, more private property, more buying things. This of course, took off post war with a huge boom.

But then to further increase consumption, you have to break down households and there are individual markets within every household. The ultimate of it is to convince children that they want their own consumer thing, and they can bug their parents till they get it. And even further, if you can break down the family dinner, so no one ever sits down together for dinner. And so you have teenagers wanting to have a certain frozen thing that they grab out of the freezer and put in the microwave and run out the door with a pizza pop, while the parents go to separate places. And every unit is busy buying things because the big lie of consumerism is if we only had more, we would be happy.

It is the kind of lie that is diabolical, because you can always get more stuff. And if you are not happy yet, you do not stop and think to yourself: "I don't think having more stuff is making me happy, maybe I should find some other way to be happy". But happiness is a universal human goal. Buying stuff — if it is not making you happy, you can merely reflect on the lie which says you do not have enough yet. So you could be a billionaire and still think you do not have enough because there are trillionaires! More all the time. More, and breaking down and dividing.

Then we are facing a polycrisis across multiple planes. But as people start paying attention, and that does happen even in a consumer society where the overwhelming message is individualism, instant gratification, and selfishness, and this is of course not universal through all the countries that are in this room, but it is certainly true that the North American culture is very much based on selfish individualism. So if you start actually paying attention, you may start saying: "Well, we are in an extinction crisis. Species are going extinct all over the place. And there is a climate crisis. And there also seems to be a geopolitical undoing here. Putin invaded Ukraine. That was not supposed to happen, remember? We were supposed to have the end of history and ground wars in Europe, and genocide was not something we thought would ever happen again."

If you start paying attention to things, it is easy to be overwhelmed by a sense of despair. And one of the things that anesthetizes people against despair is addiction. So we are addicted to many things in a consumeristic culture, we are addicted to screen time and what now is called "doom scrolling". You can get addicted to those things. That is another part of breaking down the family unit. It is the addiction and the invasion of a child's space by what they see on screen.

A professor friend of mine told me she

was worried about the young women in her classes. If they are not "Instagrammable", they feel they have no social capital, and they do not have friends. If they are not able to constantly photograph themselves looking beautiful and posting it, they fall into a place where they do not know their own value or worth, and they don't have friends. Ten years ago, when there was a half-hour break, the students would break out to sit with friends and they would be kind of buzzing, talking to each other. Now, they are all looking at their screens and no one is talking to anybody else.

So, addictions are a real problem in our society. And yes, addiction to opioids is a crisis. But addictions can take all kinds of shapes, forms, and distractions. Our addictions are distractions. So in terms of again coming back to the word, wholeness, where does this come into such a society? Many of you would have heard of the Hungarian-Canadian Dr Gabor Maté, who writes a lot about mental wellness, mental health, and addiction. He said: "The opposite of addiction is connection." Earlier, I was describing the consumeristic capitalist model for consumption and driving consumption. Consumption benefits from alienation and a lack of connection. The more connected we are, the more we are associated in communities, and the more we are able to say: "There's something more in my life than my paycheck, or the fact I do not have enough money."

Addiction's opposite is connection. That suggests that if we want to have a society where we can embrace wholeness, we have to question the overwhelming economic model that tells us that the country is successful if the gross domestic product (GDP) is growing. But of course the GDP, the gross national income, are all measures of things that are meaningless. If you have a big plane crash — this has been said for decades — or any major disaster, a lot of people are employed picking up the body parts and racing off to get the coffins, and it adds to the GDP. It is a meaningless measurement, but most countries use it as their measure of success. In all of this, where is the place for anyone to think about anything to do with the value and the meaning of life itself, and we are here to ask big questions. And that is where the political part of my life was overlaid with something that I think was extraordinary.

I hope you have heard of the Earth Charter, the one thing that I ever worked on, and we completed it in 1997. I was a member of the Earth Charter Commission. So I was not yet in politics or had joined a party, but was working at Sierra Club, influencing politicians in a political kind of world, and this was put together in the aftermath of the Rio Earth Summit, which happened in 1992. The Earth Charter had been one of the things that the organizers of the United Nations Conference on Environment Development, called the Rio Earth Summit, had hoped to have ready for acceptance by what was then the largest single gathering of heads of government in the history of the world. I was there then, my

daughter had not yet turned one, and I was holding her as this happened, as I watched and listened to the speeches of everyone starting from the senior George Bush. One never thinks in hindsight, one would look back at someone like George Bush and say: "What a statesman!" I can now identify geographically, everyone from George Bush to Canada's Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, to Fidel Castro. Everybody was there, all committing to a series of conventions. One was the framework convention on climate change under which we are still operating with the Conference of the Parties on Climate Change.

The Paris Agreement came out through that treaty and the convention on biodiversity to protect all life on Earth, protect species from extinction, ecosystems from disappearing, but the Earth Charter just did not make it across the finish line. There was one negotiation moment that I recall, where the Canadian Ambassador for the Environment, Arthur Campeau, said at one moment in the negotiations that we should think of the Earth Charter as the kind of document that a kid could hang on their bedroom wall. And one of the delegates from the Global South said, "Our children don't have bedrooms", which was the truth, but it kind of brought things to a bit of a stop, and it did not find its feet again.

But the World Society of Quakers, the Friends meetings around the world were very engaged with this. There was a significant element of Buddhism working on the active Buddhist community that was working with the Quakers, and there was a lot of input from various strands of faith-based communities, but it was also political and there was a lot of work that went into the Earth Charter, but it fell off the rails and it did not get approved. (*To be continued*)

The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything.

Albert Einstein

"O Hidden Life..."

JOY MILLS

SOMETIME in early 1923, Dr Annie Besant, then President of the Theosophical Society (TS), penned some lines that have since become familiar to members throughout the world, have been translated into several languages, and have, indeed, become a nearly indispensable part of every theosophist's vocabulary. The words have been set to music. They have been chanted and sung.

Few gatherings of the Society have been held since that year that have not been opened with the recitation of these words. At every International Convention, successive Presidents of the Society have inaugurated the proceedings with the antiphonal recitation of what has come to be known as the "Universal Prayer" or "Universal Invocation". Simple in the extreme, the words possess the magical power of a *mantra:*

O Hidden Life, vibrant in every atom;
O Hidden Light, shining in every creature;
O Hidden Love, embracing all in Oneness;
May all who feel themselves as one with Thee,
Know they are therefore one with every other.

So familiar have these words become



Annie Besant

that it may be their significance and depth of inner meaningfulness have escaped us.

When we become habituated to anything, be it a person, a situation, or an idea clothed in the fabric of language, there is always the danger that we come to take it for granted. In times of stress, we may even mouth words we learned in

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our childhood, as in the simple prayers of our faith. People have been known to do this automatically at times of crisis. Even avowed atheists have been heard to utter prayers they deny knowing or remem-membering. But words are precious and often fragile vehicles not only for thought, but for the aspirations of the heart. They can convey not only mundane meanings that get us about in the world and relate us to each other, but also the hunger of the soul and the beauty of the spirit in their reaching out to that "moreness" which remains forever indefinable and therefore unspeakable.

Can we pause, then, to examine the lines which Dr Besant gave the Society and the world? What inner meanings, what deeper realities lie behind the words themselves? To what new insights may we be led, even as we pronounce the words and speak the separate phrases? Have we become attached to these words simply because they came from that heroic soul, Annie Besant? Would it matter if some other individual had served as a channel for their impartation to the world? Undoubtedly, constant repetition has endowed the verse with a certain inner significance, a sacredness if we may call it that, but repetition can also dull the spirit and memorized phrases can be mouthed with little attention of either mind or heart.

Before we examine some, at least, of the inner meaning of the verse, it may be of interest to note its specific origin. In her "On the Watch-Tower" notes from *The Theosophist* of June 1923, Dr Besant wrote that the lines were prompted by a request from a number of members who were helping to organize a "Brotherhood Campaign" in South India. This "campaign" had been inaugurated some time earlier in Great Britain and was just then being taken up in India. Her comment continues:

> I wrote . . . a few lines for daily repetition, morning and evening, as I did not feel that I could write a meditation, as they had asked me to do. Meditation seems to me to be a very individual thing, the working of one's own mind on some special theme; the most I could do was suggest a theme. Here it is, as it chanted itself . . .

Then follows the verse already given above. Further, she adds:

> It sends forth successive waves of color, pulsing outwards from the speaker, if rhythmically intoned or chanted, whether by the outer or the inner voice, and if some thousands would send these out over successive areas, we might create a very powerful atmosphere . . .

The fact that Dr Besant tells us that the verse "chanted itself" to her may indeed indicate that its true source lay in a deeper or higher realm beyond her own conscious mind, perhaps even from that Source to which she herself always gave the deepest and most profound reverence and obeisance. Surely, we must concur that the words, as she gave them, are of such beauty and majestic sweep that any alteration or modification would be improper. The effect on the surrounding environment or community, and on the

individual who may be reciting the words as the verse is spoken, can only be guessed at, although many testify to its efficacy in producing an inner peace and even actual healing.

Turning now to the verse itself, we may consider it phrase by phrase, suggesting some of the meanings latent within it. First:

"O Hidden Life, vibrant in every atom;"

The immediate question that arises is: Why hidden? Is not life in evidence all about us? Life surely is not hidden! But what is referred to here, what is invoked, must be beyond or above the obvious. Dr I. K. Taimni, in his work, *Glimpses into the Psychology of Yoga*, reminds us that: "The Ultimate Reality exists only in the Ever-Unmanifest and is the source of all relative realities which can be within the realm of human experience . . ." The highest principle, then, is present every-where, and yet, is beyond all existence. It is truly the "hidden life" that underlies all of manifestation.

Inherent within that Reality is its own dynamism, as it were, making possible the production of all things, all existence, for there, at the heart of Reality, is the throbbing pulse of creation. Without that pulse, nothing can exist. It is ubiquitous, and contains within itself the power of resonating throughout all that ever is or will be. That potency is locked up in every atom and every element of the manifested universe. Truly, it is "vibrant in every atom". So all of Nature pulsates with the rhythm of the Eternal One, hidden forever, but known by its countless manifestations, as the One becomes the many, and yet remains forever One. This initial phrase is a call to that eternal, Unmanifest Principle: the Supreme Reality which is both beyond the cycles of manifestation and yet forever vibrating through the manifested universe. In terms of human consciousness, it is an invocation to that *ātman* which is hidden in our very nature, as present here in the physical as at its own level because its resonance vibrates through all the atoms of all our vehicles — carriers of that *ātman* —from *buddhi* to the physical.

"O Hidden Light, shining in every creature;"

Again, we may ask: Why hidden? If there were a light shining in every creature, surely that light would be observable. The very nature of light is that it glows and therefore it can be seen. Light radiates outwards, but we are called on to invoke a *hidden* light, a light that shines within but is not radiating outwards in a visible manner. So, a deeper meaning must be implicit in the words.

The One Reality, when it manifests, may be said to become Light. It is this interior light of the Supreme Reality, of *Iśvara*, the manifest Deity that is present in every creature. Life has now become light; its very vibrancy is now shining with an inner dynamism. In humanity, *buddhi* — the "light of the soul" — is now united with *ātma*, ready to turn outwards into activity. It is this light which must illumine our entire nature. This light makes consciousness possible, and it is "hidden" because it is not objective to conscious-

ness but is of the very nature of pure consciousness itself. And that light is present, shining through every atom in space.

"O Hidden Love, embracing all in Oneness;"

From the polarity of Life and Light there now springs creative activity, Love. Wherever there is polarity, relationship between the poles comes into existence. The purest of all relationships, the one relationship that is not sullied in any manner by any object of either attachment or repulsion, is the relationship of Love. This we may call the underlying "glue" which holds together all manifested things, all parts of the universe, all elements that appear with manifestation. Therefore it is Love that "embraces all in Oneness". The One has become the many; out of unity has come multiplicity. Yet however great the multiplicity, all is held in the one embrace of that pure relationship which arises when Life and Light come into existence, that relationship of Love.

Love lies at the very heart of the creative process. It is therefore the principle of universal lawfulness, which underlies evolution. Hidden, then, at the heart of the manifold is Love, which binds the many into the unity of the One. This is the law and the fulfilment of the law, bringing everything into perfect equilibrium, for whatever happens anywhere in the universe has its repercussions everywhere. There is no external authority, no extracosmic deity weighing the scales of justice. Love is at the heart of the universe and brings about balance because all that is in the universe is held in its embrace.

Here, too, is the creative principle: *ātma-buddhi* joined with *manas*, turned outwards now on the great involutionary-evolutionary journey. *Manas*, or creative activity, is truly love in action. The mind, when infused with intuition, embraces the universe, perceiving all things as they truly are. The mind that can fragment the Real in order to grasp or realize its manifold nature can also be brought into a condition of stillness, in which the modifications of the thinking principle have ceased. In that condition, perception, or awareness, is undivided. The undivided state of consciousness embraces "all in oneness".

The first three phrases of the *mantra* remind us of the great triplicity of the Supreme Reality — Life, Light, and Love. But this triplicity is "hidden", because it is not known objectively, but rather underlies the entire process of manifestation. It is "hidden" because the mind alone cannot grasp its essentialness, nor can it be experienced through the instrumentality of the senses. As Dr Taimni points out, in the above quoted work, "According to the Occult philosophy there is a method of knowing the Reality . . . and this method consists in suppressing the modifications of the mind completely". That method, of course, is yoga. "Then", continues Dr Taimni, "the individual consciousness becomes freed from the veil which separates the individual consciousness from the universal

consciousness and knows this Reality directly by becoming one with it".

In the first three lines of our verse, we invoke the triple nature of the One Reality. In that invocation we may perform a supreme yoga of Self-Realization. Our attention is drawn to the sublime fact that underlying each individual and the universe is the One Reality in its triple aspect of Life, Light, and Love. Its realization lies in a realm beyond the mind, but by invoking it, we bring that Reality into direct awareness, into our consciousness attuned and harmonized with the One. The final two lines of the verse affirm this realization.

"May all who feel themselves as one with Thee,"

The use of the word *Thee* indicates that the triplicity of Life, Light, and Love is indeed One — the One Supreme Reality. Note, however, that the emphasis first is on the word *feels*. What is it to feel oneself as one with the Supreme? Feeling is acute awareness — awareness without any distracting thought, without any disturbing influence. It is an awareness that is total, which overwhelms us and takes hold of us wholly and utterly. Perhaps it may be compared to the moment of pain when one stubs one's toe against a stone abutment. At such a moment, there is no other awareness than the awareness of pain. No thought even intrudes at the sharp moment of impact. Only later may we say, "I stubbed my toe" or "I felt pain in my toe".

The feeling that must come, and must be affirmed in the realization of oneness, is such a feeling: total, entire, complete, without analysis or reason or logical deduction. Only in such a condition can true *knowing* arise. In one sense, this ability to "feel . . . as one with Thee" may be described as the pain of oneness, the burden of oneness, that we all must bear, if we would know the reality of life itself. It is not, in other words, a selective feeling: "I will feel one with you, but not with that person; I will feel one with a tree, but not with a snake", and so on. When we say, "May each . . ." or "May all . . ." we are invoking in ourselves a consciousness that has no divisions, no barriers. It is a consciousness infused only with Life, Light and Love, and therefore it is pure and whole.

Out of that acute awareness of "feeling," must follow a knowing:

"Know they are therefore one with every other."

So the mantram concludes with an affirmation of the certainty of knowledge. Humanity is not only meant to *feel*; it must *know*. This is the full burden of *self*-consciousness. It is a knowing that is not simply a surmise, an opinion, an idea, or a belief that may be altered when some other notion comes along. It is rather a conscious act that arises because we have been immersed in a consciousness that was uncompounded, undivided, whole and pristine in its nature. As a result of the contact with that consciousness, of that non-verbal awareness that we are one with the Universal Reality, that we are truly *ātma-buddhi-manas*, we have

to know, to be fully conscious of our one-ness with all other units of Life who are equally infused with that Reality, vibrating with it, shining with it, embraced by it.

In some versions of the *mantra*, the word *also* has been substituted for the word *therefore*, but it may be noted that in Dr Besant's original version, the latter word is used. There is a subtle, but very definite, difference between the two words. "Also" is an additive word; it means "in addition to", "this plus that", and so on, "Therefore" has the connotation of "subsequent upon", "as a result of"; it is not augmentative. What is intended in the *mantra* is the realization that when the feeling of unity is present, recognition of the one-ness with the Supreme Reality that is Light, Life, and Love, then there follows upon that recognition the realization that one is inevitably united with all other creatures. For how can we be one with the Supreme and remain separate from, distinct from, all others who are equally rooted in the One Reality?

Many more meanings may be discovered in this magnificent verse that Dr Besant bequeathed to us. It is truly a reaffirmation of the entire creative process in which we — and all life — are immersed; a reaffirmation that we hold within our power, as self-conscious units of life, the ability to perceive life, whole and splendid. This is the vision we can send shining out over the entire world, the vision to which we can give wings and voice and form. This is the vision that can recreate ourselves every time we chant the mantra, and so, recreate and transform our world.

Such a vision alone can bring about a new consciousness in the world, consciousness of unity, brotherhood, peace, and harmony, of wholeness and holiness. When we repeat these few simple lines, either alone or in a group, we invoke the One Reality to manifest itself anew, and this is to make whole and make holy all that is in the universe about us. No more wonderful act could we perform. ✧

The problem of the individual is also the world's problem,
they are not two separate and distinct processes.
You are the repository of all humanity.
You are the world, and the world is you.
And, if there is a radical transformation
in the structure of an individual's psyche,
it will affect the whole consciousness of the human being.

Jiddu Krishnamurty (11 May 1895 – 17 February 1986)
The Quotable Krishnamurti, by Robert Epstein, p. 142

A Mythological Lens on the Theosophical Doctrine

RAFAEL MARQUES DE ALBUQUERQUE

MYTH is a tool of the spiritual path. Fictional stories about gods, heroes, martyrs, and sages do not merely delight the soul; they equip us for the journey toward the sacred. Myths communicate ethical and cultural values to a people, encourage the seeker to direct their efforts toward mystery, and ultimately prepare the unconscious mind for mystical experiences.

The work of Joseph Campbell, particularly *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, illustrates the psychological dimension of myth as a means of preparing the seeker's mind for the journey. For Joseph Campbell, stories function as metaphors that point to profound truths that cannot be expressed literally and, in doing so, transmit essential teachings. Moreover, during mystical experiences, the rational mind falls silent, and the deeper layers of the psyche must be prepared to engage with whatever emerges. Stories equip the unconscious in ways that rational thought cannot: you may not remember to maintain a humble attitude as you go deeper, but the Sumerian tale of Inanna can remind you to set your adornments aside. In fact, during trance states one can experience a journey analogous to that of Inanna or other gods and heroes.

One peculiarity of myth is that it presents itself as truth — as if it had occurred in a factual sense. In a way, the seeker is expected to accept the story as part of their preparation for mystical experiences. Esoteric understanding lies precisely in the ability to grasp that, at its core, myth does not consist of factual truths, but of encoded teachings — and yet to surrender oneself to it. To drink it to the last drop as a cosmic truth, while aware of its nonliteral nature.

In mystical experiences, factual truths prove to be of marginal relevance. In the experience of union with the divine, it matters little whether Jesus actually multiplied the loaves and fishes, whether Moses parted the Red Sea, or whether the Buddha created multiple manifestations of himself to teach the Dharma. Historical accuracy will not make the experience more enlightening.

Joseph Campbell argued that modern

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Western societies have lost their mythological relationship with the world. Madame Blavatsky, in her own way, elaborated a similar argument when she denounced how European modernity cornered the mind between a scientific materialism blind to ancestral sacred teachings and a hypocritical Christianity estranged from its own essence.

From this perspective, one of the functions of Blavatsky's work may be understood as the presentation of a new mythology: a system of myths with which someone shaped by materialist modernity might form an emotional bond and in which they might believe, even if in that wise, mystical mode of belief that does not affirm factual truth, but affirms the symbol.

In the nineteenth century, the natural sciences, such as chemistry and physics, were advancing at an accelerated pace. Archaeology and anthropology were emerging as structured fields of knowledge. It was only natural, then, that in crafting a modern mythology, Blavatsky would draw inspiration from the ideas of her time. Abstract symbols pointing to hidden truths — such as those she describes in the Book of Dzyan — are presented in a form palatable to the intellectuals of her time, following the ancient tradition of great sages adapting their teachings to their disciples.

In this light, Blavatsky described traditional themes (such as the origin of the world) using modern language and a scientific framing. The story of humanity does not appear clothed in imagery that might seem absurd to the modern mind, such as Adam and Eve in paradise or Noah's ark containing all animal species, but rather as a saga of ancient peoples who could, in principle, become objects of archaeological study. If nineteenth-century scholars debated the Phoenicians, Vikings, or Aztecs based on historical evidence, it was conceivable that archaeology might one day reach the Atlanteans and Lemurians. These narratives aligned with the mindset of the period and accomplished their goal: raising awareness and interest among people in the nineteenth century in the hidden wisdom of ancient traditions.

A theosophist intrigued by this conception might ask why Blavatsky described the root races and the history of the world and humanity as factual truths if she knew she was creating a theosophical mythology. We cannot know her deepest convictions in this respect: perhaps she believed in these ideas in a literal sense. It is also possible that someone like her, who had access to deeper truths, held a vision of reality that does not correspond to, and need not correspond to, factual history. Factual history may be important when communicating with a wider audience, but it becomes far less significant once one begins to perceive reality beyond its veils.

Regardless of her own awareness of a mythological dimension in her writings, we may compare her to other great sages throughout history who have expressed their insights through myth and parable — not merely to persuade the

seeker to embrace and internalize the myth within the psyche, but perhaps because it is expected that the mystic, initiated into esoteric knowledge, will learn to inhabit a peculiar state of believing without believing: believing symbolically rather than factually. Blavatsky filled her work with indications pointing in this direction. She explains the process of seeking the deeper, mystical, and symbolic meanings behind allegories. It is implicitly suggested that we could apply this method to her own work, since failing to do so risks turning us into exoteric theosophists: those who know the doctrine only in its literal sense, who believe in myth as factual truth, and who fail to understand the function of myth in the journey toward direct experience of the sacred, which, as the sages remind us, is what truly matters.

Some people, who may feel devoted to theosophical teachings, may feel that this article offends Blavatsky by suggesting that her doctrine is false. I can hardly see how comparing her to the great sages of humanity would diminish her. Myth is powerful and important — arguably even more important than historical facts, at least for the mystic.

With this brief article, I do not seek to delegitimize the ways in which individual theosophists choose to engage with the literature. My aim is to present a perspective that coexists alongside the many possible viewpoints within the theosophical movement. The idea outlined here may resonate with those who find value in some of the teachings of theosophical literature but see little meaning in a literal interpretation of what I have here called theosophical mythology.

We might therefore consider three valid paths for theosophists. The first is to believe literally in the theosophical myth, holding, for instance, that the separation of the sexes truly occurred among the Lemurians eighteen million years ago. The second is to study the doctrine through a mythological lens — interpreting it as a tool on the mystic path — without drawing conclusions about historical facts, leaving history to historians. The third is to recognize that this mythological system does not work for you and to seek other mythological frameworks better suited to your path, while still drawing from theosophical literature the teachings that resonate with you, such as ethics, meditation, universal brotherhood and comparative religion. In the end, every theosophist must build their own boat to cross the sea, making the leap from reading about and believing in a worldview to the direct perception of reality. ✧

I think of mythology as the homeland of the muses, the inspirers of art, the inspirers of poetry. To see life as a poem and yourself participating in a poem is what the myth does for you.

Joseph Campbell

Four Foundations of Mindfulness

CECIL MESSER

WHEN the Buddha began his teaching on meditation, he emphasized the application of mindfulness in one's daily activities. He formalized this practice in his famous discourse on mental training, the "Four Foundations of Mindfulness", in which he described four categories of mental cultivation. These four forms of mindfulness meditation practice take as their objects: the body, the feelings, the mind, and the mental formations.

1. The first category of mental training is in connection with our body. We observe the breathing process, body postures, and physical sensations. This practice can be done in any situation by giving constant attention to our physical and verbal activities. An example of this is the practice of "walking meditation", wherein we carefully monitor the movement of our principal body parts while walking in a slow and deliberate manner. Another common practice while sitting is the moment-to-moment scanning of each body part, from the top of the head to the tip of each toe and becoming aware of its particular sensation. These practices entail being attentive and simply living in the present moment with full mindfulness.

2. The second category of mental cultivation regards our feelings. The practice is to be aware of whether our feelings are pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent. When a feeling presents itself, examine its nature: how it arises and disappears in our mind, where it comes from and where it goes, and whether or not we feel attached to it.

3. The third category of training is the meditation practice dealing with our mind itself. We may observe the state of our mind while it is at rest or in movement. We may be aware of whether our mind is with or without the afflictions of anger or resentment, excessive desire or attachment, and ignorance or stupidity. We may know whether it is distracted or not, attentive or not, and free or not.

4. The fourth category of mental cultivation is the mindfulness meditation practice using our own mental formations as objects. Mental formations are concepts and attitudes born from our psychological conditioning and take the form of subconscious habit patterns like neurological grooves. To become accustomed to "seeing" thoughts and emotions arise, simply notice these mental activities

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as they display themselves. Bare perceptions from watching birds playing or hearing the wind in the trees are not thoughts in this context. Our mind may react to perceptions by generating mental formations such as concepts, labels, likes, dislikes, and indifferences based on the conditioning of personal experience. Emotions are the energetic aspect of thoughts that get caught up in the ensuing drama.

In our meditation practice, we may observe, analyze, and reflect upon these mental objects. They include five principal obstacles to enlightenment: obsessive pursuit of pleasure, malice or ill will, laxity, anxiety, and uncertainty or distrust. They also include beneficial factors in support of the way to enlightenment such as: mindfulness, interest in sacred doctrines, energy, joy, relaxation, concentration, and equanimity. Traditionally, fifty-two mental objects were delineated by the Buddha.

In the training for attaining the serenity of mindfulness, we may notice that mental states or levels of attention develop in discernible stages: initially focusing on an object, gradually eliminating distractions, and subsequently pacifying the mind until we dwell in equanimity. Through the practice of mindfulness, these beneficial mental states arise through our cultivation of virtue, especially enthusiastic diligence, until a state of calm abiding is experienced. Consequently, our awareness becomes alive: ever-present, spontaneous, effortless, and natural.

Meditation Session

Think about your personal predispositions and mental habit patterns and choose a useful meditative object for this mindfulness practice. Shamatha practice is more beneficial when using an object that is both meaningful and concise. When choosing a pithy sentence or paragraph, condense it to a single word or concept and allow it to arise. For example, if you are predisposed to viewing others as enemies, you may select the following passage from Rumi. Represent it by the word "love".

> Whether you love the One
> or another human being,
> If you love enough,
> in the end you will come into the
> Presence of Love itself.

Stabilize your mind on "love" as the object with no accompanying analysis. Your focus on "love" will be like a feeling — a warmth, not as an imaged group of letters. Lose yourself while communing with the object such that there is no subject/object dualistic operation. This is not to identify yourself with the object but to lose yourself in its ambiance. Let go of any sense of effort and rest in calm abiding.

Meditation matures as one begins to shift focus from an object of awareness to the openness of awareness itself, like gazing into the vast sky rather than watching cloud formations. ✧

Yesterday is but today's memory, and tomorrow is today's dream.

Khalil Gibran

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