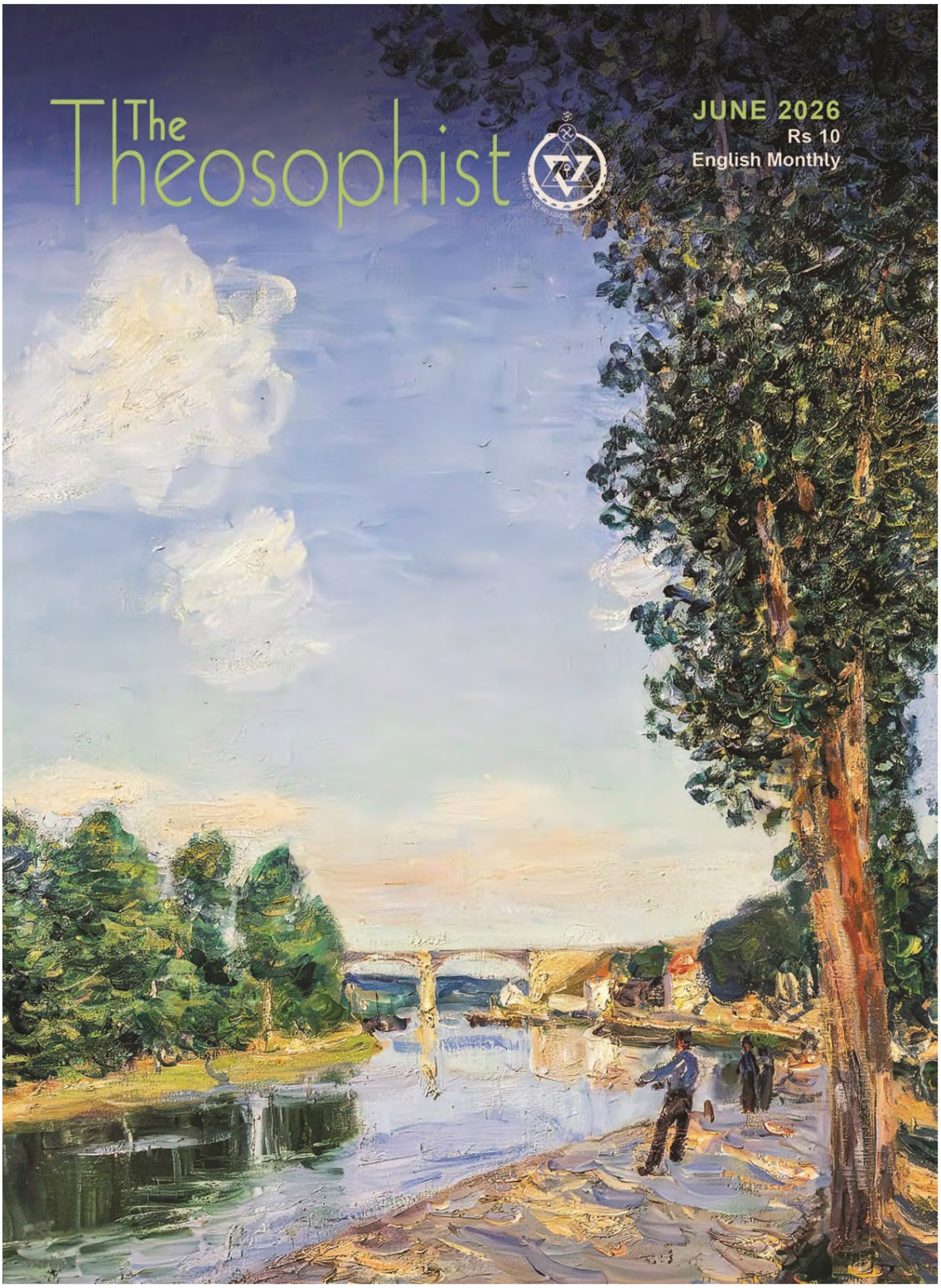
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THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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.

HPB and Today's World

TIM BOYD

H. P. BLAVATSKY (HPB) was often described by others, and by herself, as a messenger. She was not the creator or originator of Theosophy, the Ageless Wisdom, or *The Secret Doctrine*. In fact, her statement about her magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine*, was: "I have here made only a nosegay (a small bunch) of culled flowers, and have brought nothing of my own but the string that ties them." She was a person with unusual gifts, chosen to deliver a message, not to an individual or group of "chosen people", but to humanity. A message of a universal wisdom tradition and some specifics of that tradition that our time was prepared to comprehend.

The message and the messenger appeared in anticipation of the future — an unimaginable future to the eyes of her time, but clearly anticipated by those who sent her. In a time where local conditions, religions, cultures, economies, communication, climate, and conflicts dominated thought and planning, the message was sent in preparation for a rapidly approaching moment when global awareness and an emerging universal consciousness would begin to make itself known. She came to prepare the world for a turning in a cycle of human unfoldment, from a pattern of one-pointed fixation on the material / outer world and an intense materialistic science with its fruits of industry and technology. A pattern of growth that had exhibited an ever-increasing emphasis on the individual, with his / her personal beliefs, wants, and needs, and an ever-expanding capacity to satisfy and magnify those wants. An atomized world of separate entities pursuing separate goals.

The message delivered through HPB focused on the essential fact of the Unity of all life. It described the operations of that One Life as an omnipresent ordering principle moving through all things. It asserted the possibility, and the responsibility, to cultivate an ever-deepening realization of this ever-active inner life. In the words of HPB's Diagram of Meditation, "First conceive of Unity" and all else would begin to become clear.

Her presence in the world and the focus of her life's work was "to form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood" which in time would encompass the whole of humanity. After her death the First Object of the Theosophical Society (TS) was changed to "To form *a* nucleus of *the* Universal Brotherhood" to reflect a shift in TS focus. Her work was to establish the Universal Tradition not limited by locality or culture, capable of operating through any and all cultures. Hers was an attempt to establish

the basis and move beyond "I", ego, national and religious identity, to compassionate living rooted in a growing perception of unity.

Some details of HPB' life: Before the founding of the Theosophical Society in 1875 in New York, she had traveled to every continent on earth except Australia. This was at a time when traveling from London to Bombay by steamship (the jet planes of the day) took a month. If land routes were involved, the time doubled. Every place she went, she connected with profound representatives of the Ageless Wisdom tradition — Sufis, Buddhists, shamans, mystics, healers, deep students of esoteric knowledge. From childhood, she reported experiences of a guiding presence, later recognized as her Master, whom she first met physically in London at the age of twenty.

The world she grew up in had a total population of 1.2 billion, one-seventh of today's; life expectancy was 30–35 (40 in England and the USA) less than half of today's. The primary form of long-distance communication was by postal delivery (today commonly called "snail mail") with a letter taking weeks to arrive at its destination. The British had laid transoceanic cables enabling telegraph for urgent, brief messages. International news and literature were spread by word of mouth and by delivery of local news publications long after the events had occurred. The telephone, while invented during her lifetime, was not widely used.

HPB was well known for her ability to produce phenomena of different types. In the early days of the TS, mostly in the Western world, it was what caught people's attention and attracted at least a few to try to understand the rationale behind such phenomena. When the Letters from the Masters started to be received by A. P. Sinnett, all of them were phenomenally produced. In Sinnett's efforts to understand and to promote a broader awareness of the Masters and the deeper latent human potentials, he came up with an idea which he felt was guaranteed to remove all doubt and convince the world (for him, Western and British) of the undeniable reality of the Masters and their powers. His suggestion was that the Master should cause an exact reproduction to be produced in India of the newspaper printed in London on the same day. Much to his dismay, Sinnett's suggestion was not accepted.

Today, few places on earth require more than one day to reach. Communication in all forms is immediate. You need not read a newspaper headline to know the news, you can see and hear from the people making the news in real time. Today there are more active cell phone accounts than there are people in the world — each one bringing news, photos, video, live action, mail, text, audio, music, and calls from all corners of the planet to the pockets and purses of the world's population. Today even a child would laugh at the idea that producing the headline of a foreign newspaper on the same day it is printed proves anything more than the facts of normal living in any city or village on earth.

What has *not* changed? Headlong pursuit of material wealth, technological advancement, comfort, power. The consequences are evident: climate change, resource depletion, environmental destruction, global anxiety, war, human preoccupation with outer world processes that conflict with the felt mandates of an inner life, inner sensitivities dulled by constant bombardment, and personal attachment to outer stimuli. Yet, despite these consequences, we still have the capacity to think of the whole of humanity and the earth as a living, multi-faceted, interdependent organism.

HPB gave specific information about the processes, nature, cycles, inhabitants, and forces operating within the multidimensional universe and world we inhabit, and within ourselves. Specifics of what she offered are still challenging to students to this day, but those specifics were given to make a broader point. We live in a universe of harmony and order whose most prominent truth is Oneness; that intelligence is omnipresent, no space is empty or devoid of life; that the intelligence and perfection of the whole is within each of its parts and reveals itself over vast cycles of time; that we function within cycles/rhythms of growth and unfoldment; that the ultimate unfoldment of the individual is the attainment of the undivided consciousness of Humanity — "the dewdrop slips into the shining sea". And, most important, that as a human family we are once again on the cusp of a new cycle, having largely exhausted the positive learning potentials of the present phase.

What do you do when you recognize that what is being called truth is a lie? When you can see that war does not lead to peace; that intense poverty is not a requirement for prosperity; that hate for others cannot lead to love for a righteous few; that the Divine is not outside of us and is not swayed by gifts, smooth words, and obedience to man-made rules? Such misconceptions persist not because they are true, but because they are collectively accepted. Consensus trance is the name for this condition. Agreement, however, is not the same as truth. J. Krishnamurti as a thirteen-year-old said in *At The Feet of the Master*: "Though a thousand men agree upon a subject, if they know nothing about that subject, their opinion is of no value."

Throughout history external revolutions have been a feature of human history — replacing one set of beliefs and arbiters of truth with a different set. They are never pleasant, mostly violent, but never final. What is called for instead is an inner revolution in the original sense of the Latin word *revolvere* — to roll back to the starting point. This does not mean undoing the advances of this or previous cycles, but recognizing, and building upon the underlying unity from which all progress arises.

What does this mean for us? It is not possible for us to make a sudden leap into a height of awareness that has been foreign to us. In *The Mahatma Letters* an important statement is made: "As the course of the river depends upon the nature of its basin, so the channel for

communication of Knowledge must conform itself to surrounding circumstances." HPB's life was spent introducing us to the next wave of thought, to the dawning cycle of awareness, to the knowledge shaped by the circumstances and needs of our time.

It is a habit of the modern world to reduce everything to our level. In this way of thinking, as human beings we are all equal, which at its deepest level is true. We are all sparks of a universal flame with divinity enshrined deep within us all. But at the level of human personality and capacities, this idea is completely wrong. The Mozarts, Einsteins, Ramana Maharshis, HPBs are very different from the rest of us in their understanding, particular genius, and perseverance. Among Muslims there is a popular response to the idea that the Prophet Muhammad is like other men. They would say, "Yes, he is the same as other men, in the same way that a ruby is like other stones."

At a TS meeting in London years ago, the speaker was addressing the audience when one of the listeners reached in his pocket, pulled out a pack of cigarettes, took one out, lit it, and started smoking. The speaker, Ianthe Hoskins, then President of the TS England, stopped her talk and informed the man that smoking was not permitted in TS meetings. He took another puff then said, "Why not? HPB smoked!" to which Ianthe Hoskins immediately replied: "When you have written *The Secret Doctrine*, then you too will be welcome to smoke here." Hers was a sharp spontaneous response, but I do not think I would have let him off so easily. Perhaps something more like: "When you have written *The Secret Doctrine*, *Isis Unveiled*, *The Voice of the Silence*, *The Key to Theosophy*, the thousands of pages of her collected writings and letters. When you introduce humanity to a new unfoldment of an Ageless Wisdom and suffer betrayals, condemnation, being reviled only to be revered one hundred years after your death. When you have served a life of sixty years traveling to every continent, sacrificing health, wealth, position, family, friendships in an attempt to accomplish the purposes of the Masters of the Wisdom, with no clear hope of success. When through your life and selfless work you have established an organization that has influenced the direction of human thought and culture globally, then not only will you be welcome to smoke, I will light your cigarette for you."

Every year on 8 May, we come together in places around the world to honor HPB as a messenger of truth. As necessary as such recognition is, we must never lose sight of the fact that while the messenger is important, the *message* is what she came to deliver. It begins with, "First conceive of Oneness". ✧

To the worldy man Karma is a stern Nemesis, to the spiritual man Karma unfolds itself in harmony with his highest aspirations.

William Q. Judge

Theosophical Reflections on Purpose

MARJA ARTAMAA

AT some point in every life, the question surfaces — quietly, in the middle of an ordinary day, or suddenly, in a moment of crisis or unexpected joy: *Why am I here? What does any of this mean?* Most of us push the question aside. We have things to do. But the question does not go away. It waits.

Theosophy takes that question seriously. It treats it not as a philosophical luxury or an occasional mood, but as the very engine of human development. The search for purpose, in the theosophical understanding, is not separate from life — it is the deepest current running through it.

Joy Mills, one of the most eloquent voices in the modern theosophical movement, was once asked: *What is your fondest wish for the Theosophical Society in the future?* Her answer speaks directly to this:

> My fondest wish for the Theosophical Society in the future: I suppose I would say that I trust the Society will never lose sight of its roots in the Wisdom tradition and never falter in its direction and purpose as so magnificently defined by its founders, Blavatsky and Olcott, and by those Great Ones, the Masters of Wisdom, to whom they gave full allegiance. While the expression of the Wisdom may change with the times, the essential message should remain the same, I would hope, so that those seeking a deeper meaning to life, seeking to understand themselves and the world about them, may discover that Wisdom.

It is in the light of these words that the following reflections are offered.

What We Are Seeking

When we seek, as true theosophists, we must seek wisdom — and wisdom includes, as a natural and inseparable part, the art of knowing ourselves.

This is perhaps where we must begin — honestly, and without pretence. Because a mere desire to become wise is not enough. We may all feel that desire. But Theosophy asks something deeper of us. It asks us, in a very real sense, to let go of desire itself — to stop grasping, and to begin to grow deeper.

That growing deeper requires strength. It requires self-discipline. It requires the patient, sometimes difficult work of educating and cultivating ourselves — not

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for our own satisfaction, but so that we may become transmitters of the wisdom of our age.

That is what it means to be a theosophist. Not a title. A living, breathing commitment to be a transmitter of wisdom — for light, for the good of all — in all ages.

The Message We Carry

Theosophy carries a message into the world. And we are its carriers. That message is this: cultivate understanding of life. Expand consciousness. Recognise the absolute necessity of humanity's development.

And it asks something personally of each of us — to take mastery of our own minds. Not to let our minds be pulled in every direction by noise, triviality, and by all that draws us away from the essence of life.

We live in a world of extraordinary distraction — an age in which concentration itself has become almost countercultural. There is so much that clamours for our attention, so much that promises meaning and delivers very little. Theosophy calls us to something different. It calls us inward, to the still place where real understanding begins.

This is not a rejection of the world. It is a deepening of our relationship with it.

The Purpose That Lives in Us

I believe most people sense that seeking the purpose of life is natural to every human being — not by setting goals, but by finding life through living it with a sincere mind. It is not something unusual or esoteric. It is as natural as breathing.

Every person, at some point in their life, asks: *Why am I here? What does this all mean?* We ask it in moments of joy, and we ask it in moments of loss. The question itself is sacred. Our spiritual development — the very quality of our inner life — depends upon how we live with that question. It depends upon the refinement of our senses and our minds. Upon our capacity for discrimination — the ability to distinguish what is real from what is merely compelling. And upon inner peace — that quality of stillness without which nothing deeper can be heard.

It is upon the balance of our physical life, our emotions, and our minds that our awareness and consciousness grow. When these are in harmony, something remarkable becomes possible. The meeting point of personality and spirit becomes evident. A natural connection opens — and when that connection is alive and functioning, sparks of meaning begin to arise in our lives.

We begin to sense that our personality is not the whole of us. That there is something more — something that can shine through us, if we allow it. The personality becomes able to transmit spirituality. Spirituality echoed by the higher mind, *buddhic*, and *ātmic* levels. We have all felt it — in moments of genuine compassion, in acts of selfless service, in the quiet after meditation when something feels, just briefly, clear and whole.

A Lifelong Commitment

Theosophy is not an invention. It is not a momentary flash of insight, how-

ever brilliant. It is a lifelong process — and it requires deep commitment.

I want to stay with this word — *commitment* — because I think it is one of the most misunderstood and undervalued words in our vocabulary. We live in a time that celebrates options, flexibility, the freedom to change course. And there is wisdom in that. But there is also a wisdom in staying. In going deeper. In not moving on when things become difficult. When we commit with the very roots of our heart — something opens. We become free.

This may seem paradoxical. How does commitment bring freedom? But those of us who have experienced it know: when we are fully committed to something true, we are no longer scattered. We are no longer pulled in a hundred directions. We are whole. And in that wholeness is a quiet, steady freedom.

Within us grows the strength and the connection to fulfil that for which we walk the path of our development. We are not wandering. We have a direction. And that direction is meaningful.

This is one of the cores of spiritual life: freedom and connection.

Not freedom from responsibility, but freedom through it. Not connection as dependence, but connection as love — love for the path, for each other, for the world we serve.

In one word: commitment.

We, as individuals, fulfil ourselves for the good of the world. Our development is never only for ourselves. It ripples outwards. Always.

The Sacred in the Everyday

Theosophy opens for us a dimension that rises above the everyday. And sometimes we can mistake that to mean that spiritual life exists apart from ordinary life — that we must somehow step out of the daily world to find what is holy.

But Theosophy does not ask us to live outside of daily life. It invites us to be more fully within it. And when rightly understood, this is freedom.

Think about our days. The conversations, the meals, the small decisions, the moments of kindness or impatience. The work we do. The people we meet. Theosophy says: *This is the field.* This is where it happens. This is where we become who we are called to be — by our free will.

The everyday becomes sacred. And the sacred is a living connection to the meaning of life.

Why We Are Here

If we think thoroughly, or intuitively, life is our inner school.

We can acknowledge that spiritual life is not a luxury or an addition to our lives — it is the very ground of who we are. Within us already is the spirituality we wish to bring forth for the good of the world. We do not need to find it somewhere else. We do not need to wait until we are more ready, more evolved, more certain. It is here. It is in us. Now.

We allow spirituality to enter our lives — in all things, in all moments — so that we radiate its vibration around us, whenever we are able. This helps the world. It may seem a small thing — one person living more consciously, more

kindly, more awake. But it is real. It matters. The world is changed by it, even when we cannot see how.

Theosophy helps us turn within — to understand ourselves and our minds. To meet ourselves honestly and with compassion.

That is why we are here. That is why our lives have meaning.

We turn inwards so that the ethical principles we hold are not simply words we believe in — but living realities that breathe through everything we do.

What Guides Us

Our understanding of our own feelings and mind — our intuition — the wisdom that arises within us when we are still and open: these are our guides. Not only for ourselves, but for the world.

We are not alone in this. We walk together. We learn from one another. And we are held, I believe, by something greater than ourselves — a wisdom that has always been here, waiting for us to be ready to receive it.

Carrying The Wisdom Forward

Purpose, in the theosophical sense, is not something we define and then pursue from the outside. It is something we discover by becoming — by the gradual, committed, sometimes demanding work of aligning our personality with the deeper self that seeks to shine through us.

The Theosophical Society exists to keep that discovery alive — in the world, and in each of us. It is fitting, then, to close where we began — with Joy Mills, whose words carry as much weight today as when she first spoke them:

> While the expression of the Wisdom may change with the times, the essential message should remain the same, I would hope, so that those seeking a deeper meaning to life, seeking to understand themselves and the world about them, may discover that Wisdom.

May we be part of that discovery — for ourselves, and for all those who are still searching. ✧

Our prime purpose in this life is to help others.
And if you can't help them, at least do not hurt them.

His Holiness The Dalai Lama

Idolatry

ELTON HALL

AS almost everyone knows, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam abhor idols, because they manifest the idea of many gods, or polytheism. Never mind that all three self-described monotheistic religions accept angels, not to mention saints, as divine mediators between the human being and the ultimate deity. When the colonial British ruled India, as Christians — whether sincere and practicing or only nominal — they looked down on the myriad temples, shrines, and sacred spaces of the Hindus. Here was the rampant polytheism that the missionaries strove to eradicate. Except for a few European functionaries who took an interest in Sanskrit sacred texts, the overwhelming tendency was to dismiss and demean Hindu religious thought and practice, as evidence of a more primitive, even retarded, mentality.

Unfortunately, even those few who could appreciate to some degree the spiritual heritage of the subcontinent nevertheless retained in refined form the same attitudes, which were simply prejudices. Since the colonial government dealt for the most part only with educated Brahmins, their views of the so-called masses were exceptionally limited. Only a few scholars recognized that the very Brahmins who were the source of what they were learning were withholding much more than they shared. Despite the vast scholarly work of the last century and a half, this situation likely remains.

Had they paid even a little attention to actual Hindu practices, their belief that Indians were benighted idol worshippers would have been challenged. Since English has become a common language in India, Hindus freely use the term "idol" without being idol worshippers, because the idol is understood to be an image only, and for many Hindus, the image is a symbolic representation of the imageless. One way the colonizers could have sensed this is by the way the gods and goddesses so freely trade names and functions, just as was the case in ancient Egypt. Even more telling, the practices of the Hindus directly reveal the difference between having an image of a god — the idol — and idol worship.

A few decades ago, a lovely documentary was filmed of a school festival

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in honor of Sarasvati, the goddess of learning (and much more). Schools celebrate this goddess annually by preparing a temporary altar and dais, creating from paper and plaster a figure of the goddess, and carefully painting it in beautiful colors and detail. Once installed, Sarasvati is invited to take up residence in the idol. During the festival, offerings of flowers and fruit are made to the goddess by placing them on the altar, and hymns of praise are sung, often extolling the goddess but equally praising other gods and goddesses. Once the festivities are concluded, the goddess is thanked for her presence and for learning in general, and invited to withdraw from the statue. To the great joy of the school children, the idol is borne by them to the local river and being washed away. This is hardly idol-worship; no one thinks he or she is tossing the goddess into the water.

In the United States, Indian markets typically have *puja* (worship) materials available before Ganesha Chaturthi, the 10-day celebration of the birth of Ganesha, the god of wisdom and remover of obstacles. Since Ganesha temples are few and far between, and since not everyone lives near a river, one can purchase an "idol box". This consists of an image of Ganesha, appropriate incense, and other items for venerating the god, and it includes instructions on how to properly dispose of the idol. These paraphernalia are, of course, for the home. The instructions include directions for filling a tub with water and, when the event ends, immersing the idol in the water and leaving it overnight. By the next morning, the idol will have dissolved, and the tub can be emptied out anywhere. Once again, this is not idol-worship.

Are there Hindus who think the god or goddess is actually the idol? One cannot simply declare a yes or no, because one does not know the minds and hearts of each and every self-professing Hindu. But these examples show that Hindus of every background clearly understand the difference between an image and what it points to. Further, Hindus understand gods and goddesses as manifestations of the Divine, and this is shown in two ways. A Hindu may take a god or goddess as *the* god, and all the rest as aspects or manifestations of *the* god. This is one's *ishtadeva*, the presence of the Divine that resonates with one's own incarnated being.

One may also see all the gods and goddesses as manifesting aspects of That, the ultimate which is beyond form or conception. The ancient and timeless Vedas assert that the gods themselves are part of the unfoldment of the Kosmos from That which, being beyond the Kosmos yet pervades it, and so have a beginning and ending in what seems like endless time, when all is reabsorbed into that formless Source. Gods and goddesses may manifest in new forms, sometimes, temporarily, as in the 1970s, when the god of disco dancing and the goddess of computers appeared. They were, of course, manifestations of Shiva (Nataraja, lord of the dance) and Sarasvati (goddess of learning) in what might be called "local" forms.

Broadening the concepts of idols and idolatry, Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626), sometimes called the father of modern empirical science, held that human beings persist in ignorance because of four idols. The Idols of the Tribe are those preconceptions inherent in human nature — theosophists would say inherited from previous lives — such as the unexamined conviction that the senses reveal the world as it really is. Rather, the senses are limited and do not show what is hidden to them and distort what they perceive. Idols of the Cave are personal misconceptions and delusions, the result of one's education, culture and environment. Each individual has his or her personal cave, mistaking shadows for realities, so to speak. There are, however, social or collective idols that mislead people in their search for understanding. Idols of the Market are all those concepts agreed on by undiagnosed common consent, in the belief that our discursive thinking produces adequate words for expressing reality. Rather, Bacon thought, the words we learn socially profoundly affect our thinking and both limit and mislead our thinking. Bacon did not consider the theosophical view of ideation, and how purified and focused thought can affect speech. Yet his point is well-taken: unexamined assimilation of words — concepts — can do just what he indicated. Finally, his Idols of the Theater are the dogmatic claims of philosophers and their illusionary demonstrations. One does not have to be a philosopher to detect these idols in society and thus in oneself. Bacon was concerned with natural philosophy, which became the physical sciences. Initially, the term "science" meant any structured body of knowledge, including theology and philosophy, but in the nineteenth century the term became reserved for what until then was called natural philosophy — physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy, and their many related fields.

Bacon was not concerned with the nature of consciousness in itself, and so did not speak to much that is fundamental in Theosophy, but he understood that any science must have systematic methods of discovery. For him, this meant that natural science could not simply rely on a naive empiricism that accepted as reality whatever appeared to the untrained senses.

Rather, natural science required the development of hypotheses that could be tested by carefully constructed experiments. It is for this that he is considered the father of modern science, which was only emerging rather willy-nilly in his time. The Royal Society, founded in 1660, chartered by King Charles II, and still in existence, took up Bacon's program and systematic investigation in the physical sciences was nurtured thereby.

Though Bacon was far from being a theosophist, those who study Theosophy can appreciate Bacon's ideas both regarding idols and the need for methodological discipline in discerning the truth. Both ideas can be applied to human consciousness. Individuals can think of the four interrelated methods advised by

Theosophy — study, meditation, self-study, and the *pāramitā* path — as the science of consciousness. Study is immersing oneself in the teachings of Theosophy. H. P. Blavatsky said that studying *The Secret Doctrine*, including intuitively reading between the lines, would over time make the mind increasingly porous to spiritual understanding. Meditation begins with universal hypotheses, such as the First Fundamental, and scrutinizes all the illusory tendencies — prejudices, dogmatic beliefs, dispositions, tendencies, desires, and so-called needs — that cloud pure consciousness and mislead self-consciousness into idol worship.

Self-study, the daily life ledger, is the self-conscious effort to identify what really happened in one's daily thinking, inter-acting with and reacting to others, one's decisions, and how one executed them. Such impersonal review can show what could be made more clear, what was driven by unacknowledged motives, what needs correction, and what should be reinforced. Such review is scientific if it is impersonal, for then one observes and draws conclusions rather than merely wallowing in regrets for errors or self-praise for what was well done. Real acknowledgement is impersonal and the key to understanding. The *pāramitā* path, eloquently explained in *The Voice of the Silence*, is the experimental process of purifying consciousness, that is, of all the idols that bind and limit it.

A rather simple analogy may help. If one thinks of the ocean, one knows it has the foam of waves on the surface, the waves themselves, and deep currents and even deeper stillness. If one likens one's consciousness to the ocean, one can see that myriad self-help books contain insights that pertain to the foam, ways to calm it and not be distressed by it. Psychology as currently practised aims to deal with the waves, for, unless they are calmed, the foam will return. Theosophy reaches to the depths, the root of all the ocean, and that is where universal Truth is to be found.

It is where fully realized self-consciousness abides, for it knows it is the ocean, only appearing as the individualized and passing crests of foam, and appearing as individual and transitory waves. In the depths, self-consciousness realizes its inseverable oneness with the ocean itself, the manifestation of the First Fundamental as the One Life, impersonal, like the sun, shining on — and in — all. As the *pāramitā* path shows, it is impersonal, for all that is personal is merely a distorted reflection of what is real. Its most transparent manifestation in incarnated human consciousness is found in the fact of the utter interdependence of all life, that is, Universal Brotherhood.

Idolatry arises because appearance is taken for reality. The foam is not the reality of the ocean but only one of its appearances. The same can be said of the waves. These analogies of idols and of the ocean, suggest the question: What, then, am I? This is the overriding question for self-conscious beings, that is, human beings whose *manas* has been

awakened, even though still in early stages of development.

The remarkable Islamic mystic and philosopher Muhyiddin ibn al-'Arabi (1165–1240), pondered this question throughout his life. Born in Andalusia in Muslim Spain, as an adult he travelled to Egypt and Mecca, eventually dying in Aleppo. Though writing mostly in Arabic, he was avidly taken up by Persian Sufis, and no serious Muslim philosopher or theologian — whether sympathetic or antagonistic to Ibn 'Arabi — has been able to avoid him. Like Plato and Aristotle in the European West, Ibn 'Arabi permeates subsequent Islamic philosophical and religious thought. As any great teacher in any age, he wrote in the language, using the concepts of his time and environment, and, like them, transformed those limitations into a spiritual luminosity that transcends time and place.

His fundamental message was the unity of God and hence unity of all existence. Using the Arabic term *wujūd*, often translated "essence" or "being", he distinguished between God as Absolute, about which nothing can be said, and God with infinite aspects, called Names — ninety-nine of which are famous and drawn from the Qur'an. One might compare this with the theosophical distinction between *parabrahma* and Brahmā, the inconceivable Source and the intelligent creative principle that is behind all unfoldment and evolution of the Kosmos and thus of the solar cosmos and the earth. That *wujūd* is, in one sense, beyond comprehension and in another sense the Reality that underlies and suffuses all existence. It is in this second meaning that *wujūd*, the Divine Essence, manifests as the Divine Names.

According to Ibn 'Arabi, the angelic hierarchies that aid the manifestation of existence each know one Name but are limited in that regard, not knowing the other Names. Only Man — metaphysically the abstract Man — contains within himself all the Names, and so they are present in each incarnated human being. Yet, if self-consciousness is not developed, they largely remain latent, potentials that are not actualized. Being self-conscious, a human being can actualize those potentials, but just as the Buddha and the Vedantins taught, that actualization is obscured by all the tendencies, *samskāras*, that are brought to fruition in an individual human life. These must be overcome — and though the language is rather different, Ibn 'Arabi's advice is basically that of the four elements mentioned above — study, meditation, self-study, and the path of purification (sometimes called the *pāramitā* path).

H. P. Blavatsky said that the human body is a temple. A temple is a sacred space for the deity, whose image is placed in the inmost sanctuary of the place. The heart is the abode of the deity, who is everywhere but most manifest in the heart, which represents *buddhi*, the universal sixth principle of the human being. Shri Shankaracharya, the expounder of Advaita Vedanta, teachings often referenced in *The Secret Doctrine,* said that the mind (*manas*) must be dissolved in the

heart (*buddhi*) for real spiritual knowledge to enter self-consciousness.

Idolatry is taking what is not Divine for the Divine, giving a false sense of ultimacy to what cannot be ultimate. Drawing from a statement attributed to Muhammad, Ibn 'Arabi often said: "He who knows himself knows his Lord [God]." The injunction at Delphi, seat of the oracle of Apollo, the solar lord of wisdom, was "Know thyself." It was a warning to those who would pose a question to Apollo through the oracle. The answer would be oracular, in that it was ambiguous and could only be properly understood by one whose motives were self-understood. When Croesus, ruler of the small but very wealthy kingdom of Lydia, asked the oracle if his contemplated invasion of the Persian empire would be successful, the oracle responded that, if he invaded, a great kingdom would be lost. He did, and Lydia was destroyed. Ibn 'Arabi took the Qur'anic statement as a kind of Delphic warning.

The renowned Islamic scholar William C. Chittick has translated some of Ibn 'Arabi's massive corpus into English. In *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity*,[1] Ibn 'Arabi provided a profound interpretation of the saying: "He who knows himself knows his Lord." Ibn 'Arabi wrote:

> Perfect human beings are transparent before every self-disclosure of *wujūd*. In contrast, all other created things have delimited capacities that impose upon *wujūd* specific knottings and colorings that result in distinct beliefs. All beliefs demand delimited and defined standpoints, and these exclude other standpoints. To the extent that people cling to their beliefs, they cause conflict with the beliefs of others. . . .
>
> Delimited beliefs rise up out of the limited degree to which people have actualized their own *fiṭra* [innate dispositions], and this in turn goes back to the capacity or preparedness of the immutable entity, known eternally by God. Individual preparedness allows people to be receptive toward the properties of *wujūd*'s names to a certain specific degree, no more and no less. Just as preparedness delimits *wujūd*, so also it delimits knowledge. Preparedness allows people to understand what they understand. Hence all knowledge is constricted by the subject, which is to say that within the infinite possible configurations of *wujūd*, the subject knows only itself. "You judge your object of knowledge only in terms of yourself. Hence you know only yourself."

If people know only themselves, they also believe only in themselves, for their beliefs are determined and defined by their own conceptual limitations. When they gaze upon existence, they constrict and construe it in their own individual terms. "Neither your heart nor your eye ever witnesses anything but the form of your own belief concerning God." Or, more succinctly, "No one has ever seen anything except his own belief." As a result, people devote themselves to nothing but their own fabrications. "The creatures are bound to worship only what they believe about the Real, so they worship nothing but a created thing. . . .

There are none but idol-worshippers."

Theosophy teaches those who seek knowledge how to move beyond idol worship and draw ever closer to what is Real. Whatever insight or intuition one gains from study, meditation, self-study and practice, it is relative truth. It may be immensely useful and valuable to one's understanding at the time, but one must move beyond, deeper into the ocean of Theosophy, which is self-knowledge. Clinging to what one has discovered will make of it at best just another beautiful idol. So, despite feeling that one is losing what one has gained, one goes deeper until new understanding dawns. This process continues until one realizes the Real, which is ourselves as rays of the One Life, itself a primal manifestation of That which is quite beyond any reckoning. Doing so replaces the idol, the image of the Divine, with the Divine Itself. One can respect idols and revere what they represent, but in the end, one must step beyond all idols, no matter how ethereally attractive, for no individual is an idol. Each is the Real, if one could only perceive it. Theosophy teaches how to tread the Path to that ultimate perception. ✧

Endnote:

1. William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pages 149–150.

God teaches us to live day-to-day rather than letting false idols deceive us into hoping only in the future. Recognizing the tendency toward idolatry, places us on the path towards love. Love is incompatible with idolatry.

Pope Francis

One Life, Many Paths

CATALINA ISAZA CANTOR

WHENEVER I am given the duty of delivering a talk, a familiar thought arises: what I am about to say has surely been said before — perhaps more wisely and more beautifully. So why say it again? Especially to an audience like you, who have long reflected on deep topics.

Then, I think of the great Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, who believed that literature does not invent new metaphors, but returns to ancient ones — life as a dream, time as a river, and so on. For him, repetition was not a flaw but a source of meaning: what changes is the tone, the context, the emphasis. Creativity, he said, lies not in novelty, but in reinterpretation — in joining an ongoing dialogue across time.

A similar idea was expressed by a Mahatma, who reminded us that truths are never owned; they are drawn from the universe's great treasury. Our task, as writers or speakers, is simply to give them a form and pass them on.

While deep wisdom and life are one, we inhabit a world of many paths, and each of us connects to truth in a unique way. Every voice matters because each reveals that shared truth in a different tone; and often, by listening, we discover that our voices can resonate together as one.

That is exactly what I invite you to reflect on as we consider "One Life, Many Paths". Beneath our many traditions, cultures, beliefs, and personal journeys, there is a single current of life flowing through us all. Each path has its own language and symbols, yet all point to the same essential truth. What differs is not the destination, but how each of us learns to walk, to listen, to understand, and to express it. Let us explore this together.

We might pause here and turn our attention inward. If life is truly one, where do we meet it — only within ourselves, or also beyond what we usually call "me" or "I"? Do we choose our path, or are we, in some subtle way, chosen by life itself as one of its many expressions? As roles change and identities come and go, what is it that quietly remains? And beneath these many paths, could there be

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one living presence, one awareness, discovering itself through each of us?

If we allow these questions to settle, they gently invite us to shift our gaze — from the surface of events to the depth from which they arise. We see this shift in everyday life and in world events. An online argument, a cultural tension at work, or a political conflict between nations may seem separate, but all grow from the same place — how we see ourselves and others.

The climate crisis shows this clearly: what we do in one place affects life everywhere. When we look beneath events to what gives rise to them, personal reflection opens into a wider understanding of one life living through many paths.

From this point, we can explore "One Life, Many Paths", not only as a human experience, but as a universal pattern — visible in our biographies and echoed in philosophy, science, art, and spiritual insight — where a single essence unfolds through countless forms, perspectives, and stories, in order to know itself more fully.

Diversity is the living signature of the universe — the way the One becomes visible in the many. *The Secret Doctrine*, in *Stanza III*, describes the dawn of manifestation as a primordial stirring: "*the last vibration of the seventh eternity thrills through infinitude*." From that first movement, light awakens within darkness, a single ray enters the depths, and multiplicity begins — not as separation, but as unity unfolding into form.

From the first gesture, the One expresses itself as many without losing its wholeness. Each being and each path carries a unique tone of the same source, like rays from one sun lighting different parts of existence. Stanza III describes this unfolding — from One to Four, and from Four to Seven — not as a break from unity, but as consciousness expressing itself. In this view, diversity is how existence speaks.

Ironically, it is precisely here that misunderstanding arises. When difference is taken as absolute, it hardens into separateness, giving birth to the sense of being divided, isolated, or opposed.

As human beings, we all look for a sense of who we are, of identity. When we lose touch with our deeper source, our likes and dislikes quietly become our sense of self. We begin to identify strongly with things like gender, race, culture, nationality, beliefs, or social roles. While these differences are expressions of our diversity, they can also turn into lines of division. This happens when we mistake what is temporary for who we truly are, and forget the deeper identity we share. In fact, within this apparent division lies a profound opportunity. Just as matter differentiates in order to take form, consciousness seems to split so it can know itself. Separation is a functional stage, useful to make awareness possible and to allow unity to be rediscovered consciously.

To know itself, the One must experience itself as many. This is the movement of evolution: consciousness moving outward into life, then inward

into remembrance. When it returns, it is not the same as before — the circle closes with awareness, shaped by everything that has been lived and learned.

When we look at human life from this perspective, our individual stories no longer appear isolated or accidental. Instead, each life becomes a chapter in a much larger narrative, a moment in an ongoing exploration of being. What we call "one life" is, in truth, a single movement within a greater rhythm.

From the perspective of reincarnation, even this one life is not truly singular, but one expression among many opportunities of rebirth — each a unique unfolding of the same monadic essence. Seen this way, no experience is wasted. Every sincere effort, every lesson learned, quietly shapes what follows, carrying the wisdom of the many, back into the One.

This is why unity unfolds through countless individual journeys, each shaped by temperament, experience, and inner calling. As G. de Purucker expresses it so clearly in *The Golden Precepts of Esotericism:*

> The path to the heart of the universe is one and yet different for every human being. The meaning is that all human beings themselves are that pathway which is built of thought and consciousness, and of the fabric of our own being, built of the stuff of Nature's heart. . . . This is the road of long enduring slow evolution, moving ahead little by little in each life, through the incalculable ages.

We often grow up shaped by social and material expectations, believing there is one "right" path, where life should move in a clear, straight line toward fixed goals.

But let's be honest, how many lives truly unfold that way? Most of our lives are marked by pauses, changes, and unexpected turns. Plans shift, certainties fade, and new directions appear. This is not failure. It is simply life as it is — changing, impermanent, ever-unfolding.

As Clara Codd reminds us in *Trust Yourself to Life* — and here I paraphrase — life does not ask for rigid beliefs or fixed paths. It asks for a living trust. Not conformity to an external pattern, but an inward listening and an honest response to life as it reveals itself. Meaning, then, is not born from perfect planning, but from presence — from meeting life as it arrives, with openness, courage, and attentive awareness.

To live one life — this body, this name, this passing story — is to stand where past and present meet. Much of what we experience is already in motion, shaped by earlier actions, words, and thoughts, now unfolding through circumstances, losses, and unexpected meetings and partings. These conditions are not meant to fix our future. In every moment, there's a quiet freedom: how we respond, which direction we take, and how we decide our story to continue.

Our lives are shaped by small, quiet choices as much as by big ones — the intentions we act from, the thoughts we keep, a simple yes or no. Each choice leaves its mark and opens learning, limits, or new possibilities. We align with a deeper order through the apparently

smallest actions: listening with care, helping without seeking credit, choosing kindness. These acts may not change the world at once, but they change the inner ground where transformation begins, like a single candle altering the atmosphere of a dark room.

Along the way, we begin to see that none of us is just one thing. Each of us carries many roles — friend, seeker, student, teacher, caregiver, family member, and so forth. At different times, some come forward while others rest, making room for new growth. This is the natural rhythm of a full life: meeting each moment with care and openness, and allowing life to shape us from within, but none of this happens in isolation.

We can see this unity across many fields. In science, disciplines may appear separate — physics, biology, psychology (having different objects of study) — each exploring the same reality from a different angle. In art, a painter works with colour and form, a musician with sound and silence, a poet with words, all responding to a shared inner impulse to express meaning and experience.

The same pattern runs through humanity's great traditions. Religion, philosophy, and science speak in different ways: science observes, philosophy reflects, and religion shares lived wisdom. But they all come from the same question: Who are we, and what is this life we share?

If each human being is the path, then an essential question naturally arises: how do we walk this path consciously and authentically? How do we move forward without losing ourselves in borrowed certainties, external authorities, or ready-made answers?

The wisdom traditions speak with remarkable consistency: the journey begins inward, with discernment and fidelity to our own deepest truth. Before action comes clarity; before movement, inner alignment. This is why ancient teachings place such emphasis on the very first step. As *The Voice of the Silence* advises, we must "learn to discern the real from the unreal" and to distinguish "head-learning from Soul-wisdom", reminding us that transformation begins not with knowledge alone, but with awakened understanding.

To walk the path, then, is not to imitate another's footsteps, but to be faithful to oneself — to listen honestly to one's own higher call, and to align thought, feeling, and action with that inner recognition. Authenticity is not isolation; it is the foundation that allows true relationship and genuine unity to emerge.

Seen this way, our many cultures, beliefs, and histories don't divide us — they show the richness of one shared life. We live in one world, deeply connected, where what affects one affects all. This raises a simple but urgent question: how do we live together?

Not by erasing our differences, but through cooperation — by taking responsibility for one another, for future generations, and for the living planet we share. Cooperation is more than a practical choice — it becomes a way of living,

a recognition that we belong to one another, the real fraternity.

We see cooperation every day: scientists sharing data across borders, neighbours helping after disasters, and communities supporting those in need. It's not abstract — it's how shared life takes care of itself.

Cooperation lies at the heart of life unfolding through what is often called the Divine Plan — not a fixed script, but a living, intelligent movement. Life expresses itself through different kingdoms and planes: mineral, plant, animal, human, and beyond, moving through physical, mental, spiritual and subtle levels of existence. Each level grows from the one before it and supports the whole. Nothing evolves in isolation — whether in Nature, consciousness, or the wider universe. As Geoffrey A. Barborka writes: "Every thing within the universe must partake of that Divine Plan . . . the part must follow the same pattern that the whole follows."

Cooperation, then, is not just a social or ethical choice; it is a spiritual law of life, calling us to take part in this larger movement with awareness.

As Clara M. Codd reminds us, life does not move in straight lines, but in cycles of growth, pause, and renewal. Seeing this helps us to be gentler with change in ourselves and others, and to move more naturally with life's rhythms. Fraternity does not require sameness or agreement; it grows through difference and can hold contradictions without breaking. Like an orchestra, where each instrument has its own voice, and harmony is born from attentive listening and mutual respect.

This understanding gives living meaning to the mission of the Theosophical Society: ***To serve humanity by cultivating an ever-deepening understanding and realization of the Ageless Wisdom, spiritual self-transformation, and the unity of all life.*** It is not only about studying ideas, but to embody them in awareness, choice, and action. When unity is truly understood, service becomes natural, and compassion becomes intelligence in action.

We live in a time of rapid change and deep connection, but also real division — social, digital, ecological and more. Unity is no longer just an idea; it's a practical need. We meet its need in everyday moments: how we listen to those who differ from us, how we use technology, and how we care for one another and the living Earth. Each conscious choice — to listen instead of react, to cooperate rather than compete, to care rather than consume — becomes a small act of healing.

This is the deeper meaning of "One Life, Many Paths". Each of us walks a unique path, shaped by experience and history, yet none of us walks alone. What we choose on our own path always touches the whole.

And perhaps this is the quiet invitation of our time: to walk our own path with integrity, while never forgetting the life we share. If One Life truly flows through us all, then every step, every path matters. In choosing how we walk — today,

here, together — we shape not only our individual journeys, but the future of our shared world. Let us remember that we are not our thoughts, but Divine Wisdom, nor our desires and feelings but Universal Will and Love. Remember that there are many paths, but a single goal: union with the Divine, a return to the source, carrying the gifts of the journey.

Let us finish this reflection with a simple reminder, offered not as a conclusion, but as an invitation:

One life, many paths — walk yours with awareness, and you walk for all.

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**Beginning to feel the growth of one's soul,
one realizes the calm that no outward events seem to touch.
This, again, is the best proof of spiritual development,
and one who feels this, however slightly and vaguely,
need not care for any occult phenomena.**

**From the beginning of my novitiate I have been taught
to rely more upon the calm within than upon
any phenomena on the physical, astral, or spiritual planes.
And, given favourable conditions and strength in oneself,
the less one sees of phenomena the easier it is
to make real and substantial spiritual progress.**

**So my humble advice to you is to devote your attention ever
to growing calm within, and not to wish to know in detail
the process by which the growth is effected.
If you are patient, pure, and devoted,
you will know all in time, but remember always
that perfect and resigned contentment
is the soul of spiritual life.**

The Doctrine of the Heart, p. 69–70
Annie Besant

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

ELIZABETH MAY

THERE was no document to approve when we were at the Rio Earth Summit in June 1992. So, when it did not get across the finish line, two people decided they should keep trying. One was the Secretary General of the UNCED Earth Summit at Rio, who was a Canadian, Maurice Strong, and the other was Mikhail Gorbachev, having left power and brought about the kind of transition I will talk about later.

They got together with a number of other people who had been part of the Earth Summit process, and they formed the Earth Charter Commission, made up of people like the former heads of government, such as the former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Ruud Lubbers, and then some environmentalists. I ended up being appointed to it as well as there were indigenous peoples, faith leaders, people from around the world, and we worked till 1997. We had public sessions. The one in India had thousands of people attending to contribute for drafting a new version of the Earth Charter. Thus in 1997, at Rio plus five [years], we got together again. But the Earth Charter document that we had signed off on then was now supported by some UN agencies and some governments, and it is worth mentioning because it is the one place where you find the notions of there is something going on here and it is more than money. By the way, if any of you are cosmologists and remember Brian Swimme's *The Universe is a Green Dragon* — he was one of our advisers.

So, I will read a part of the preamble — you might find it online — of the Earth Charter.

> We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward, we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms, we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for Nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards

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> this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of the earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

It works through over several pages developing a number of principles. One thing that I just wanted to read aloud because it came from the Earth Charter Commissioner from India, Kamla Chowdhry. She was part of a Gandhian center in India and worked with Mahatma Gandhi. She added for us this thought that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about *being more, not having more*.

There is this notion that we just have to have more stuff and we will be a success. Have more stuff and then we will be happy. Have homes that have more square footage than anyone could possibly use, but that is all right. But, being more is a far more insightful goal for a life's mission than having more, and yet our society tells us all the time that all that really matters is having more.

Certainly, the economic models of exploitation and colonialism are brutal and unfair. And this is the only document I know of that crosses that line between governments saying that we support the Earth Charter as Mexico, Costa Rica, and the Netherlands have done. Individual cities like Victoria, British Columbia, have endorsed the Earth Charter, but it is disappointing that it remains unfulfilled as a promise because so much work went into really crafting something. When we started talking about women's rights we had a Muslim member of our committee, King Hussein's sister, Princess Basma of Jordan, who was fantastic because she was a really strong feminist, but she said: "If we put it this way, we will not offend anyone in my culture." We must put it this way. It was a precise and diplomatic process to come up with a document this good.

Similarly, another document that I think everyone should read regardless of faith or tradition is Pope Francis's encyclical on climate change. It really isn't just for Catholics or even just for Christians. It also points out that our culture of consumerism is one of instant gratification and selfishness and that it ultimately leads to despair, unhappiness and alienation. And that a throwaway society, where you think you can throw out something that you think of as garbage that's going to end up in some landfill somewhere; once you have a throwaway culture, you also have throwaway human relationships, throwaway life experience, there is just no other way, and things that matter are things you have to think about.

We now have a new term out there called the attention economy, because there is so much information. There is no shortage of information, but what is scarce is attention, and there certainly are enough political narcissists — we do not need to name them — who are seeking attention all the time. Which is also back to the distraction and the addiction of immediate gratification, because you click something, how many likes do you get? You retweet something.

This is where I come down to where I want to ask for your help, it would be very easy looking at the science on the climate crisis or the science on loss of species around the world to see the world right now. And, of course, as I mentioned, the polycrisis lens. One of my favorite people in politics anywhere around the world is the prime minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley. And she speaks of a polycritical world — it is a term we do not always think of, but everywhere you look, the established orders are breaking up; just as I mentioned when the Kremlin collapsed, the last people to notice it collapsing were the people inside. Capitalism will collapse and the last people to notice will be the people on Wall Street. They will not notice it till it has happened.

In a polycritical world, we are hitting levels of disequilibrium across multiple planes. You may want to read more deeply into this, because I'm not doing it justice. But Professor Thomas Homer-Dixon, who runs something at Royal Roads University on Vancouver Island, called the Cascade Institute, looks at polycrisis and writes about it. I tend to think of it as kind of a Rubik's cube with multiple planes. You know how Rubik's cubes work; they all fit. If everything goes wobbly all at once, it could be a disaster or — and this is what I hope you will agree is possible — it could be an enormous opportunity.

Everything has gone wobbly all at once. The old orders are breaking apart. Some of them deliberately through recklessness and goodness knows what else. Does Donald Trump have any plan at all for anything? But that certainly is the case with Putin. How is it that Netanyahu is getting away with genocide? What is happening? It is all wobbly all at once. across multiple planes. So into that moment step up the predictable people who have been the masters of the universe for so long, they don't notice their day may be done. So, they move in and say it is an emergency.

Now in Canada that's been manifested by the prime minister and the premiers of British Columbia, Ontario, and Nova Scotia all have recently passed laws that say it's an emergency. So we can ignore environmental laws and indigenous rights, because we have to be able to build things fast. Within the last couple of days the Congress in Brazil passed the same law. Well, not word for word, but the same intent: We've got to be able to build things fast. We can't be held back by environmental laws. Now, of course, the president of Brazil, Lula, is left wing, but the Congress of Brazil is primarily right wing. So, they passed this law, and a lot of us globally are trying to stop it.

The Global Earth Charter, for those of you who are greens, the only thing that holds global green parties together — and we are in more than 80 countries around the world — is that we distilled the Earth Charter to six global green values. Our values as a political party are derived from the Earth Charter. I only know about what just happened in Brazil because I was on a conference call with the Brazilian Green Party people the morning it happened.

I haven't seen it in any newspapers in Canada, but they are reeling from it and we are putting out a statement with them to say to President Lula: "Please veto this bill. The Amazon is too important to allow Bolsonaro's buddies in your Congress to decide it's more important to get through pipelines and roads and mining, than protect the Amazon." So, we are hoping that Lula will veto this bill. In a crisis, polycrisis, everything has gone wobbly. Predictably, the bullies will show up. They have had the power a long time and they can step up and say, "It's an emergency."

People have to question them and say: "How does what you're proposing have anything to do with the emergency?" Thoughtful people asking questions will make a big difference. But so far, for the most part, other than the indigenous people of Canada who are standing up, we're seeing a lot of emergencies. And the emergency doesn't have to be explained. We just need to say: "Trump is threatening us with tariffs. But, what makes us think that's a good time for us to destroy Nature here? How does that connect? Give me at least a plausible narrative that connects these things." Some of you may have read already, but pull it out if you haven't, Naomi Klein's book, *Shock Doctrine*. As soon as it is an emergency, what more can you push through?

More on the agenda of the fascists, dictators, and transnational corporations, I basically think of the fossil fuel industry as a form of organized crime that is global. So, at a time when things are all going wobbly across multiple planes, that is an opportunity for us because they are experiencing disequilibrium. They could be on the point of collapse and not know it.

So, what pushes the world order to what we need, which is respect for all life? What allows us to imagine for one minute that the quest for money and power could be replaced by love? How could we do that? It has to start in multiple countries. It has to start here and everywhere. It starts with, depending where you're coming from, meditation or prayer, sending out to all the ways in which we know fundamentally we are all connected. I'm not going to try to describe them, but I know that the life form and love that flows through me flows through you. How do we explain that? I don't know.

But if we all start thinking the same way or at least enough to inject into our own cultures wherever we are, whatever voice we have, how do we start saying: "Wait a minute. The bully boys are losing. The tyrant's day is done. This is the time for people. This is the time for my little grand-daughter." I was showing pictures over there. Her name is Lily. And her first movement as a little baby was to stretch and she had this funny stretch with a clenched fist and I have always said the babies united will never be defeated!

But, if we around the world started thinking: how do we move the culture of our town, our family, our community, our country? How do we start saying — can we not agree here — that the root cause of what is causing us pain and grief and suffering, the root cause of the abuse

of human rights that we see around the world, is that the wealthiest top 1% have more wealth than the 95% of the rest of us, and that's not right. Could we not say together from every place around the world where we are, with every community where we break bread, that this is a moment of opportunity, and if we take hold of it, and we say to those who think they deserve to have power: "You're over. We're taking this back because this planet, this sacred creation, we were not put in charge of."

We are merely here as fellow creatures on the same planet with the First Nations people. Almost every indigenous prayer ends with "and all my relations". A First Nations friend said he was raised to understand that his grandmother had taken his father and her other sons out in a boat to be fishermen and she had called to the whales and said: These are my sons. They will be fishing here. She explained to the whales and to her sons the mutuality. The whales used to help the indigenous fishermen by driving the salmon they didn't want towards them, and the indigenous fishermen helped them by not taking their favorite salmon out of the water. So, it was a relationship of mutuality. In the community where I live, it is literally the case that indigenous people regard the orcas and the eagles and the salmon as relatives. And the literal translation of their names is the whale people, the salmon people, the tree people, all related.

If we can shift our worldview enough these fish are not resources; they are our relatives. Yes, we are going to eat fish and cut down trees, but we are going to do it with a measure of compassion and respect. That is the relationship that we are in. The mutuality, relationship, love — those principles — have to rise up above greed and economic growth as ends in themselves.

We have to redefine and reassert that as humanity we are one human family, one earth community and we cannot be divided one against the other; otherwise we don't survive. So yes, there is self-interest at the base of it. We want to survive, but we also want to recognize that *having more can never replace being more*. It is good being together in pursuits of the kinds of things that the Theosophical Society does and all of you in your communities do, in terms of saying: What is the meaning of life? What is Truth? What do we seek? How do we live our lives in ways that could be a useful example to others? But the goal here is to help every single human being to avoid what we see in our culture as throwaway lives, where people who are suffering with mental health and addiction issues are just consigned to being thrown away; or where we think that if there's one really valuable tree, who will be the first one to get there to cut it down. We have an opportunity right now because when things are in disequilibrium, nobody is in control. And that is actually really good news. So, we can connect, and I really do believe we can change that. So again in this wobbly Rubik's cube of my imagination of multi-

ple polycrisis — geopolitical, economic crisis, biodiversity crisis, climate crisis, equity crisis — right across all these different planes, everything is wobbly.

What would be the thing that puts it out there and says in this moment everything has changed and we have justice and fairness, kindness and love pulling all of our societies together and everyone can say: "Isn't it nice to be one human family? Isn't it nice to know that we can breathe, care for each other, and be safe knowing that there is enough in the world for all, if we share?" Just as Gandhi said, there is not enough for everyone's greed, but there is enough for everyone's need.

These things are not on the television news. These things are not talked about in parliament very much. But there is a deep thirst, because across all these different crises there is, at least in North American society, a deep spiritual crisis, knowing that something is not right about the fact that the biggest bullies have the most money. And if the measure of success is money, where is the karma in that? No. The bully's day is done. They are exposed for what they are: empty shells of threats, mean-spiritedness, and greed. And the rest of us, united, can change everything.

✧

When you want wisdom and insight
as badly as you want to breathe,
it is then you shall have it.

Socrates

The Way of Divine Love

KAMALA NELLEN

GREAT spiritual traditions speak of love as the highest path; yet the path of jñāna-yoga speaks of knowledge as the highest path. I have heard some in that tradition say: "Please don't mention that word 'love.'" Then I chuckle, as I remember Uddhava trying to convince the Gopis of Vrindavan that they also had it all wrong. Indeed, the spiritual journey is interesting! My teacher said that those traveling either path are going where they need to go and end up at exactly the same place. It really depends on one's propensity.

For me, it was the path of love. I remember clearly my first encounter with my Master and the first program I took under him five decades ago; it was a two-day immersion in the path of love. During that two-day program I did experience what I came to know as divine love. My initial experience was that the love was not focused on any person; it was free flowing, expansive, pervasive, and ecstatic! For me, it was so immense that it was physically painful to experience. I had no idea what was happening to me. It was a gift for me to remember and point all my practices toward holding as I journeyed the path of yoga, for the sake of that love. Now I understand it is our birthright to know love; we come from love, we are love, and we return to love. Further it can be found everywhere when we are grounded in divine love. Yes, and on a bad day you could not convince me of that for a nanosecond! Still, the Great Ones tell us, it is the truth.

We think we have no friends, no love; then with the littlest crack in our armor, we let a kindness in, and immediately gratitude arises, a feeling of softening. Someone once came to my teacher crying, "I have no friends." My teacher said: "You only need one friend, and that is God — of course, you can be friends with others who love God." He had good reason for saying that.

One of my favorite books on love published thousands of years ago, is *Narada's Way of Divine Love*. I like the version translated and with commentary by Swami Prabhavananda, published in Chennai, India. The book is a compil-

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ation of aphorisms translated from Sanskrit that describe the approach to God through love described by Narada. He tells us: "The path of devotion is the easiest path to attain God." (p. xiii) I was committed to it as I read that statement. My thinking has been: Who needs complicated prāna-yāmas, difficult postures, rigorous restric-tions, and complicated texts?!" In truth, I have grown to love those texts through the path of love.

Narada is first mentioned in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, where he approaches Sage Sanatkumar. Later we find him in a second incarnation, where he requests Sage Vyasa to write the *Srimad Bhāgavatam*. We learn from his wisdom that the means to attaining this pervasive undying love is through the practices given by a Master. Whether it is Jesus, Krishna, Buddha, or any of the great masters throughout history, each shows the way to experience divine love.

Eventually we come to know this love exists in the heart, and there we find its origin and unending source. Finally, we come to experience that the worshipped and worshipper are one, that even the teacher is no longer necessary as a personification. But for a bhakta there is nothing like the one from whom we receive awakening and instruction. Eventually we do have to let the image of the teacher go, and come to see that love everywhere, at all times, and in all people and places.

For most, love begins with parents, siblings, friends, teachers, spouses or significant others, and with children and grandchildren. But selfishness and attachment to particular outcomes by those we love causes us to suffer and in some cases dismiss the relationship. We want that person to behave in this way; otherwise we will reject them. My own mother was like this and I could not please her no matter how I tried. Consequently I became very sad. So goes what we first call love, when it lets us down. There is no fun there.

Narada instructs us: "In divine love there is complete forgetfulness of the body, complete effacement of selfishness, and complete absorption in the Beloved. The one aim is to please the Beloved. Utter selflessness is the nature of this divine love." (p. 64) There is no derision or scorn in this love. In fact, there is no other at all. Ah, to have parents who love us unconditionally!

We see this in the way Jesus cared for all humanity. When people came to meet him, he gave unconditionally because he saw everyone as God and unconditionally worthy. Thousands came and come to him to receive this divine love. My guru had thousands of people coming in the same way, and I stood near him over a year or more and never saw him offer anything but total attention, care, and love to each and every person — for hours he would give. He saw each person, no matter what they had done, how wretched their speech toward him, however unkempt, all were completely worthy of loving compassion. That is how I came to see divine love in action and it is what Jesus called

all to act on behalf of, even if they did not believe they could do so; true unattached service.

Ramakrishna said: "The best path to union with God is to follow the way of divine love as taught by Narada." Jesus said this kingdom of God is within. What is beautifully said by Narada is that it is divine love itself which draws us toward itself. It is a gift of grace. Forgiveness, compassion, kindness, care, respect for another, all these virtues arise from and guide us toward divine love. But when we act from selfish motives — when we are told in our current culture to look out for number one — we have to be reminded to focus on true wealth and security. When we contemplate the virtues, care, compassion, and respect for each other, we are moving toward divine love and through them we receive more and can open others to love.

In daily life, we have many opportunities to experience love. One evening a couple of months ago I was walking down a city sidewalk in Los Angeles when I came upon a badly injured squirrel lying in a strip of grass next to the sidewalk. My heart went out to the little one who was sprawled out, clearly badly wounded, and breathing hard. I noticed another tiny squirrel running up and down the trunk of the tree looking on, and even coming to lay its body over the injured squirrel to what I saw as a desire to care for the injured one and protect it from potential harm from me as I looked at it from above. It ran up to me a couple of times as if to say, Help! Not having my cell phone to call animal rescue, I enlisted others passing by to help me call around. A young mother happened to come by with her baby strapped to her chest and she had a phone so she began to call animal rescue numbers to no avail. She knew the shop owner around the corner and enlisted his help. He tried to offer a sip of water and some seeds to no avail. Eventually he got the injured squirrel into a box and carried it into his shop. Sadly, it died shortly after that and the tiny squirrel who had been running up and down the tree to see what we were up to, called out in its little wailing voice.

We saw crows were circling ready to devour the squirrel, when two women showed up and offered to help us rescue the baby; we rushed to chase it through the alley until he was safely in the box and inside the shop. The two women went off to get some vegetables and fruits — they just happened to know what squirrels eat! Later the post office fellow found a tiny square of cloth for the little one to burrow under and declared that he would take care of the little one until it got bigger and could fend for itself. Now this little one which is called Audrey, is growing strong and plump. She runs around outside and comes back to the shop for grapes, walnuts, and greens. Through love, we learn to love all creation.

Narada tells us that for a seeker, love for God is the most natural and easy path. This is because divine love is in every particle of the universe, and it is found in the human heart. When we direct love toward God, each one has access to love

in its fullness. This is why Narada tells us bhakti yoga is the easiest path of all. The only qualification for the bhakta is to feel the need for God and to want to devote oneself to God — for the sake of love. This happens when we tire of the world. So many now are world-weary and turn to spirituality. New seekers may not yet understand that the one they worship is pointing themselves to their own hearts. Eventually we are each drawn to love as to a magnet.

Swami Vivekananda, a disciple of Ramakrishna, further tells us not to suppress any emotions; rather to intensify what we feel and direct all our feelings toward God. That has been a blessing for me to hear because from childhood I was told not to show my feelings or speak of what I was really experiencing. Feelings can be strong, so we are told to hold them in check. But when we continually hold them in, they eventually burst out in unhealthy ways or cause us to become ill. When we direct all our feelings to God, we receive cooling compassion, calming of the intensity and a return to equanimity.

When we direct all feelings toward God, who accepts us unconditionally, we find relief. No feeling actually lasts more than a short time unless we keep it alive by continuing to think about what we assume caused it. In fact, we are the cause of our feelings because of what we think. When we receive words and color them with past experiences, they stay with us. It is such a gift to give all of that to the divine, where it is safe to have a good rant or cry, and then to be restored. Perhaps forgiveness is the next step. It can take a while, even years, but it is one of the greatest virtues. Anyone who has truly forgiven another will say, forgiving restores us to peace which is an experience of divine love. St Francis called peace the greatest of all gifts.

The more we can anchor ourselves in love in the heart, the more love increases. In my experience, love definitely comes in ways we need to receive it, in order to grow into a greater experience of the mystery of love. This is because it is not only our inherent nature but it comes from God. For instance, we pass a stranger in the street and that person shares a genuine smile and a "Good morning!" Gratitude is kindled inside us if we are open and return the smile and kind gesture. It is like a spark igniting the flame of love inside, and it can ignite the next heart to feel their own love when we continue in this way. Even the glance of a bird can help us remember love. Love loves sharing itself.

A great siddha Guru, Bhagavan Nityananda, said: "The heart is the hub of all sacred places, so go there and roam." I have been endeavoring to explore this when I sit for meditation. My discovery has been that the heart is much bigger than what is in my chest; the heart is vast and unending with no borders. And the love there is just as immense. We can live from this space. There is home where there is love, and where there is love, one is always home. There is no lasting love unless it is with the divine within us, and

where there is this commonality, there is always love between people. The best part of this is, for me, knowing the security and peace I seek is to be found in divine love and that no one can take it from me.

The trick is to keep remembering! This is why we are given practices that we can do every day. In all traditions, we start with practices given by the Masters to remember love and to give gratitude. A Native American custom is to start each day by giving gratitude to God, for the sun, the earth, the sky, the air, the clouds, and the water. Love is apparent when we look for it and say, "Thank you." Then we are anchored for the day. We can return to a practice at any point in the day to remember.

I remember an instance when a man came to my teacher crying, "My lover left me! The Master said, "Just go find another!" Love is always available to us. Yet the greatest relationship is with divine love; it is boundless and never ending, all inclusive, and freeing. It does not matter what form of devotion one's devotion takes, Narada tells us to seek this love.

One who is immersed in the divine is a magnet because they are a pure channel for love; we see the light of the divine in world teachers. There is a particular sweetness, a silence, a depth of purity in a place where those who love God have stayed a while or sing God's praises. This is because the place takes on the energy of divine love — it is palpable in the air and in the walls. In my experience, when I enter a home where there is prayer and gratitude for the divine, I become peaceful and it catches my heart. This would happen to me as a child when I went into the homes of school friends where prayers were offered. My own home had none of that and the lack of sweetness was palpable when I returned there. But the good news is that we can change the energy of a place by changing our thinking. When we pray there, sing or chant to the divine, and meditate there, through whatever form our devotion takes — where there is this love for God, there is a beautiful energy. There true intelligence arises, the intelligence of the heart. Jiddu Krishnamurti has said, "Love is not born of thought — love has its own intelligence."

Each one of us carries the seed of divine love in our hearts; when we grow into selfless love, we are a magnet for all uplifting qualities we seek from others: kindness, care, belonging, compassion, goodness, empathy, forgiveness. But in many cases, we do not believe we are worthy of divine love. Then we long for God and the sense of separation is painful.

I heard a poem by a young woman in a writers' group I was attending, as she read her poem of longing. She was in tears, asking: "What is this pain? I am longing for Him and the longing is unbearably intense yet I feel separate." When she said these words, taking into account my own experience that matched hers, I remembered that God is calling us as much as we are calling Him. This pain we think is separation is really the call of love. We have to let ourselves dive in.

To me, the call of our times is love, because with this love lies solutions to the

chaos. When we are anchored in love we are free because love does all things. Without love, there is no coherence, no wholeness, no logic, no clarity, no good sense — there is just confusion and wreckage. Love's intelligence guides us to communion as well as coherence and good sense. When people are buried in their cell phones and computers, not seeing each other, not enjoying human presence, the beautiful faces, the bright eyes, we are forgetting that our hearts contain everything we are looking for. Stop for a while, close your eyes, and look within. Savor love in the heart, offer a kindness to another, and remember to say "thank you" when you receive a kindness. Let's anchor ourselves in Narada's way of divine love. Then take time for connection with another. Love can change the world. Let's allow this true intelligence that arises from love to be our guide, and widen our hearts to share love with others and for all creation. ✧

My heart has become capable of every form.
It is a pasture of gazelles, and a convent for Christian monks,
And a temple for idols, and the pilgrim's Kaaba,
And the tables of the Torah and the book of the Koran.
I follow the religion of Love:
Whatever way Love's camels take,
That is my religion and my faith.

Ibn 'Arabi

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

Krishna to Arjuna:
Thou grievest for those that should not be grieved for, yet speakest words of wisdom. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. . . .

There is nothing more welcome to a warrior (Kshatriya) than righteous war. Happy the warriors who obtain such a fight, offered unsought as an open door to heaven. But if thou will not carry on this righteous warfare, then casting away thine own duty and the honour, thou wilt incur sin. Men will recount thine perpetual dishonour, and, to one highly esteemed, dishonour exceedeth death. . . .
Slain, thou wilt obtain heaven; victorious, thou will enjoy the earth; therefore stand up resolute to fight. Taking as equal pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, gird thee for the battle; thus thou shalt not incur sin. . . . Thy business is with the action only, never with its fruits; so let not the fruit of action be thy motive, nor be thou to inaction attached. . . .

But if from egoism thou wilt not listen, thou shall be destroyed utterly. Entrenched in egoism, thou thinkest, "I will not fight"; to no purpose thy determination; Nature will constrain thee. Bound by thine own duty born of thine own nature, that which from delusion thou desirest not to do, even that helplessly thou shalt perform.

From *The Bhagavadgitâ*, *The Lord's Song,*
Translated by Annie Besant
Chapters 2 & 18

Stephan Hoeller, 1931–2026
In Memoriam

THE passing of Stephan Hoeller on 3 May 2026 removes one of the last remaining links in the Theosophical Society (TS) spanning over half a century. He was born into an aristocratic family in Hungary, 1931. An idyllic childhood in Budapest was interrupted by the Soviet invasion of the country and the appropriation of his family lands. He was sent to Austria, where he was introduced to the name of H. P. Blavatsky and came in contact with members of the TS. He moved to California in the 1950s and eventually settled in Hollywood, which would be his home for the rest of his life. This was fortuitous for it brought him in contact with some of the older members who had been part of the TS Headquarters in Hollywood before it moved to Chicago in 1924.

When I joined the Theosophical Society in 1968, Stephan's name was mentioned in hushed tones as a radical. He and other members were calling for accountability of the officials who were running the organization. Though it was a common theme in the 1960s counterculture, it was considered revolutionary to the TS in America. Stephan became editor of the magazine that was issued by the National Committee for Progressive Theosophy in 1966 and 1967, and found that theosophists began closing their doors to him. He went on to work with one of the leading figures of the American occult, Manly Palmer Hall and his Philosophical Research Society in Los Angeles. In 1963 he was named head of the Gnostic Society, a group formed by two students of HPB, James and John Pryse in Los Angeles in 1928. He was consecrated Regionary Bishop of the Americas of Ecclesia Gnostica, a sacramental church devoted to the advancement of gnosis, and in 1977 became its Presiding Bishop.

Dr Hoeller delivered hundreds of lectures on the gnostic quest and its application to modern life, many of which are available online. He also authored a number of key texts on the subject, such as *Gnosticism: New Light on the Ancient Tradition of Inner Knowing*, 2002, a comprehensive introductory guide to the Gnostic tradition; studies on C. G. Jung and Gnosticism; *The Royal Road: A Manual of Kabalistic Meditations on the Tarot*, 1975; and *Freedom: Alchemy for a Voluntary Society*, 1992. In spite of failing health, Stephan Hoeller travelled to Vancouver, Canada, to be part of the 12th World Congress held by the Adyar TS in 2025, and his inspiring talk can be listened to online. He is survived by his partner of many years, Roberta Tropp, and numerous students and well-wishers around the world.

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