



# THE THEOSOPHIST

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Editor: *Mrs Radha Burnier*

NOTE: Articles for publication in *The Theosophist* should be sent to the Editorial Office.

Cover Picture: 'The whole earth is full of His glory' (Is., 6:1). (*Gloriosa superba*) – J. Suresh

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# On the Watch-Tower

RADHA BURNIER

## **Moral Strength and Courage**

*At the Feet of the Master* mentions courage as a qualification on the path. It is perhaps not always clear what that courage means. Does it mean, as a few people imagine, doing whatever one wants? Whatever one wants may be according to the desires of the personality, from a lower point of view, and not suitable for real progress. Or it can be the action of a person who sees in what direction humanity should advance. There is also a mass of people we call humanity who more or less follow the practice, both in thinking and in doing, which is considered normal and right by those in positions of authority or power.

Giordano Bruno grew up and joined a monastery at a very early age, which was not uncommon in those days. His thoughts, and perhaps his experience, ran far ahead of the vast mass of people around him. He began to speak of things which they had never thought over. He moved from country to country until he was caught and burnt alive. I mention him because he had courage. Being an unusual person, he spoke about things and matters which were considered improper in those days. Annie Besant was not willing even at a young age just to follow her husband,

and go along with the life approved by orthodox Christians. When she asked questions because she wanted to know, she was told to keep quiet. She left her husband and lived a life of poverty, struggled through many things, and emerged as she did. C. W. Leadbeater had the courage to leave known circumstances and to follow HPB. It is difficult for us to imagine how atrocious this seemed in his time. Krishnaji was expected to do certain things, and fall into a pattern. But he had something extremely important to convey to people all over the world, and he wanted others to think for themselves. So we have these instances of people who incurred the wrath of society, but had the courage to face disapproval and to speak of what they considered to be the truth. This gives us an idea of the courage mentioned in *At the Feet of the Master*, which is not just physical courage.

Many people have physical courage, and even give up their lives, but that is comparatively easy. Inwardly, to think over things, and follow the truth courageously even when people disapprove of it is more remarkable. If we think of the inner government of the world, there is said to be complete harmony and cooperation. When the Masters, who are

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the inner founders of the Society, had the idea of working for a society like the TS, not everybody agreed, but they said, 'you can try'. Courage is part of the qualifications for the path. Every person has to try to know the truth of it and live it, and see whether it works. The courage we are speaking about has to be built up within oneself slowly, to see whether it works. This kind of courage, Dr Besant advises, can be helped by meditating on the subject.

If we can begin to distinguish between the outer personality and the *ātmā* or inner ruler, then perhaps we will know courage in the real sense. What the *ātmā* sees as the truth is what needs to be done. There may be an occasion when important things need to be spoken about. Then we may stagnate, and go along with the crowd; that is very different. So it requires knowledge of what is important and what is less important, what is true and what is not true, for which this meditation is necessary. We talk about all sorts of things which do not concern us; things which do not matter to us, but we like talking. We enter into situations which do not call for our presence.

The person who meditates must think about what his Self really wants. Does it want you to enter into all the little phrases that people indulge in? Does it want to spend time by doing all that which the average person does? It is through daily meditation on what is necessary that we shall come to the conclusion that most of the things that the average person is in contact with, is useless. If we meditate on the real, we reject

the unreal, and the difficulties in life, which appear so great to the man of the world, appear not so important.

Often the statement is made that a kind of moral strength is necessary on the path. The orthodox Hindu, for example, is certain that what is said in the Veda or in some other text he has read is true. He says I will reject the lower castes, but he does not know the truth of it. The same thing can be said of the Christian or the communist, or anybody else. They grasp certain facts and imagine certain truths, and they may not be true at all. So to have moral strength also calls for a lot of thoughtfulness, of wakefulness, of trying to find out where the truth lies.

### The Light is All about Us

CWL quotes, 'The light is all about you', but we have to open our eyes to see. We open our physical eyes and we see what is going on at the physical level. That is all. But if we open our inner eye, we begin to see the reality of what is wrong, and that is very important. If we see what the average person sees there are numerous things which can make us excited. In fact we like being excited; life becomes very boring if it goes on the same way all the time. There must be some people to dislike, some people about whom we make an assessment, things about which we have an opinion! All these things are there, and we think they are very important.

The brain can carry out only certain things. A body is taken for this incarnation, through which we are supposed to gain some knowledge. There

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are extremely intelligent people — scientists, philosophers, etc. — who think there is nothing beyond what they understand. But that is not so, because it is only a little part that one understands. Life is all around us, but we open our eyes only a little bit to see a small portion of what actually exists. So we have to learn that our present opinions are by no means final. They may be completely off the track, or they may be only a little on the track. So let us not take ourselves too seriously, to make our lives follow what the *ātmā* would like us to do.

Through meditation we begin to see what is important and what is not important; and most of the things about which we feel concerned, help very little. We tend to worry over many small things, because we think of those things from the physical point of view. But they may not be as worthwhile as we think they are. When you worry about something and you tell everybody about it, it is just a way of doing nothing, of passing time. We can cause a lot of agitation in our lives by worrying about events, about people, about all sorts of things. But if we can generally keep a certain distance between ourselves and the events through which we pass, it would be better. Meditation means training ourselves towards higher

things, without dropping the lower things that are necessary — what is important and what is not important, what is useful and what is not useful, as *At the Feet of the Master* points out.

Let us take the example of an animal which gets hurt. He has pain of course, but he lies quietly and allows the healing to take place. Healing becomes difficult in our case because of the way the mind works. One has to consider these things carefully, and not feel afraid if the mind becomes empty. Of course we have to make a difference between the emptiness which comes out of ignorance and that which is the result of knowledge. A cow may stand in the field chewing cud thinking about nothing in particular, but we have the capacity to think. We do not use that capacity in the right way. We think over the same things again and again, because it affects us. We have to see how the mind is coping in different situations. And if the mind is quiet, we should not worry about that.

Krishnaji used to say, when he was walking along the beach, that he was just watching, not thinking, not using the mind. That is a difficult thing for a person whose mind has developed, to do. But if the mind is under control, it helps; it knows when courage is necessary. ✧

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#### OFFICIAL NOTICE

Mrs Linda Oliveira was elected Vice-President of the Theosophical Society in place of Dr John Algeo, with effect from 20 October 2008.

Mr Keith Fisher was appointed on 1st September 2008 as International Secretary of the Society in place of Miss Mary Anderson who resigned and left for England and Europe.

## *Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom*

THE most intimate union with God is the actual presence of God. Although this relationship with God is totally spiritual, it is quite dynamic, because the soul is not asleep; rather, it is powerfully excited. In this state, the soul is livelier than fire and brighter than the unclouded sun, yet, at the same time, it is tender and devout.

This union is not a simple expression of the heart, like saying, ‘Lord, I love you with all my heart’, or other similar words. Rather, it is an inexpressible state of the soul — gentle, peaceful, respectful, humble, loving, and very simple — that urges the person to love God, to adore Him, and to embrace Him with both tenderness and joy.

Everyone who is striving for divine union must realize that, just because something is agreeable and delightful to the will, this does not mean that it will bring one closer to God. Sometimes it is helpful to disengage the sentiments of the will from the world, in order to focus entirely on God. If the will is able in some manner to comprehend Him, this can be only by love. And that love, which has its end in God, will be hindered by the things of this world.

Brother Lawrence  
*The Practice of the Presence of God*

# Spiritual Literacy: Mapping the Human Potential

DARA TATRAY

ONE of the early stated aims of the Theosophical Society was to keep alive spiritual intuitions, but even in the late nineteenth century H. P. Blavatsky and H. S. Olcott were complaining about the materialism and superficiality of their era.

What has almost entirely been lost to view in the intervening period is what Theodore Roszak once described as the 'forgotten psychology of the super-conscious and the extrasensory' (Roszak 1976, p. 124). And he commended HPB for having rescued this forgotten psychology from the remains of the esoteric tradition. In this essay I would like to present a small fragment of that forgotten psychology, with reference to the writings of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, and Patañjali's *Yoga-sutra-s*, which together offer an advanced treatment of the human condition. A society which is not aware of such psychospiritual philosophies and their potential application to the great questions of personal and social transformation cannot be considered spiritually literate.

The Australian teacher of Zen, author

and academic, Susan Murphy has pointed out that:

In the three centuries since the Enlightenment . . . the cosmological imagination of the West has been destructively demoted, paralysed, abandoned, and we have paid for this dearly. We have paid in the coin of alienation, estrangement, unease, homelessness, becoming marooned in ideology, imprisoned in language, bereft of real empowerment. (Murphy 2001, p. 36)

Those last points, about becoming marooned in ideology and imprisoned in language, must have been inspired by her academic experience. In an academic setting, there is little opportunity to explore the implications of such suggestions. Academics have an adversarial way of listening, which, in the context of the type of things we speak about in the Theosophical Society, means that they are not listening at all. Instead, they are arguing, establishing their territory, and thinking about how whatever you say fits or does not fit within the bounds of their

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discipline, not taking into account the possibility that their discipline may be a hindrance to understanding. Listening, on the other hand, is related to the intuitive faculty which is non-analytical; it involves opening yourself to the inner meaning, to the unsaid things, and allowing that meaning to immerse you, to take effect.

These two completely different functions of the mind — argument and listening — have separated the sheep from the goats throughout the history of philosophy. These issues and their ramifications are perhaps best illustrated with reference to Plato's Academy, the first university in the world, founded in 386 BC. At that time, there existed another school in Athens, established by the Sophist Isocrates (not Socrates, whom Plato revered). Isocrates continued the tradition of the Sophists who were itinerant teachers and lecturers, touring the country and supplying the demand for an education that went beyond a study of the poets, of which the Greek education system largely consisted. The Sophists taught most things, but, as Desmond Lee points out:

[Since] success in life is what most men want, and since the ability to persuade your neighbour is always an important element in success, and was particularly important in the Greek democracies, they all taught rhetoric, the art of self-expression and persuasion . . . Isocrates . . . believed that a training in the art of self-expression, in the art of composing and setting out a coherent and persuasive argument,

provided in itself an educational discipline that was . . . the best preparation for life. (Plato 1955/1987, p. 18)

The training in rhetoric remained the standard form of higher education in the ancient world, and still shapes the academic disciplines today. But Plato founded his Academy on entirely different premises and radically different assumptions about what constitutes knowledge. Born into a political family in 427 BC, Plato lived through the Peloponnesian Wars between Athens and Sparta, and witnessed several political coups in Athens. To add the finishing touch, in 399 BC, the restored democracy put Socrates to death, 'on a charge of impiety and corrupting the young', leaving Plato thoroughly disillusioned with politics (Introduction: Plato 1955/1987, p. 14/16). His sentiments were expressed towards the end of his life in a letter in which he reflects back on this time:

When I considered all this, the more closely I studied the politicians and the laws and customs of the day, and the older I grew, the more difficult it seemed to govern rightly. . . . Law and morality were deteriorating at an alarming rate, with the result that, though I had been full of eagerness for a political career . . . I came to the conclusion that all existing states were badly governed, and that their constitutions were incapable of reform without drastic treatment and a great deal of good luck. I was forced, in fact, to the belief that the only hope for finding justice

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for society or for the individual lay in true philosophy, and that mankind will have no respite from trouble until either real philosophers gain political power or politicians become, by some miracle, true philosophers. (Plato 1955/1987, p. 16)

He thus abandoned his political career and founded the Academy, a school for statesmen, where a would-be politician might be trained to be a Philosopher-Ruler. The general trend of the time, then as now, was to teach people to argue, but for Plato true philosophy consisted in something more like contemplation: the contemplation of and communion with the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.

Plato taught that there were two orders of reality, the visible world and the intelligible world: the world which we can see and the world that we can know. Two distinct types of knowledge corresponded with these: observation (of the physical world) and what he considered to be knowledge proper (of the intelligible world), which is usually called by him *Intellectus* or Intellect. A diagram might help to make this clearer [Diagram 1].

Just as the sun illuminates the physical world, making it amenable to the faculty of sight, so the Good illuminates the intelligible world, making it amenable to the faculty of knowledge. The Good in Plato's system is the fundamental principle underpinning and causing all reality: it is the highest and purest of the essential, abstract, innate ideas or *forms* which underpin all existence and, as such, is the highest possible goal of the faculty of knowledge.

There are a number of interesting parallels and contrasts between the visible and intelligible worlds. Without the sun, which is the source of light, no objects are visible; and without the Good, Plato believed, nothing is intelligible, nothing could exist. So the sun and the Good play similar roles in their respective fields of activity: they make possible and illuminate or enlighten. Similarly, the faculty of sight and the faculty of knowledge are both forms of seeing — when we know something we say, 'I see' — but there is an important and fundamental distinction between the two forms of seeing. In the Platonic system, sense perception is

<b>Visible World</b>	<b>Intelligible World</b>
The Sun	The Good
Source of growth and light, which gives visibility to objects of sense and the power of seeing to the eye.	Source of reality and truth, which gives intelligibility to objects of thought and the power of knowing to the mind.
The faculty of sight	The faculty of knowledge

**Diagram 1:** The two orders of reality according to Plato



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considered to be the lowest form of knowledge, because it can grasp nothing that is permanent; it operates in a world that is always changing and is subject to decay and death. On the other hand, *Intellectus*, or knowledge proper, is entirely extrasensory, and its proper field of activity is the Eternal. In Owen Barfield's words: knowledge proper is 'the contemplation by pure intelligence of the divine ideas, and above all of the Supreme Good' (Barfield 1965, p. 46).

The position of someone who has not learned to discriminate between the real and the unreal, the visible and intelligible, the fleeting and the permanent, was described by Plato in the analogy of a number of captives who have spent their lives in a cave, shackled in such a way as to prevent them from turning towards the entrance. Owing to their enforced position, their vision is restricted to the shadow-play on the cave wall illuminated by a fire burning outside the cave. Life is passing by behind them, but they see only the shadows, which are taken to be the whole of reality. Plato asks us to consider what would happen to the captives if they were released:

Suppose one of them were let loose, and suddenly compelled to stand up and turn his head and look and walk towards the fire; all these actions would be painful and he would be too dazzled to see properly the objects of which he used to see as the shadows. What do you think he would say if he was told that what he used to see was so much empty nonsense and that he was now nearer reality and seeing more

correctly . . . Don't you think that he would be at a loss, and think that what he used to see was far truer than the objects now being pointed out to him? . . . And if he were made to look directly at the light of the fire, it would hurt his eyes and he would turn back and retreat to the things which he could see properly, which he would think really clearer than the things being shown him . . . And . . . if he were forcibly dragged up the steep and rugged ascent and not let go till he had been dragged out into the sunlight, the process would be a painful one, to which he would much object, and when he emerged into the light his eyes would be so dazzled by the glare of it that he wouldn't be able to see a single one of the things he was now told were real . . . Because, of course, he would need to grow accustomed to the light before he could see things in the upper world outside the cave. . . . (Plato 1955/1987, p. 318/9)

I have quoted this at length because it is such a clear analogy of the unenlightened state — the normal state of the human being who has not seen the truth about reality — and of the ascent to knowledge. It also explains why we may not see for ourselves the truths of the spiritual life about which we sometimes read: we have not developed or adapted our vision. In Susan Murphy's terminology, we are going about with a 'part-adapted eye'; and what we require in order to see properly in the light is a 'whole-adapted eye' (Murphy 2001). Or, as Samdhong Rinpoche once put it: 'Our mind, as it is, is really not qualified or equipped to search

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into the innermost depths of ourselves . . . We have to train ourselves to look inside' (Rinpoche 1988, p. 6). And that training consists of first educating ourselves about the possibility of such a vision, and then undergoing the required discipline.

Plato treated this process in fairly general terms, not going into great detail (at least not in *The Republic* from which the above diagram was taken); but he believed that what really defines the human being, his central capacity, is the capacity for wisdom, for seeing the Real in its most abstract, raw, and complete sense. Wisdom, as often pointed out, is not knowledge or information, but, as Plato believed, an innate capacity of the soul. However, as stated, this capacity must be developed.

In one of T. S. Eliot's poems appear the following lines, some of which are often quoted:

The endless cycle of idea and action, endless invention, endless experiment, (which) brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness; Knowledge of speech, but not of silence; Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word. All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance, all our ignorance brings us nearer to death, but nearness to death is no nearer to God. Where is the Life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information? The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries bring us farther from God and nearer to the dust. (Eliot 1936/1963, p. 161)

Eliot's vision of the human situation presents a rather bleak prospect and the general tone of this poem is one of a wistful longing for some nobler, higher state in which wisdom is not lost in words and in which our knowledge brings us nearer to Truth. Plato did not go into great detail about the spiritual path, but in the *Yoga-sutra-s* Patañjali did.

A first glance at the *Yoga-sutra-s* is liable to shock, if one takes in the kind of preparation and effort required, which is truly stupendous. As Dr Taimni suggested, it would be understandable if most people closed the book with the impression that this is an impossible undertaking. Indeed, this system of meditation is not for the faint-hearted. But then neither was attendance at Plato's Academy, for that matter. As Taimni put it in *The Science of Yoga*:

There can be no doubt that the serious pursuit of the *Yogic* ideal is a difficult task and cannot be undertaken as a mere hobby or to find an escape from the stress and strain of ordinary life. It can be undertaken only on understanding fully the nature of human life and the misery and suffering which are inherent in it and the further realization that the only way to end this misery and suffering permanently is to find the Truth which is enshrined within ourselves, by the only method which is available, namely *Yogic* discipline. (Taimni 1961/1999, p. xii)

There are many other systems of meditation and yoga which require much less of us, but the state of Enlightenment,

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or *kaivalya*, in which the Self is established in its own true nature, is nonetheless the final goal of meditation. What is extremely valuable about the Yoga-sutra-s and other traditional systems of meditation which take the discipline very seriously, is that they offer excellent guidance on the type of preparation necessary before one seriously begins the life of a meditator. Patañjali offers advice useful to the beginner and to the most advanced practitioner. As it happens, the advice is the same.

Taimni points out that the attainment of Self-Realization 'is a long-term affair and the aspirant should be prepared to spend a number of lives . . . in its whole-hearted and single-minded pursuit' (1961/1999, p. xii). So before we start it is important to see if this is what we really want. If there is uncertainty of any kind, it is best to get on with some other worthwhile pursuit: the obstacles intrinsic to the path are great enough without adding those caused by a wavering will, longing for other things, and so on. I think Taimni's advice on this point is not only useful but also very profound:

Those who do not feel themselves equal to this task are not under any compulsion to attempt it immediately. They can continue the theoretical study of Yoga, think constantly over life's deeper problems, try to purify their minds and strengthen their characters, until their power of discrimination becomes sufficiently strong to enable them to pierce through ordinary illusions and see life in

its naked reality. In fact, this is the purpose of Kriyā Yoga. When the inner eyes of true discrimination begin to open as the result of the practice of Kriyā Yoga they will cease to wonder whether they are strong enough to undertake this long and difficult journey to their true homes. (Taimni 1961/1999, pp. xii-xiii)

Fundamental to Kriyā Yoga or the preparatory path is the theory of the *kleśa-s* or hindrances. *Kleśa* is a technical term meaning 'to torment, annoy, trouble'. Thus, the *kleśa-s* are things that annoy, torment or trouble us — hindrances or afflictions (1961/1999, p. 130). The purpose of Kriyā Yoga is to weaken their hold. But these hindrances are not external to us, such as stropny neighbours or delayed trains, they are states of mind and structures of consciousness. They are as natural as the limitation and impermanence characteristic of embodied existence. But identifying with these 'ups and downs of cosmic life' is, according to Patañjali, the root-cause of all sorrow (Feuerstein and Miller 1971, p. 89). We identify with external reality, or the seen, because of ignorance of our true nature as the knower. Recall Plato's two orders of reality, and it will become evident that he was addressing the same psycho-spiritual fact. The seer must cease to identify with the visible world of the senses if he is to realize his true, essential nature, as the Knower of the intelligible world.

Not realizing the mistake we make in identifying with the seen or the known is the fundamental ignorance known in

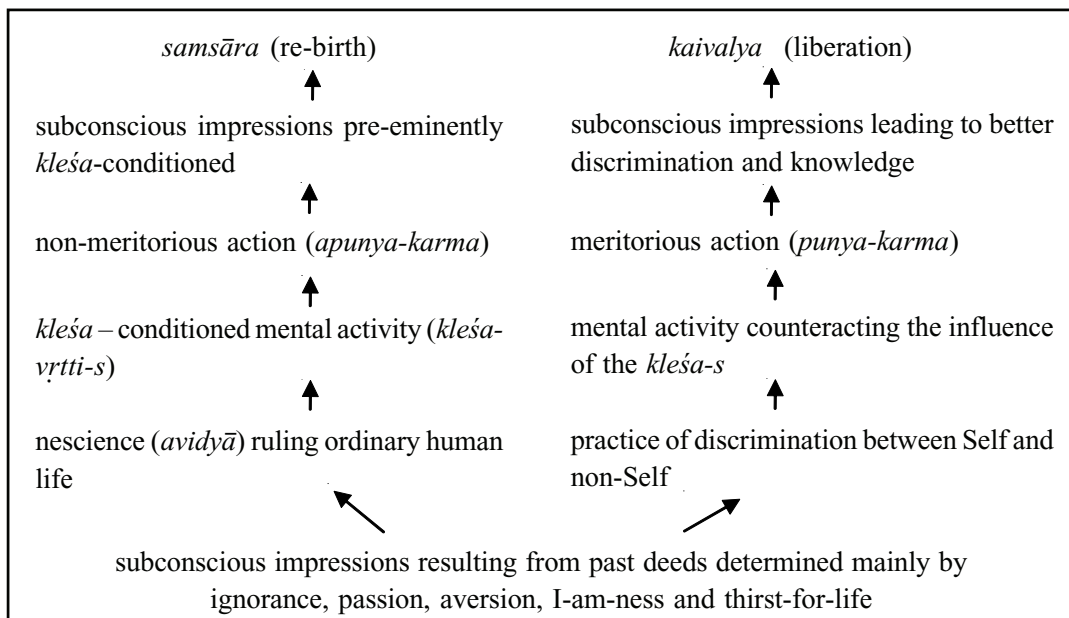
### Spiritual Literacy: Mapping the Human Potential

Hindu thought as *avidyā*. And *avidyā*, usually translated as ignorance, but literally *not knowing*, is the ‘field’ in which the other causes of suffering arise. Ignorance of our true nature as the knower of the intelligible world is said to make the other causes of suffering arise, and these are: *asmitā*, I-am-ness; *rāga*, attachment; *dvesha*, aversion; and *abhiniveśa*, thirst for life. As it is expressed in the *Yoga-sutra-s*: ‘The lack of awareness of Reality, the sense of egoism or “I-am-ness”, attractions and repulsions towards objects and the strong desire for life are the great afflictions or cause of miseries in life’ (*Sādhana Pāda*, 3). These are the *kleśa-s*.

Patañjali is not making a value judgement here or suggesting that there is something abnormal in these qualities: indeed, they sum up rather well the

constitution of the human psyche. But they will cause suffering as surely as the wheels of a cart follow the horse. Another way of putting this is to say that they lead to re-birth rather than to liberation. The practice of Kriyā Yoga, the preparatory path, consists entirely in freeing ourselves of the *kleśa-s* so that we then begin to see clearly and to act freely. But, although Kriyā Yoga is regarded as preparatory training for the yogic life, it is capable of leading the aspirant all the way to liberation or *kaivalya*, the final goal of yoga. In the second book of the *Yoga-sutra-s* it is said: ‘Kriyā Yoga is practised for attenuating *kleśa-s* and bringing about *Samādhi*’ (*Sādhana Pāda*: 2). From this it is clear, as in J. Krishnamurti’s words, the first step is the same as the last step.

A diagram will again help to illustrate this point:



**Diagram 2:** Attenuation of the *kleśa-s* (causes of suffering)

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The similarities between the two orders of reality in Plato's system and the training offered at his Academy, and the theory of the *kleśa-s* and their attenuation, seems to me quite remarkable. A number of reasons have been put forward to explain the striking parallels between ancient Greek and Indian thought. They generally run along three lines: that Greece borrowed from India, or India from Greece; that the philosophies of both sprang from a single common origin in an Indo-Aryan civilization; or that they developed independently of one another along parallel lines (Ranade 1926/1986, p. 73/4). In support of the theory of borrowing or transfer of knowledge, analysts point out that there was a great deal of commercial and intellectual traffic between India, Persia, Mesopotamia and Greece, even before the time of Alexander the Great. Support for the existence of a common origin in an earlier civilization is provided by H. P. Blavatsky in almost all her books. In *The Key to Theosophy* she argued that the Wisdom-Religion was one in antiquity, and that 'identical doctrines were taught to the Initiates during the Mysteries, an institution once universally diffused' (Blavatsky 1889/1987, p. 4).

In my opinion, however, the real explanation for the universality of transcendental knowledge is to be found in the nature of *Intellectus*, the knowledge proper of Plato's system, which we might also think of as insight or transcendental wisdom (*prajñā*). This form of knowledge or knowing is 'truth-bearing'. The *Yoga-sutra-s* say that on attaining the utmost purity of the higher stages of *samādhi* the consciousness becomes *ṛtambhara*, it becomes right-bearing or truth-bearing, because in that state there is no separation between the knower and the known; there is direct perception of the truth that is one's own nature.

It has been frequently said of the Veda-s that they were neither given nor learned nor devised: they were *seen* by the Ṛshi-s. *Ṛshi* means seer, but the seer not of the visible, material world, but of the highest forms, the most subtle orders of reality, the highest abstract principles upon which all of life is based: the truth about reality as it is. Everyone who sees in this way, sees the One, the underlying universal reality which is the truth itself. That is why, with some cultural differences, utterances about the ultimate reality end up by being remarkably alike. ✧

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He who has been instructed thus far in the things of love, and who has learned to see the beautiful in order and succession, when he comes towards the end will suddenly perceive a nature of wondrous beauty . . . a nature which in the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning; secondly, not fair in one point of view and foul in another, or at one time or in one relation or at one place fair, at another time or in another relation or at another place foul, as if fair to some and foul to others . . . but Beauty absolute, self-sufficient, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things. He who from these ascending under the influence of true love, begins to perceive that Beauty, is not far from the end. And the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that other Beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute Beauty, and at last knows what the essence of Beauty is.

Plato  
*Symposium*, 211

# The Mystery of the Female Logos

MANFRED K. EHMER

THE mystery of the Female Logos — the celestial Sophia — is one of the deepest World Mysteries, which can be penetrated only by meditative perception. Sophia is the cosmic celestial mother, the Wisdom of God, which, as the ‘Soul of the World’, marries the whole of creation. The famous religious philosopher Arthur Schult writes of her: ‘The luminous virgin is, as the divine Sophia, as the “Wisdom of God”, the personification of the luminous primordial cosmos, the *kosmos neotos*, the pure ideal world of God. She lives in a sphere which is hyperspatial, hypertemporal, hypercausal, beyond all cleavage of cosmic polarities in the realm of ever-existent wholeness.’<sup>1</sup>

As a symbol of the female Logos, Sophia represents the repressed part of the western collective soul. For in the western cultural sphere the ‘Logos’ has always been misunderstood as purely male, so that there was no place for Sophia as a figure of the spiritual-female. It would certainly be wise to complement the one-sided Logos-orientation of the West by healing Sophia-energies; moreover feminist theology has now tried to reveal

once again the hidden Sophia tradition in Christianity and Judaism.<sup>2</sup> From the secret teachings of the Jewish, Christian and Greek tradition — especially Coptic, Gnostic and orthodox Christianity — one can perceive the image of an ancient goddess of wisdom who initially had great significance but later on was completely suppressed by the patriarchal system.

In the ancient wisdom doctrine of west and east, which we call *Theosophia / Brahmavidyā* or, more commonly *theosophy*, the principle of Sophia, the mystery of the female Logos, is included. In Theosophy, ‘Logos’ as ‘spirit’ is not at any rate interpreted as masculine. Basically, in all esoteric systems, in the West for example the Kabbala, a balanced and equal cooperation of male and female world-energies is highly esteemed. Yet it must be regarded as self-evident that the supreme divine principle, however we name it, lies beyond all sexuality. At a deeper level of manifestation, however, the Divine divides itself into Male and Female. And we find the energies of the Male and the Female always completing one another in polarity, everywhere in

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creation, at all levels of manifestation.

Even the supreme deity which we worship as the Threefold Logos and the Central Sun of the universe, contains in itself the primordial male and female, first of all only potentially, as a pure possibility of development, but then also as a very concrete essential manifestation. The Deity in its whole abundance comprehends the *Logos* as well as *Sophia*, the *Word* as well as the *Wisdom*, but in its very essence it dwells beyond this duality. In its whole essential abundance the deity is the unity which underlies the male-female duality of Logos and Sophia and contains it in itself. So the divine duality is embraced by a higher Third and they are bound together in a triad. In this is enclosed the great mystery of the divine triad: that God as a whole is threefold, not composed of three persons, but a living triad within a unity.

In the world-view of Theosophy, the manifested God is seen as the *Threefold Logos*, equivalent to the Hindu trinity of Brahmā / Vishnu / Śiva, and to the trinity of Father / Son / Holy Spirit in Christianity. This holy trinity is the apex of a great living spiritual world-organism; beneath it stand the *seven primordial Logoi* (in the Bible, the seven spirits before the throne of God (vide Rev., 4, 5)); and beneath this level is a multitude of divine creating, organizing and conserving powers, which act as trustees of the supreme divine triad in the natural realms as well as in the kingdoms of spirit: from the gleaming Cherubim and Seraphim via the numberless angelic hierarchies down to nature

spirits, Deva-s and elementary spirits — an organized, manifold graduated creational structure, in which everything works together to form a living wholeness. This is the view of the universe presented by theosophy, an image of living multiplicity in unity.

As the Threefold Logos is the primordial central sun of the universe, the three aspects of God correspond to three different kinds of cosmic fire: the first Logos as cosmic Will to mental fire; the second Logos as Love and Wisdom to solar fire; and the third Logos as active Intelligence to material fire.

The *First Logos*, the paternal principle of God, is beyond the duality of 'male' and 'female'. One should beware of seeing this first manifestation of God as a kind of 'person'; it is also not a 'father' in the ordinary sense, but rather a great Unknown, an ultimate world prototype, a supreme creation principle — in the Kabbala *Ain Soph*, the unsubstantial Light of God. Of this inconceivable prototype and primordial Will it is said: 'He is the beginning and the end of all evolutionary levels of creation. All of them are stamped by His seal, and one cannot name Him other than as unity. He is the only (true) Being, despite all the innumerable shapes in which He acts in organizing' (*Sohar*, I.21a). Perhaps Angelus Silesius<sup>3</sup> had this First Logos in mind when he spoke in his famous *Cherubinic Wanderer* about the 'hyper-deity':

What they have said of God  
is not enough for me;



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My life and all my light  
is hyper-deity.<sup>4</sup>

The *Second Logos*, the Love and Wisdom aspect of God, is in some traditions considered hermaphrodite; as a male-female duality. Thus the trinity of God is, strictly speaking, extended to a quaternary, a divine fourness. The Second Logos, the son-principle in Christianity, is thus completed by a female counterpart, the celestial Sophia! She is, so to speak, the hidden and occult daughter principle, which complements the action of the Cosmic Christ, as far as we identify him with the 'son'.

The *Third Logos*, the active intelligence, appears in the Christian interpretation as the *Holy Spirit* — the world-spirit, the world-reason, cosmic intelligence, whose task is to carry down the action of the First and Second Logoi to the levels of matter.

Through the Holy Spirit, functioning like an electromagnetic transferring-media, the Son and Sophia energies are borne into all regions of creation. The living essential energies of God vitalize and animate all visible and invisible worlds; for creation is never separated from the spirit of the creator. God is not the 'watch-maker' of the deists, who construct the world like a machine and then regard it 'from outside'; but He is rather that moving universal spirit which lives and acts in the whole world. Everywhere in creation Logos and Sophia energies are at work; and they form a universal male-female polarity. Thus, all creation manifests in a dual form, and all

life evolves by the ever-active conflict of polarities, such as day and night, bright and dark, high and low, male and female, sun and moon. These are contrasts which do not oppose one another, but reach their ultimate fulfilment by creative cooperation alone.

Sophia then represents the female aspect of the Second Logos; and is thus an element of God. In our Western cultural sphere, however, the idea of a female Logos has been suppressed, as the patriarchal system has identified the 'Logos' with the purely male intellect. Not so, however, in the esoteric traditions of the Orient — here, the *mystery of the female Logos* has always been conserved, as examples from India and China demonstrate:

In the Hindu pantheon we find a goddess named *Vāch*, the goddess of the Word, of eloquence, human and divine speech — a female Logos, without any doubt, inasmuch as 'Logos' primarily means 'word'. She is also called the 'queen of gods', and according to some opinions she is in connection with the Creator Prajāpati, when he utters the extraordinarily powerful words calling into existence heaven and earth, the ocean as well as thunder and lightning. She herself personifies these primordial words of creation and thus creates the universe by her magic power. Sometimes *Vāch* is also identified with Sarasvati, the wife of Brahmā and goddess of wisdom. In every respect she is an equivalent of the Greek 'Logos', who occurs however in a purely male expression.

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In the divine couple Brahmā-Vāch we see the Second Logos, personified in its male-female polarity.

When we turn to China, we find there an equivalent to the Indian Vāch, the celestial mother *Kwan-Yin*, a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, who was among the Chinese as popular as Mary, the 'Mother of God' in the Western hemisphere. This very Kwan-Yin, sometimes also called the 'Madonna of the Far East', is the only feminine Bodhisattva in Buddhism. Her name, literally translated 'divine voice', has the same meaning as the divine primordial word, the Logos. As a female Logos, she corresponds to Sophia in Western traditions; in *The Secret Doctrine*, Kwan-Yin is explicitly called a 'female Logos'.<sup>5</sup>

Also in the Egyptian divine couple *Isis* and *Osiris* we find the Second Logos in its male-female polarity, like Brahmā and Vāch — Isis is therefore a *female Logos* and a manifestation of Sophia. Egyptian mythology calls Isis the sister and wife of the arch god Osiris (in Egypt, marriage between brother and sister was very common, even a sign of high social status), who himself is definitely a divine Logos, especially since he is also identified with the sun. Osiris is a

manifestation of the divine world Logos.

And an image of this great world Logos is in ourselves; for the Threefold Logos is reflected in the immortal Monad, which, being eternal and subject to all changes of birth and death, represents the very essence of our being. We contain the Logos in ourselves, in its triadic form, in so far as we have also Sophia in ourselves. In modern terms, we could also call Sophia an archetype of the human soul, who, lying dormant in the ocean of the collective unconsciousness, resides in all human beings, both men and women. This is the Sophia-impulse in every human soul, which, awakened in the right way, can transform us and lead us towards true awareness of cosmic wisdom. 'The Eternal Feminine draws us upwards', says the *Chorus Mysticus* at the end of Goethe's *Faust*; only the Sophia-Feminine can be meant by this. And does not also Novalis<sup>6</sup> say, in his famous fairy tale of Eros and Fabel, that Sophia 'eternally will be priestess of our hearts'? The novel ends with the verse:

Founded is the realm of Eternity;  
In love and peace ends all struggle.  
Gone is the long dream full of pain;  
Sophie eternally is priestess of hearts.<sup>7</sup>

### Note

This article appeared in the original form in *Theosophie Adyar*, and also in some other magazines.

### References

1. Arthur Schult, *Maria Sophia*, Bietigheim, 1986, p. 21.
2. Vide Verena Wodtke (ed.), *Auf den Spuren der Weisheit*, Freiburg, 1991.

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3. Angelus Silesius (i.e. Johan Schefflerr), German mystic and poet, 1624–77. His *Cherubinic Wanderer*, a collection of mystic poems, appeared in 1656.
4. Angelus Silesius, *Cherubinischer Wandersmann*, Wiesbaden, 1949, p. 3. Translation by Manfred K. Ehmer.
5. H. P. Blavatsky, *Die Geheimlehre*, vol. 1, Den Haag, p. 161.
6. Novalis (i.e. Friedrich von Hardenberg), German romantic, 1772–1801.
7. Novalis, *Werke in Zwei Banden*, vol. 2, Köln, 1996, p. 367.

To hear her name and see her form,  
Or fervently recite her name  
Delivers beings from every woe. . . .

Imbued with supernatural power  
And wise in using skilful means,  
In every corner of the world  
She manifests her countless forms.

No matter what black evils gather —  
What hell-spawned demons, savage beasts,  
What ills of birth, age, sickness, death,  
Kuan Yin will one by one destroy them.

True Kuan Yin! Pure Kuan Yin!  
Immeasurably wise Kuan Yin!  
Merciful and filled with pity,  
Ever longed-for and revered!

O Radiance spotless and effulgent!  
O night-dispelling Sun of Wisdom!  
O Vanquisher of storm and flame!  
Your glory fills the world!

Lotus Sutra 25

# Studies in *The Voice of the Silence*, 14

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WE NOW begin the third and last fragment of *The Voice of the Silence*, entitled 'The Seven Portals'. The dominant metaphor of this fragment is that of passing seven gates or doors on the spiritual path. Although referred to earlier, that metaphor becomes the primary subject of this last fragment.

## VERSES [196-205]:

[196] Upādhyāya,<sup>1</sup> the choice is made, I thirst for Wisdom. Now hast thou rent the veil before the secret Path and taught the greater Yāna.<sup>2</sup> Thy servant here is ready for thy guidance.

[197] 'Tis well, Śrāvaka.<sup>3</sup> Prepare thyself, for thou wilt have to travel on alone. The Teacher can but point the way. The Path is one for all, the means to reach the goal must vary with the pilgrims.

[198] Which wilt thou choose, O thou of dauntless heart? The *samtan*<sup>4</sup> of Eye Doctrine, fourfold Dhyāna, or thread thy way through Pāramitā-s,<sup>5</sup> six in number, noble gates of virtue leading to Bodhi and to Prajñā, seventh step of Wisdom?

[199] The rugged Path of fourfold Dhyāna

winds on uphill. Thrice great is he who climbs the lofty top.

[200] The Pāramitā heights are crossed by a still steeper path. Thou hast to fight thy way through portals seven, seven strongholds held by cruel crafty powers — passions incarnate.

[201] Be of good cheer, disciple; bear in mind the golden rule. Once thou has passed the gate Srotāpatti,<sup>6</sup> 'he who the stream hath entered', once thy foot hath pressed the bed of the Nirvānic stream in this or any future life, thou hast but seven other births before thee, O thou of adamant Will.

[202] Look on. What seest thou before thine eye, O aspirant to god-like Wisdom?

[203] 'The cloak of darkness is upon the deep of matter; within its folds I struggle. Beneath my gaze it deepens, Lord; it is dispelled beneath the waving of thy hand. A shadow moveth, creeping like the stretching serpent coils. . . . It grows, swells out and disappears in darkness.'

[204] It is the shadow of thyself outside the Path, cast on the darkness of thy sins.

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[205] ‘Yea Lord; I see the Path; its foot in mire, its summit lost in glorious light Nirvānic. And now I see the ever-narrowing Portals on the hard and thorny way to Jñāna.’\*

[HPB note]: \* Knowledge, Wisdom.

COMMENT. In verse 196, the student has decided to follow the esoteric Path, which involves dedicating oneself to the service of the world, rather than seeking only personal salvation. *Upādhyāya* is a term for a teacher (alongside the more familiar term *āchārya*), as the gloss makes clear:

Gloss 1. *Upādhyāya* is a spiritual preceptor, a Guru. The Northern Buddhists choose these generally among the Naljor, saintly men, learned in *gotrabhujñāna* and *jñāna-darśana-śuddhi*, teachers of the Secret Wisdom.

*Yāna* is literally any ‘vehicle’ in which one travels: a ship, cart, chariot, and so on. Metaphorically, it is the means by which one travels the Path. The Mahāyāna or ‘great vehicle’ is the secret or esoteric Path; the Hinayāna or ‘little vehicle’ is the open or exoteric Path.

Gloss 2. *Yāna* — vehicle; thus Mahāyāna is the ‘Great Vehicle’, and Hinayāna, the ‘Lesser Vehicle’, names for the two schools of religious and philosophical learning in Northern Buddhism.

The term *upādhyāya* of verse 196 is correlative to the term *śrāvaka* of verse 197, the latter meaning ‘student’ or literally ‘listener’. There is a widespread tradition — found in India, ancient Greece, and

elsewhere in the mystery tradition, including Freemasonry — that the beginning student is to listen and observe but not to speak or participate actively in the work. Only after an initial training period during which silence is observed, can the student respond, in word or action. First we listen to the Voice of the Silence; then we respond to it:

Gloss 3. *Śrāvaka* — a listener, a student who attends to the religious instructions. From the root *śru*. When from theory they go into practice or performance of asceticism, they become *śramana-s*, ‘exercisers’, from *śrama*, action. As Hardy shows, the two appellations answer to the words *akoustikoi* and *askētai* of the Greeks.

Verse 197 is also important as a counter statement to the exaggerated view that makes a student totally dependent on the teacher. On the contrary, students must prepare themselves, for they will necessarily travel the Path alone. The true teacher does not give detailed instructions for one’s life, but points the way by teaching and example. Then the students must make their own paths by walking them.

Another important idea in this verse is that the Path is one. That is, there is a single ideal of service and a single goal of union with all life. But there are as many ways of realizing that ideal and of reaching that goal as there are travellers on the Path. As this verse says, ‘The Path is one for all, the means to reach the goal must vary with the pilgrims.’ Though teachers may show us the way, we each have to walk it

for ourselves and in our own ways. That is a central concept of *The Voice* and of Theosophy.

Although the student has already chosen the esoteric path of service rather than the exoteric path of individual salvation, the choice is presented once again in verse 198 as between the Eye Doctrine of head-learning and the Heart Doctrine of soul-wisdom. In truth, no choice is final, once for all time. We must continually make decisions because the road divides before us every step of the way and at every moment of time.

The Eye Doctrine of head-learning is not just intellectual information, but rather meditational insight, as the verse and gloss 4 make clear:

Gloss 4. *Samtan* (Tibetan), the same as the Sanskrit *Dhyāna*, or the state of meditation, of which there are four degrees.

Similarly, the Heart Doctrine of soul-wisdom is not the sentimentality of feeling, but the practice of certain virtues (and *virtue* means literally ‘strength’, the quality characteristic of a *vir* — a warrior or a hero):

Gloss 5. *Pāramitā-s*, the six transcendental virtues; for the priests there are ten.

The six *pāramitā-s* are the keys to the seven Portals of this Fragment other than *virāga* or ‘desirelessness’. They are giving, moral conduct, patience, valour, meditation, and wisdom. The additional four, making up the ten for priests, are resolution, skilful means, power, and knowledge.

The Path is said to consist of various stages or initiations. The first of these is mentioned in verse 201, where it is called the *Srotāpatti*, and the three following initiations are named in Gloss 6:

Gloss 6. *Srotāpatti* — (lit.) ‘he who has entered the stream’ that leads to the Nirvānic ocean. This name indicates the *first* Path. The name of the *second* is the Path of *Sakṛdāgāmin*, ‘he who will receive birth (only) once more’. The *third* is called *Anāgāmin*, ‘he who will be reincarnated no more’, unless he so desires in order to help mankind. The fourth Path is known as that of *Rahat* or *Arhat*. This is the highest. An Arhat sees Nirvāna during his life. For him it is no post-mortem state, but *Samādhi*, during which he experiences all nirvānic bliss.\*

The numbers of lives that will pass after each of these initiations before one achieves nirvāna are traditional, but they are best interpreted symbolically. The numbers may indicate a gradual approach to the goal, which is conscious participation in the state of samādhi during this life. *Samādhi*, literally ‘putting together’ or ‘uniting’, is the goal of Yoga. HPB had little patience with orientalists, Westerners who studied and interpreted Eastern literature, as shown by her note on the terms of these four initiations or states:

[HPB note]: \* How little one can rely upon the Orientalists for the exact words and meaning, is instanced in the case of three ‘alleged’ authorities. Thus the four names just explained are given by R. Spence

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Hardy as: 1. Sowān; 2. Sakradāgāmi; 3. Anāgāmin; and 4. Arya. By the Rev. J. Edkins they are given as: 1. Srotāpanna; 2. Sagardagam; 3. Anāgāmi; and 4. Arhan. Schlagintweit again spells them differently, each, moreover, giving another and a new variation in the meaning of the terms.

Verses 202 to 205 give an overview of the Path to be trodden, the Path that leads from darkness to Light. The darkness is the ignorance, selfishness, and violence that characterize unenlightened action in the world. Within the darkness is a shadow, which is our personal nature without the guidance and discipline of the teacher's hand, which alone can wave away the darkness. The teacher, as we have already seen, is not some external person, but the higher Self within each of us. The shadow is what Sigmund Freud called the *Id* (Latin for 'it') and Carl Jung called the Shadow. It is also what Edward Bulwer-Lytton called the Dweller on the Threshold in his novel *Zanoni*, a term HPB also used, as she admired that novel and its author.

Verse 205 tells us that the Path passes through Portals (of which there are seven), each one narrower than the preceding. This image of the ever narrowing Portals recalls Christ's statement from the Gospel of St Matthew (7:14): 'Narrow is the gate, and straitened [that is 'made narrow'] the way that leadeth unto Life, and few there are that find it.' Recall that *The Voice of the Silence* is 'dedicated to the few' — those few who find the straitened Path leading through the ever narrowing

Portals. This path leads by a 'hard and thorny way' to *jñāna* or gnosis, which HPB's note (cited above) defines as 'knowledge, wisdom'. It is immediate and direct knowledge of Truth. And the 'hard and thorny way' leading to it is reminiscent of HPB's posthumously published statement:

There *is* a road, steep and thorny, beset with perils of every kind, but yet a road, and it leads to the very heart of the Universe: I can tell you how to find those who will show you the secret gateway that opens inward only, and closes fast behind the neophyte for evermore. There is no danger that dauntless courage cannot conquer; there is no trial that spotless purity cannot pass through; there is no difficulty that strong intellect cannot surmount. For those who win onwards there is reward past all telling — the power to bless and save humanity; for those who fail, there are other lives in which success may come.

That statement is practically a summary of the chief points of *The Voice of the Silence*.

### MEDITATION:

Think about the statement 'There *is* a road'. Memorize it. Repeat it. Let its meaning bloom in your heart.

This dominant metaphor of the third fragment — the seven gates on the Path, each opened by a different key — is developed in verses 206–14, which list the seven keys and briefly characterize each of them.

**VERSES [206–214]:**

[206] Thou seest well, Lanoo. These Portals lead the aspirant across the waters on ‘to the other shore’.<sup>7</sup> Each Portal hath a golden key that openeth its gate; and these keys are:

[207] 1. DĀNA, the key of charity and love immortal.

[208] 2. ŚĪLA, the key of harmony in word and act, the key that counterbalances the cause and the effect, and leaves no further room for karmic action.

[209] 3. KSHĀNTI, patience sweet, that nought can ruffle.

[210] 4. VIRĀGA, indifference to pleasure and to pain, illusion conquered, truth alone perceived.

[211] 5. VIRYA, the dauntless energy that fights its way to the supernal Truth out of the mire of lies terrestrial.

[212] 6. DHYĀNA, whose golden gate once opened leads the Naljor\* towards the realm of Sat eternal and its ceaseless contemplation.

[213] 7. PRAJÑĀ, the key to which makes of a man a god, creating him a Bodhisattva, son of the Dhyāni-s.

[214] Such to the Portals are the golden keys.

[HPB note.]: \* A saint, an adept.

COMMENT. The metaphor of the world as a body of water — a sea or a stream — and of our experience of earthly life as a voyage on or crossing of that body of water is found in many human cultures

and traditions. In Anglo-Saxon times, one of the most poignant uses of that metaphor is in a poem called ‘The Seafarer’, which speaks of the difficulties and dangers of voyaging on the open sea. A similar metaphor found in the Buddhist tradition, which speaks of arriving at the other shore as completing the journey of life, is used in verse 206, the gloss to which explains:

Gloss 7. ‘Arrival at the shore’ is with the Northern Buddhists synonymous with reaching Nirvāna through the exercise of the six and the ten *Pāramitā-s* (virtues).

The use of the metaphor in verse 206 is somewhat unusual because the seven portals — gates or doors — are said to lead the pilgrim across the waters. That seems to be a different metaphor, for gates and doors are usually associated with a road or a building. One way of reconciling the two metaphors is to envision a bridge passing over a river of rushing water, and on the bridge seven successive portals through which the traveller must pass to reach ‘the other shore’.

The metaphor of a bridge is also widespread, as in the lyrics of a Simon and Garfunkel song ‘Bridge over troubled waters’ and in the Zoroastrian concept of a bridge that is the only access to heaven. According to Zoroastrian myth, after death we must each cross Chinvat Bridge (literally ‘Bridge of the Separator’), which leads to heaven (‘the other shore’). When a good soul is on the bridge, it becomes wide and easy of passage, but when a wicked soul tries to cross, it shrinks to the width of a razor’s edge so that the wicked



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one falls from it into an abyss below.

Each of the seven portals is opened by a particular key, which are listed in verses 207–13. These keys are the *pāramitā-s* or supernal virtues. The number of such virtues varies from one Buddhist scripture to another, but six are generally recognized, with four added virtues for the monks, making a total of ten. In *The Voice of the Silence*, the seven keys correspond to the traditional basic six *pāramitā-s*, with the addition, in the middle or fourth position, of a seventh virtue.

The seven portals and their keys correspond with all sets of seven, but particularly with the seven initiations (which are stages on the Path) and the seven human principles (each of which has to be unified with the others during the human pilgrimage):

The first, *dāna*, ‘gift, charity, love’ (etymologically related to the word *donation*), corresponds with the dense physical body (*sthula śarira*), for all acts of giving must be grounded in the physical.

The second, *śila*, ‘good conduct or behaviour’, is translated ‘harmony’ in the *Voice* because harmony is the essence of all right action. It corresponds with the principles of vitality (*prāna*), which produces harmony of action in our living.

The third, *kshānti*, ‘patience’, corresponds with the principle of form, the model body or double (*linga śarira*), for that is what persists patiently through all the changes in our dense physical body.

The fourth, *virāga* (or *vairāgya*) is translated as ‘desirelessness’ in *At the Feet*

*of the Master* and sometimes as ‘dispassion’. It might be literally translated as ‘uncolouredness’, for the root of the word, *rāga*, can mean an ‘emotionally tinged colour’; it is a term that refers to one of the modes of Indian music, each of which is associated with a time of day and an emotional attitude. *Virāga* corresponds with the principle of desire (*kāma*). Popular lore associates emotions with colours: to look at the world through rose-coloured glasses, to be green with envy, to have the blues, to be in a black mood, to be in the pink, and so on. Clairvoyants say that when we are overpowered with an emotion, our auras are flooded with the corresponding colour. So we then literally see or respond to the world through that emotional colouration, as though we were wearing coloured glasses. To see things as they really are we must take off the glasses and see the world uncoloured by our emotions. That is what *virāga* is — uncoloured perception of the world around us.

The fifth, *virya*, ‘strength, zeal’ or literally ‘heroism, manliness’ from *vira*, ‘hero, man’ (as in the title of the founder of Jainism: *Mahāvira*, ‘Great Hero’) is cognate with the Latin word *vir* ‘man’ and thus with *virile* and *virtue*, etymologically ‘manliness’. It corresponds with the principle of mind (*manas*), which is also related to the English word *man*, mind being the faculty that makes us human.

The sixth, *dhyāna*, ‘meditation’, corresponds with the principle of intelligence or intuition (*buddhi*). It is the way we discover wisdom and according

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to verse 212 ‘leads the Naljor\* towards the realm of Sat [Reality]’. A Naljor, HPB notes, is ‘\*A saint, an adept’.

The seventh, *prajñā*, ‘wisdom’ (from *pra*, ‘forth, fulfilling, complete’, and *jñā*, ‘know’) corresponds to the principle of Self within us (*ātmā*). The knowledge of who we are is the fullest knowledge — that which makes it unnecessary to know anything else — as the sage Uddālaka instructs his son Śvetaketu in the *Chāndogya Upanishad*.

H. P. Blavatsky wrote an article entitled ‘Chelas and Lay Chelas’ (*Collected Writings* IV, 606–14), in which she discusses the qualifications required

in a chela or student of one of the Masters of the Wisdom. She lists seven such qualifications, which parallel very closely the *pāramitā-s* of the Golden Keys to the Seven Portals from *The Voice of the Silence*. The chart on this page gives a parallel list of those qualifications.

The Golden Keys to the Seven Portals are thus another way of talking about the qualities that are needed to prepare ourselves for discovering who we truly are. Comparing them with the qualifications listed in ‘Chelas and Lay Chelas’ will reveal some interesting connections, and the description of qualifications for chelaship in that article will repay careful study.

<b>Pāramitā-s: Golden Keys to the Seven Portals</b>	<b>Qualifications expected in a chela. . . .</b>	<b>. . . who must be master of 1–4 and one with 5–7</b>
1. <i>dāna</i> = gift, charity	1. perfect physical health	1. <i>śarira</i> = body
2. <i>śīla</i> = good conduct or behaviour	2. absolute mental and physical purity	2. <i>indriya</i> = senses [vitality]
3. <i>kshānti</i> = patience	3. unselfishness of purpose; universal charity; pity for all animate beings	3. <i>dosha</i> = fruits [form]
4. <i>virāga</i> ( <i>vairāgya</i> ) = desirelessness, responding to reality without emotion	4. truthfulness and unswerving faith in the law of karma	4. <i>duhkha</i> = pain, sorrow [desire]
5. <i>virya</i> = strength, zeal	5. courage undaunted in every emergency, even by peril to life	5. <i>manas</i> = mind
6. <i>dhyāna</i> = meditation	6. intuitional perception of one’s being the vehicle of the manifested Avalokiteśvara or divine <i>ātman</i>	6. <i>buddhi</i> = intellect or spiritual intelligence
7. <i>prajñā</i> = wisdom	7. calm indifference for, but a just appreciation of everything that constitutes the objective and transitory world, in relation with, and to, the invisible regions	7. <i>ātmā</i> = highest soul, i.e. spirit

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For example, the last of the qualifications is a 'calm indifference for, but a just appreciation of everything that constitutes the objective and transitory world, in relation with, and to, the invisible regions'. Every word in that description is important. We are to be calmly indifferent to everything in the objective and transitory world, but that does not mean that the world is worthless or that we are to forsake it. For we are also to have a just appreciation of the objective and transitory world, as it relates with and to

the invisible regions. It is in such a calm indifference combined with a just appreciation that true wisdom lies — the wisdom that is of our own essential nature.

#### MEDITATION:

Take each of the seven Golden Keys, the *pāramitā-s*, and meditate on it. Compare it with the corresponding human principle and the corresponding qualification of a chela. You might spend a day, a week, or a month on each in turn. They will repay repeated consideration. ✧

We are in the Winter Solstice, the period at which the Sun entering the sign of Capricornus has already, since December 21st, ceased to advance in the Southern Hemisphere, and, cancer or crablike, begins to move back. It is at this particular time that, every year, he is born, and December 25th was the *day of the birth of the Sun* for those who inhabited the Northern Hemisphere. It is also on December the 25th, Christmas, the day with the Christians on which the 'Saviour of the World' was born, that were born, ages before him, the Persian Mithra, the Egyptian Osiris, the Greek Bacchus, the Phoenician Adonis, the Phrygian Attis. And, while at Memphis people were shown the image of the god *Day*, taken out of his cradle, the Romans marked December 25th in their calendar as the day *natalis solis invicti*.

Sad derision of human destiny. So many Saviours of the world born unto it, so much and so often propitiated, and yet the world is as miserable — nay, far more wretched now than ever before — as though none of these had ever been born!

H. P. Blavatsky

'The Year is Dead, Long Live the Year', *CW*, X, 278

# Theosophy and Kashmir Śaivism

V. V. CHALAM

THEOSOLOGY proclaims: 'All Life is One.' This is the foundational Theosophical principle. The ancient Kashmir Śaiva philosophy also declares 'All is *chiti* (Consciousness)', and that 'nothing that is not Śiva exists anywhere'. Śiva refers to the Universal Consciousness; it is the Inner Self of all. When the mind is tranquil, the Self is discovered. Hence the importance of meditation.

Meditation is achieved by diving into the deeper levels of being. By turning within, the individual mind rises towards Universal Consciousness. Meditation frees the individual from suffering and the feeling of limitation. Seeing oneness everywhere and realizing the Self in everything, the awakened person lives with freedom and creativity. Established in meditation on the Self, one plunges into the ocean of Bliss. The luminous energy of pure Consciousness is at the heart of meditation.

Theosophy proclaims that Consciousness is the primary stuff of the universe, while Kashmir Śaivism says that Consciousness is all-pervading at all times, is characterized by *icchā* (will), *jñāna*

(knowledge), and *kriyā* (power to act). According to Kashmir Śaivism, God is without form, and is referred to as Śiva. Śiva brings the universe out of his own being. Consciousness is, therefore, the substratum of matter. As Theosophy says, matter is the gross manifestation of Consciousness.

According to Kashmir Śaivism, there are thirty-six levels of Consciousness — from pure Universal Consciousness at the top, to the least conscious object such as the stone. Even the stone has certain divine qualities — it is strong, long-lasting, reliable and so on. One Sutra says: 'The Self is the sweet core of everything.' Our Theosophical prayer says the same thing: 'Hidden Life, vibrant in every atom. . .' Even the most inert object has this Hidden Life or Consciousness as its essence. There is the Divine Essence in all minerals, in all animals, and in all human beings.

All are animated by One Life. This is the basis for Universal Brotherhood emphasized by the Theosophical Society. All are knit together. All are interrelated. Everything is Consciousness or God. Let

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us, therefore, look at the world from this uplifting viewpoint. This leads to reverence for all life and Universal Brotherhood is a natural corollary.

Everything is linked to everything else by Supreme Intelligence. That is why we have the famous statement in Theosophy: 'As above, so below.' Kashmir Śaivism, while affirming this, says: 'As here, so elsewhere.' One of the sages proclaimed: 'There is no word, no thought, no image, no idea, no state that is not Śiva.' This is the core teaching of Kashmir Śaivism and also of Theosophy.

As we progress along the spiritual path, we assimilate that all is a manifestation of the Divine Mind. One has to develop this vision. Then one attains perfect peace and gains a new insight into oneself. Everything is utterly beautiful and inspiring when viewed from this lofty perspective. To attain this height, let us contemplate: '*All is One; all is Consciousness.*'

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Some selections from the texts on Kashmir Śaivism are given below:

1. Beyond and pervading the waking,

dream and deep sleep states is the blissful fourth state (*turiya*).

2. Right effort is the means.

3. Limited knowledge expressed in thought or speech is bondage.

4. Enlightenment takes place through the power of inner language.

5. When the mind becomes one with the heart, the true nature of the world is perceived.

6. Even the casual conversation of a true yogi is as powerful as a mantra.

7. Inquiry is the highest branch of Yoga, since it distinguishes between what is to be chosen and what is to be rejected.

8. A wise person should practise inquiry.

9. Seeing oneness everywhere and realizing the Self in everything, the awakened person lives without fear.

10. When one experiences expansion of joy, one should meditate on the perfect condition of this joy; then there will be Supreme Delight.

11. When one is mentally blended with the incomparable joy, then there is complete union with that joy.

12. One who has reached the supreme state of Śiva becomes a divine being. ✧

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.**

John 1:1-4

# Qualifications for Our Work

N. SRI RAM

ANYONE who tries to help people to gain a deeper and truer understanding of things must himself to some extent rise above the trivialities of ordinary life, on which so many of us spend so much of our energy and time. This does not mean that we should not attend to the small things in life. Even small things can be of great significance in the life of a great person, and things of real importance to us can become trivial if we deal with them in a petty spirit. The values of all things depend ultimately upon the spirit which is manifested.

One of the qualifications needed for a worker is a certain earnestness or seriousness of purpose which does not permit him to fritter away his time, his thought, his interest, on things which do not matter or in ways which do not help him or anyone else. To be serious of purpose does not mean, however, that we should be stiflingly solemn and part with any sense of humour we might happen to possess. We can be solemn and yet light of heart and in touch, and see the humorous side of things. When you see things in the right perspective, anything that does not fit in with it becomes incongruous, and this incongruity or

disproportion may be brought out in a humorous remark. To have a sense of humour is to have a sense of proportion, of relative values and appropriateness. It has been said that no one can go far on the spiritual path without a sense of humour. What is needed is the lightness which comes from a capacity to hold oneself in detachment, and does not bear down heavily. Even when one is light-hearted, one need not lose his deep purpose, and our deep purpose is to do all things that will help to redeem our fellow-beings from a condition of ignorance and all the illusions which are the causes of unhappiness.

It is not possible merely by the employment of large resources to effect the miracle of changing all the people in the world from what they are into something entirely different. If we were to pay a large enough sum we could attract many graduates who have done brilliantly in their examinations, but I do not think the Theosophical work would be advanced by a hundred such workers. The quality of the Wisdom has to be in the heart of the individual before he can communicate it to others. Theosophy is not a science which can be studied like a

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railway guide and then given out for the benefit of others. The truth has to come from one's own experience or realization; one must speak at least from one's sincere conviction. It is perfectly legitimate to quote someone and say: We learn from so and so. But really to affect other people there has to be the touch of a first-hand feeling. If you are giving your own reaction to some great truth, such reaction is your own and not anybody else's, and therefore even though the truth may have been expressed by other people in various ways, when you speak of it you will bring into your statement something of your own quality, your feelings, heart and

emotions, which have their own value.

One has to have faith in what one speaks about; not blind faith. If there is a belief which is at variance with your own experience it merely creates a conflict in yourself; the belief pulls you in one way while your experience of things and contact with people have moulded you in a different manner. But if a person has a realization which is not born of any motive of gratification or fear, if it is not the product of prior reactions, then it stands by itself and we have to call it knowledge by faith, or intuitive knowledge. There are certain truths which can be known only from within oneself.

**Become fully aware of the true image of man:**

**Man is spirit,  
Man is life,  
Man is deathless.**

**God is the light source of man,  
And man is the light that came from God.  
There is neither light source without light,  
Nor light without a light source.**

**Just as light and its light source are one,  
So man and God are one.**

**God is Spirit; therefore, man is also spirit.  
God is Love; therefore, man is also love.  
God is Wisdom; therefore, man is also wisdom.  
Spirit is not material in nature;  
Love is not material in nature;  
Wisdom is not material in nature.**

**Therefore, man, who is spirit, love, and wisdom,  
is in no way related to matter.**

*Seicho-no-Ie*

Nectarean Shower of Holy Doctrines 48-49

## Books of Interest

THE DISCOVERY OF THE NAG HAMMADI TEXTS, by Jean Doresse, Inner Traditions, 2005, pp. 409.

THE GOSPEL OF PHILIP, tr. by Jean-Yves Leloup, Inner Traditions, 2004, pp. 173.

THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS, tr. by Stevan Davies, SkyLight Paths, 2004, pp. 192.

THE HIDDEN GOSPEL OF MATTHEW, tr. by Ron Miller, SkyLight Paths, 2004, pp. 292.

THE SECRET BOOK OF JOHN, *The Gnostic Gospel*, tr. by Stevan Davies, SkyLight Paths, 2005, pp. 208.

After Doubleday published Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* in 2003, this novel stimulated an international sensation, focused intense interest among the general public on an obscure religious movement, and showed strong prospects for becoming an expensive Hollywood film.

This popular narrative awakened slumbering awareness into a shocking realization that an extraordinary library, lost for sixteen centuries and discovered during 1945 at Nag Hammadi in upper Egypt, contained an extensive collection of one hundred and forty-four sayings of Jesus. Preserved with the dry sands and covering and obscuring an ancient gnostic community, Egyptian peasants discovered thirteen leather-bound papyrus volumes preserved in jars on a hillside. Intense

interest arose when *The Gospel of Thomas*, one text in this literary treasure was discovered to contain several sayings never previously known to modern scholars, besides additional statements strikingly similar to familiar New Testament and patristic texts. This discovery yielded documents that seemed to be a 'missing link' useful in connecting these compositions with the New Testament gospels and gnostic, patristic, Manichean, and Cathare writings. This find prompted a growing desire among Christians to understand the cultural context in which primitive Christianity emerged, the actual authenticity attributed to Jesus' sayings contained in the New Testament, and the astonishing archeological discoveries preceding this find of what were called the Dead Sea Scrolls. Ancient documents lost and forgotten for centuries contained a promise for revising conventional Christianity.

The contents of these gnostic gospels present a radical alternative to Christian orthodoxy. *The Gospel of Matthew* confirms that Jesus' actual teachings and behaviour were obscured by the interpretations imposed by the early Christians. Miller reveals the underlying narrative in this gospel, transcending the traditional theme reporting Jesus' atonement and the events transpiring after the crucifixion. In this composition, Jesus' challenge for personal transformation and social change



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predominates. The image represented by Jesus resembles the teacher described in another gnostic text, *The Gospel of Thomas*, rather than the redeemer venerated within traditional historic Christianity. Leloup's translation of *The Gospel of Philip* abolishes the mysteries surrounding the enigmatic bridal chamber recorded in that story and reveals a relationship with Jewish esoteric tradition. This writing describes the nuptial chamber as the holy of holies, describing God as the Father, the Holy Ghost as Mother, and Jesus as the son. Neither man nor woman alone is created in God's image; their sacred embrace in which they share the divine breath indicates that they resemble God. For portraying the physical relationship shared by Jesus and his most beloved disciple, Mary Magdalene, this writing was condemned as 'the works of the flesh' and was suppressed until the text was rediscovered at Nag Hammadi in 1947. Beside raising penetrating questions as to whether the New Testament version reporting Jesus' teachings is accurate and complete, this composition, *The Gospel of Thomas*, presents Jesus as a wisdom-seeking sage sharing aphorisms about each person's responsibility for creating the Kingdom of God upon earth.

When the Nag Hammadi library containing gnostic manuscripts was discovered in 1945, some scholars suspected that this treasure was more valuable than the Dead Sea Scrolls. Among these compositions, *The Gospel of Thomas* contained sayings attributed to

Jesus that were collected by Judas Didymus Thomas, perhaps Jesus' closest disciple. This gospel preaches the coming of a new man and describes the genesis of the man of knowledge. Jesus pictures a journey from limited to unlimited consciousness, invites aspirants to imbibe this knowledge for themselves, and explains that imbibing self-knowledge will transform them into a Christ. This text advanced knowledge about second-century gnosticism, producing important implications for studying the historical development of the New Testament, provided assistance in advancing form-critical analysis for understanding Jesus' sayings historically, and underscored the importance of the Jewish-Christian context during the first two centuries.

*The Secret Book of John* clarifies the gnostics' emphasis on self-awareness and introspection, their ardent admonition that divine wholeness will be restored not by worshipping false gods but by developing the latent inherent divinity within humanity. Understanding gnosticism, as expressed in this gospel, evokes an awareness that in this religion the distinction and dichotomy between saviour and saved ceases.

These gnostic gospels illumine the context within which Christianity arose, reveal Gnosticism as a profoundly significant factor within and beyond primitive Christianity, and provide an enormously promising resource for inaugurating a spiritual renaissance transforming Western thought.

DANIEL ROSS CHANDLER