

Freedom of Thought

As the Theosophical Society has spread far and wide over the world, and as members of all religions have become members of it without surrendering the special dogmas, teachings and beliefs of their respective faiths, it is thought desirable to emphasize the fact that there is no doctrine, no opinion, by whomsoever taught or held, that is in any way binding on any member of the Society, none which any member is not free to accept or reject. Approval of its three Objects is the sole condition of membership. No teacher, or writer, from H. P. Blavatsky onwards, has any authority to impose his or her teachings or opinions on members. Every member has an equal right to follow any school of thought, but has no right to force the choice on any other. Neither a candidate for any office nor any voter can be rendered ineligible to stand or to vote, because of any opinion held, or because of membership in any school of thought. Opinions or beliefs neither bestow privileges nor inflict penalties. The Members of the General Council earnestly request every member of the Theosophical Society to maintain, defend and act upon these fundamental principles of the Society, and also fearlessly to exercise the right of liberty of thought and of expression thereof, within the limits of courtesy and consideration for others.

Freedom of the Society

The Theosophical Society, while cooperating with all other bodies whose aims and activities make such cooperation possible, is and must remain an organization entirely independent of them, not committed to any objects save its own, and intent on developing its own work on the broadest and most inclusive lines, so as to move towards its own goal as indicated in and by the pursuit of those objects and that Divine Wisdom which in the abstract is implicit in the title 'The Theosophical Society'.

Since Universal Brotherhood and the Wisdom are undefined and unlimited, and since there is complete freedom for each and every member of the Society in thought and action, the Society seeks ever to maintain its own distinctive and unique character by remaining free of affiliation or identification with any other organization.



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THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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The Theosophical Society is composed of students, belonging to any religion in the world or to none, who are united by their approval of the Society's Objects, by their wish to remove religious antagonisms and to draw together men 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.

What Does It Mean to Be Human? – II

TIM BOYD AND DAVID LORIMER

TIM Boyd: Could you talk about this transformation to becoming fully human? It is characterized by an increase in humanness or humanity. In terms of science or the practice of science, what would you see as the role that science has to play in this transformation?

David Lorimer: This reminds me of a conversation between Fritjof Capra and J. Krishnamurthi (K.), when Capra asked him how he should relate himself as a scientist with himself as a human being. Then K. said to Capra: “You are a human being first and a scientist second.”

That is quite a good approach, because obviously science is a human activity. And what a lot of us are concerned with now, both in the Scientific and Medical Network, and obviously in the TS, is expanding the metaphysical basis of science and bringing in, like Ravi Ravindra is also doing, the rigor into other ways of knowing.

The whole practice of yoga is very rigorous in its own terms, just as physics is rigorous. But what we are trying to get

beyond is one of the fundamental points made in Iain McGilchrist’s book [see Part I of this article in the May issue], or the kind of rationality which only acknowledges the material realm, and nothing else. And which also tends to leave out the heart and the feelings. It is really how you grow fundamentally as a human being, and as a scientist, rather than what science itself can contribute.

TB: It does seem that something more can be involved in our approach to science. The Dalai Lama frequently makes the statement that each one of us has the greatest laboratory possible for experimentation — our consciousness. So, is there something more in science or an approach to science that can lend itself to this transformation?

DL: One aspect would be “wonder”. In fact, a lot of the New Atheists substitute wonder for the kind of spiritual religious imagination. It is about expanding our perception. It also depends on what science we are studying, or whether we are studying medicine. It is very different

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studying physics than it is biochemistry or cosmology. And each of these sciences has its own method and scope. The cosmologists would easily get a sense of wonder, just by looking up at the night sky; that is something which all of us can do. And the biologist might get a sense of wonder from the intricacy of the cell, and the self-organizing and self-healing capacities of the body. So I think a lot depends on the lens we use for our science.

For instance, someone like Barbara McClintock, who won the Nobel Prize in biology, made her breakthroughs through identifying herself with what she was seeing through her microscope. This is a very different method. It is more like the Goethean method which I suggested in the interview with Ravi. It is a method that adds the qualitative to the concept, because the concept on its own is not sufficient, nor is the qualitative.

TB: During your conversation with Ravi he made the bold prediction that physics will ultimately be absorbed into psychology. In the United States, in the early 20th century, there was a great scientist, a botanist who discovered all sorts of uses for plants that nobody had envisioned. He was once asked about his scientific method. His comment was that “anything will give up its secrets, if we love it enough”. This is something like what you were saying — this shift from analytic mind to heart. But from your awareness of contemporary science and its practitioners, do you see or anticipate anything like this kind of love

— or heart-based approach to science?

DL: Yes, this again comes back to Goethe and the way that Rudolph Steiner developed Goethean science. What Goethe was able to show was that there is a sharp distinction, or continuum, depending on how we are looking at it, between observation and contemplation. In observation, you detach yourself and remove yourself, see things separate from yourself, whereas in contemplation, you fuse with the object of your contemplation. If you are observing a tree, it is different from contemplating a tree or contemplating a flower.

When you are contemplating, you are feeling into this. It is what Goethe called a “delicate empiricism”. You may get, as you were suggesting with Carver, insights from feeling empathetically. Empathy is *emföhlung*, in German, so that you may get different insights from feeling into what it is you are relating to than detached observation. An example of this would be the teaching of Stephan Harding and Brian Goodwin at the Schumacher College. They offer a Master of Science degree in holistic science, training people to do their science in this more contemplative way, bringing together science and spirituality.

TB: Going back to Ravi’s prediction, I think you had said that it was possible that scientific practice will become more directed toward the human mind and its behaviors, and that it is clearly linked with scientific knowledge and experiment.

DL: Yes, the reclassification, if you like, largely depends on whether conscious-

What Does It Mean to Be Human? – II

ness is more widely acknowledged to be primary or fundamental. Like Planck suggested already in 1931, and Schrodinger and Pauli and other great physicists realized, you cannot get behind consciousness. Consciousness is fundamental. Mind is the matrix of matter, as Planck said. But it is a different starting point, because at the moment, the received view is the primacy of matter. So if consciousness is derived from matter, it depends entirely on it. The way this view is defended is, as Jeff Kripal says, “by rigorously excluding everything that does not fit with that view”. And he adds, “to dismiss is to miss”.

So there is a self-reflexivity which will be required, which is becoming aware of who is the knower, who is doing the knowing, who is the self that is knowing? That then initiates a self-reflexive process, which also includes the assumptions with which you approach something. The great philosopher who was at Oxford, R. G. Collingwood, talked about the fact that science starts with a question and the question contains the possibility of its own answer. So the question presupposes a particular approach.

An example I sometimes use is the hard problem. The hard problem which says, “How does the brain generate consciousness?” Well, of course, the idea, the possible answers to that question, are contained within the formulation of the question. But maybe it is the wrong question. So I think that there has to be an input, in this sense, of philosophy and philosophy of science and philosophy of

mind into science. Because the scientific education process does not include these meta levels of science, and the fact that philosophy brings its tools of logic and structuring (as does language) to science, you cannot divorce yourself from a sort of philosophical and cultural embeddedness, even if the principle is universal.

TB: You the people involved in the Scientific and Medical Network, are part of this growing minority of people who believe as you do that consciousness is primary. Do you see on the horizon something that might come to be called a “science of consciousness”? The great Quantum Physicist, Max Planck, made the statement: “A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.” How do you see the emergence of a science of consciousness?

DL: Well, of course, the problem about that remark of Planck for me is that the people who are left behind are trained by those before. And we have a structure of what Foucault calls power knowledge, scientific consensus, and settled truth. We are seeing this in the current circumstances. Now the science is settled, we are told. I mean, science is never settled; there are always disagreements within science. Politically, it means that if you want to get on, then you have to share the approach of your head of department, and the journals, editors, and so on. It is actually more difficult to see how you break out of this. Then Planck

supposed that it would happen anyway.

Although the experience, for instance, of Rupert Sheldrake is that younger people are far more open to his ideas, on the other hand, if they propose a research project based on Rupert's work, that would be ruled out, caught by the head of the department. Apparently, there are now algorithms that look for unacceptable words in article submissions, so that they are sent back and rejected even before an editor has seen them. This was news to me; it is something I read about last week. This is what we are really working on in the Network and Galileo Commission, it is precisely this transformation.

The frame of this transformation is that there are two approaches here. There is a third person, outside-in approach, which is consciousness within science in the broadest sense; and then there is the inside-out, first person approach, which is science within consciousness. So I think just to get acknowledgement that there are two valid approaches — a qualitative and a quantitative approach — would be maybe a first step.

This is because if you pretend that the third person approach, and what you can measure from brain scans and so on, is sufficient, then you have actually missed out the subjective, qualitative aspect, which is the knower who is doing the knowing and the investigating. So this self-reflexive process and realization is a key move in this respect, and maybe one can educate younger scientists to understand this point.

TB: A few years ago, in another Theo-

sophy-Science Lecture, there was a remarkable scientist, Sangeetha Menon. Her whole field is the scientific study of consciousness. But of course, you are studying the effects of consciousness, not consciousness itself. In talking with her I found some of my ideas were changed along the line that you are talking about. At the time I believed that if you wanted to sink your scientific career quickly, you tie it to the exploration of consciousness. Yet, here she was in an actual academic setting.

Somehow, she had managed to frame her research so that it was not only acceptable, but was encouraged. That was a hopeful shift in my way of looking at this. Is this something that you are seeing within the scientific community?

DL: Maybe we need a sort of equivalent to the Nobel Prize for these sorts of studies to bring things forward a bit. This is in order to have calls to do research, or even getting the funding, because, as you said, one cannot make a lot of progress in science with zero funding, and the funding mainly goes into supporting and extending the current paradigm. It is also a consequence of this power knowledge and the politics of knowledge, that there are certain gatekeepers who dictate who basically gets the money.

TB: You have just given me an idea that maybe the Scientific and Medical Network and the Theosophical Society can combine to produce such an award for people with intuitive approaches to science. Many of the approaches

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are intuitive, but I mean something related to consciousness.

DL: Yes, one would obviously have to think through the parameters and criteria. Maybe someone like Federico Faggin, who is interested in these areas, should definitely get on your program at some point, because he is a pioneer, and he is the inventor of the Intel processor, and has written his autobiography, *Silicon: From the Invention of the Microprocessor to the New Science of Consciousness*, in which he describes the most extraordinary mystical experience and the scientific theory that he has developed as a result of this.

TB: In your conversation with Ravi you said that “humanity is evidenced through living from the heart”. This is very important. Could we conclude by expanding on that?

DL: Yes, I have actually been reading recently the autobiography of Richard Falk, called *Public Intellectual*. He sees himself as a citizen pilgrim, so he is looking for “humane global governance”, not one that suits the people who are in charge, but that really gets us thinking about what

is truly “humane” and what is “humanitarian”. You will always find that this corresponds, in some way, to an expression of love, and love arises in the heart. The central and most profound experience that humans can have is oneness with the light and love of consciousness, which in the West would be duly known as Gnosis.

Educating the heart then should be given at least as much priority as educating the head. This has partly again to do with the balance between the right and the left hemispheres, and more the head and the heart, and that is why I finished on the business of integration. And in order to be a rounded human being, we have to have light in our mind, warmth in our heart, and strength in our will, because if there is no strength in our will, we will not be able to bring anything to fruition.

Finally, I would like to invite your listeners to have a look at our website: <scientificandmedical.net>. We have a weekly webinar schedule, and just this week we had Peter Russell talking about his latest book, *Letting Go*, on science and spirituality. ✧

Whoso would be a human being, must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of our own mind. Absolve yourself to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Reign of Law in Buddhism

C. JINARĀJADĀSA

THIS little work does not attempt to give an exposition of Buddhism from the standpoint of a deep student of Buddhism. . . . The value of the essays will be solely because it reflects the experiences of a Buddhist who has tried, however humbly, to mould his life on the life of the great Lord Buddha.

Such an attempt has only been possible to me because of my studies in Theosophy. It is Theosophy that has vivified and illuminated for me, in a way that no tradition in Buddhism nor any living exponent of it has done, the ancient truths as to the Way preached by the Lord. I am perfectly aware of how my fellow Buddhists in Ceylon look askance at all Theosophical ideas as heretical.

This little work is a testimony to such among them as may be drawn to inquire into Theosophy, but are held back by popular misconceptions. I for one, to whom the Lord Buddha is the greatest Ideal in life, have found in Theosophy what I have not found in any existing Buddhist book or tradition, that is, a never-failing source of inspiration in understanding the Dhamma as the most

beneficent power in the universe, and the Sangha as the ever-watchful and compassionate Guardians of humankind.

I have sought to make the Buddha, the Dhamma [Buddhist teachings], and the Sangha [a community of Buddhist monks] a living power in my life, and it is Theosophy and Theosophy alone which has wrought for me this miracle.

* * * * *

The Reign of Law

OF all the great changes which have come about during the last hundred years in modern thought, there is none so profound as the conception of the reign of universal law.

Wherever we look, whether with the microscope or the telescope, we find laws. The tiniest electron as the mightiest solar system obeys laws which the mind of man can tabulate.

All the discoveries of modern science, which have given us this conception, have profoundly shaken Western theologies. So much is this the case, that a cynic has declared that today, "God exists only in the gaps of the cosmic order."

C. Jinarājadāsa (16 December 1875 – 18 June 1953), was a Sri Lankan scholar, lecturer, and writer from Sri Lanka (old Ceylon) who served as the fourth President of the Theosophical Society based in Adyar, Chennai, India, from 1945 to 1953. From the Foreword and ch. I of the booklet by the same name, 1948 ed.

The Reign of Law in Buddhism

One of the hardest problems for thoughtful Christians at the present time is to harmonise the facts of evolution and the doctrines of theology.

The latest conclusions of modern science are after all nothing more than the proclamations of the Lord Buddha. When we understand what the Lord meant by the word Dhamma or Law, we realize that it is Law absolute, which brings under its sway all things great and small. It has been said that a scientific law is only a statement of the conditions under which certain results will follow. This is exactly true of the Dhamma.

For all the teachings of the Lord Buddha are based upon the inevitability of law. He does not proclaim a moral law as having any value from His sanction, but that it brings its own sanction with it. In science we do not say that one particle of matter attracts another because of some divine decree, but because it is the nature of matter to attract each other in a particular way. Similarly, the whole conception of life offered by the Lord Buddha is based upon a scientific conception of the universe.

One of the most wonderful conceptions which the Lord Buddha gave is that moral law is exactly the same as any physical law. When He proclaimed that "hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love", He was not uttering a beautiful ideal, but was giving a scientific statement of the laws of the universe, visible and invisible.

Of late many Western thinkers, who are profoundly influenced by scientific

conceptions, are beginning to realize that in Buddhism is a statement of life which is in thorough accord with science. There are, of course, some who consider Buddhism a cold religion, because there is little scope in its practice for emotionalism. But there is little scope for emotion in science.

Yet all the great changes in material civilization which we have now are due to the application of scientific truths. Similarly, when the great precepts of morality are thoroughly understood as expressions of natural law, we shall all try to live more moral lives. The world has failed to be more moral than it is largely because of its false conception of morality.

If morality is only the statement of a Personal God who can be appeased, then there is a natural tendency not to be absolutely rigid in adherence to morality. But if we realize that to break a moral law is exactly like breaking any physical law, then we are on our guard in a new way. If I were to walk carelessly over a precipice, I know what will happen, and so I take care to be circumspect when nearing the edge of precipices. In exactly the same way, if I thoroughly believe that to tell a lie is to put in operation natural forces whose reaction on me will be pain, I refrain from telling lies.

Of course, we must not be truthful because we are afraid of pain if we tell a lie; we must be truthful because truth is our ideal, and the more true we are to life and to fact, the more true we are to ourselves.

The Reign of Law in Buddhism

When we have the conception that the precepts of morality are precepts of natural law, there is a quicker response to morality. In theory, Buddhist lands should be ideal lands of moral life; but if in practice they are not so very much better than non-Buddhist countries, it is simply due to the fact that Buddhists have not yet awakened to the priceless value of the teachings which the Lord Buddha gave them.

Such is the inherent nature of the Dhamma, that practically every man, who adheres to the teachings of science, whether he is Hindu, Christian, Zoroastrian,

or Mussalman, cannot help being in one part of his mind a Buddhist. For his scientific leanings will impel him to consider not only physical Nature, but also the invisible nature of men's hearts and minds, from the same scientific standpoint of natural law. This, of course, is pure Buddhism. Hence we have an interesting psy-chological fact that there are many Buddhists by practice who are not so by name, all over the world. For true Buddhism is not something in sacred books, but a universal teaching disseminated all over the world where the laws of Nature are in operation. ✧

The greatest achievement is selflessness.
The greatest worth is self-mastery.
The greatest quality is seeking to serve others.
The greatest precept is continual awareness.
The greatest medicine is the emptiness of everything.
The greatest action is not conforming with the world's ways.
The greatest magic is transmuting the passions.
The greatest generosity is non-attachment.
The greatest goodness is a peaceful mind.
The greatest patience is humility.
The greatest effort is not concerned with results.
The greatest meditation is a mind that lets go.
The greatest wisdom is seeing through appearances.

Gautama the Buddha

Where, Who, What is God? — II

ELTON A. HALL

EXPLORING the Answer

Those of us who have studied Theosophy for some time naturally gravitate to what H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) called “three fundamental propositions”, in the “Proem” of *The Secret Doctrine*, upon which “depends the understanding of all that follows”.⁴ Yet we should pause a moment. The “Proem” does not immediately lay out these propositions; rather it refers to an ancient manuscript that depicts a few simple geometrical figures. The first is a white circle on a black background; the second the same circle with a point in it.

The first circle is complete latency of Kosmos, what she calls “slumbering Energy”. It is also Space and Eternity in this latency, which she calls *pralaya*. So here we already have what will be explained as Absolute Abstract Space, Absolute Abstract Motion and Eternal Duration. The second circle has a point which represents the “dawn of differentiation”. Here we might think of the cycle of day and night in our diurnal experience. The dawn imperceptibly appears in the dark night sky before that which manifests daylight — the Sun — appears. This gradual emergence of light — dif-

ferentiation — encapsulates as much as possible in the *māya* of the physical world the very beginning of *manvantara*, or manifestation.

We should note that this analogy and explanation reveals the strictly mathematical nature of existence, for recalling this fact will make understanding much of *The Secret Doctrine* somewhat easier. At this level, however, the geometry is symbolic, for the white circle, we are told, represents divine Unity, the Source of all that comes to be and the end to which all returns. And the circumference of the circle is as close as the human mind can come to understand the “ever incognizable PRESENCE”, while the plane is the Universal Soul.

These two are one, quite beyond our present understanding. Here we have an intimation of the answer to the original question “Where, who, what is God?”, for the Universal Soul and the Presence are one. Whatever this inconceivable Presence and Universal Soul is, it is the Source without which there would be nothing, including no “Man-spirit”. What is most fundamental in us is most fundamental in Kosmos, and even before Kosmos exists.

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Where, Who, What is God? — II

The Upanishads and Nicholas of Cusa, along with Alain of Lille and Pascal all noted that God is a circle whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere. If we keep this in mind when looking at these figures, we will avoid turning this spiritual geometry into Euclidean diagrams. The plane of the circle, HPB says, is the limit of human knowledge; the ultimate Source is quite unknowable. Yet even in *pralaya*, total non-manifestation, she refers to the Universal Soul and the Divine Thought, “the plan of every future Cosmogony and Theogony”.

She warns, however, that such terms should not be mistaken for any thought process available to the human being. These references point to what is utterly unknowable, and yet what lies behind even the highest and most noumenal levels of existence. Put another way, if the ultimate Source is real, all existence is *māya*. And in that unknowable hides the “plan”, the potential for both every kosmos and the hierarchy of beings often called gods, *devas*, spirits, elementals, and so on.

Where, then, is God? No conception of deity can approach the Source, and so one can say God is Absolute Abstract Space — but not space as we can experience it — or Duration — but not time as we experience it — or Eternal Motion — but not motion as we experience it. Given the image of the circle, God might be considered the black background. It might be considered the white circle, and if so, then it is both everywhere and nowhere — nowhere as the black background, everywhere as the circle.

It would be a mistake to consider God to be somewhere “up there” beyond the kosmos, for it is right here, but like what is behind the backdrop curtain of a stage, it is, so to say, behind all that manifests on the stage of existence, covered by a veil that can never be lifted. It is the Presence. Given the divine Teaching, the question “Where, who, what is God?” is one question. Only in the highest, primordial levels of manifestation does it unfold into three questions: this is the point in the circle, the dawn of manifestation.

And so we are given other images and analogies to consider on page 2 of the “Proem”. We are told that nothing motionless can be divine, and we know from Theosophy and contemporary physics that everything is in motion. As Krishna, the avatar of Vishnu, who underwrites the universe, and the embodiment of the divine, says in the *Bhagavadgītā*, we should see the divine in all we encounter. From the human standpoint, we should see the divine — Krishna — in all beings.

In the stunning and terrifying 11th chapter of the *Gītā*, when Krishna shows Arjuna his *viśvarūpa*, his universal form, he reveals the dynamics of manifestation but does not show himself beyond his universal form. What is the formless noumenon of form remains hidden. Even the Divine Eye, lent to Arjuna by Krishna (since Arjuna has not yet earned it), does not see all. What Arjuna sees is the ceaseless motion that is karma working throughout the world, indeed, throughout the kosmos.

Here in the “Proem” we are told that

what slumbers and awakens into manifestation is the One Life, and between such awakenings, sometimes called *mahā-manvantaras*, is non-Being, which is absolute Being, unconsciousness which is Absolute Consciousness, “unrealizable, yet the one self-existing reality”. Since its one attribute is eternal motion, it is called the Great Breath. The point in the circle is the first flutter of differentiation, the potential for manifestation, called “Aditi in THAT” on page 3. In HPB’s *Theosophical Glossary*, Aditi is *mula-prakṛti*, which is sometimes called the veil over *parabrahm*, which is That unknowable.

Elsewhere, Aditi is connected with the pervasive *ākāśa*, also connected with space. Yet on p. 18 of the “Proem”, *parabrahm* and *mulaprakṛti* are called aspects of the One Principle. It appears that we are being taught a great lesson here. In attempting to conceive that which is beyond all possible conception, we must be careful not to get stuck in thinking this way or that. Our minds, one might say, are being loosened up from rigidity in thinking by what appears obscure and even contradictory.

By the time we come to the Three Fundamental Propositions (p. 14), we have been prepared for what they say. Each is set out in some detail in a few pages, though their full meaning is progressively unfolded in the whole two volumes of *The Secret Doctrine* and other works. And even all that is only what we might be able to understand at this point in our collective evolution. Their depths

can only be explored in careful thinking freed from preconceptions, and by frequent reflection and meditation.

The First Fundamental is that Being which is No-Being, That which lies beyond the veil of even the noumenal potential for manifestation, That which is no-thing, the nothing without which there would be no existence at all. It remains a mystery because no thought or experience can reach it, and yet all dissolves in That as *manvantara* gives way to *pralaya*. It is conceived under two aspects — Absolute Abstract Space and Absolute Abstract Motion. She will add Eternal Duration as the third aspect a little later on.

Space and Motion are qualified by “absolute abstract” to show that nothing we experience as space and motion in perception or thought approaches this utter transcendence. Absolute Abstract Space and Absolute Abstract Motion are aspects, not attributes — that is, they are the way we can try to understand the First Fundamental but they are not features of That itself. This motion is again symbolized by the Great Breath which is Unconditioned Consciousness.

Reflection on this mysterious connection between motion, which cannot be motion as we experience it, though our experienced motion — movement, vibration, resonance — exists because of it, and consciousness anticipates the Second and Third Fundamental. We should note that “consciousness” cannot be encompassed by our experience of consciousness, for it is unconditioned, and all manifest consciousness

is differentiated in some way, hence conditioned. We tend to recognize consciousness only to the degree it approaches consciousness as we experience it.

We have no problem recognizing consciousness in our pet dog or cat, or in mammals, and we can sense it in other creatures —snakes and fish, even mosquitos and ants — though we have no idea what conscious experience is like for them. By using imagination, we can acknowledge consciousness in plants, lichen, and bacteria, perhaps even in a virus. But sensing consciousness in rocks, planets, and stars boggles the mind.

Yet the Great Breath is the unfoldment of existence which is consciousness as well as matter. Eternal Duration is also quite beyond conception, for we are told repeatedly by HPB that time is the succession of states of consciousness — motion again. If what is unconditioned is real and the source of unfolding evolutionary existence, then all differentiation is *māya*, which we may call “illusion”, remembering that we, as differentiated beings are also illusion. So just as dream chalk cannot write on a blackboard, it can write nicely on a dream blackboard. We experience ourselves as real, and so the world about us is experienced as real.

Given the rich image of the Great Breath, we think of inhalation and exhalation, inbreathing and outbreathing, and the Second Fundamental seems to follow naturally. All existence, which consists of numberless universes — whether only sequential or simultaneous as some modern cosmologists think is not said — is

periodical, just like breathing. Existence is cyclic and so we can think of cycles from the Kosmos as a whole, down to the cycles of our daily rounds. This perspective, of course has profound implications for understanding anything and everything about human life and the nature of the world. As the Breath expands and becomes all existence, consciousness differentiates, and here we find the necessity for hierarchies of creative beings, whole classes acting as one being, engaged in the work of evolution at many levels. The human being, as an inseparable part of the evolving kosmos, must, in some profound sense, contain or at least reflect those beings, just as the rest of Nature does.

If we think of human beings as souls or monads — centers of consciousness — they are aspects of the Great Breath, the *fons et origo* [source and origin] of consciousness, and so are rooted in one ultimate consciousness. And so we come to the Third Fundamental. Here HPB uses the term “Over-Soul”, used by the philosophical Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson in the mid-19th century. Given that consciousness is, like everything, subject to periodicity, humanity as a whole and each human being is seen as on a pilgrimage.

Though the rich meaning of this pilgrimage is found in the second volume of *The Secret Doctrine*, we can grasp its general meaning here. All consciousness in whatever form is on a pilgrimage, but until it becomes self-conscious and capable of reflecting on itself and the world,

that pilgrimage is just Nature unfolding, so to speak. Once it becomes self-conscious — that is, human, which is us and perhaps many beings throughout kosmos — the pilgrimage takes on a new meaning: we are responsible for what we do, how we think, choices we make. And the law of karma — ceaseless restoration of harmony — takes on a moral dimension that cannot be avoided.

Raghavan Iyer stated clearly that “The complex teachings concerning states and planes of consciousness . . . and the evolutionary pilgrimage of Monads, may be grasped through meditation upon the fundamental axiom that Law and Deity are one.”⁵ Karma is the divine in manifestation — invisible, as are all the laws of Nature — the effects of which can with effort be understood.

We see that the kosmos unfolds in levels of increasing differentiation, from a unity into the grand diversity in which we as pilgrims find ourselves. Being self-conscious, we can understand that consciousness, and hence perception will vary depending on the level on which it operates, or, in more suggestive language, the level at which it is awakened. But the ultimate unity has not thrust a universe outside of itself. It has unfolded through differentiation through many levels, and this means that everything is here, now, not somewhere else.

Theosophy typically speaks of seven general levels in the cosmos and seven correlative principles in the human being and in everything that exists. As we know from *The Key to Theosophy* and else-

where, these principles can be understood in various ways, and the second volume of *The Secret Doctrine* speaks of the 7x7, or 49 fires, since each principle can be seen as septenary. What is important for this essay is to understand that all these levels are here, are us, though much is latent in us at this moment. Hence the pilgrimage of a human being and of humanity as a whole is to discover what we are.

HPB has answered her original question: “Where, who, what is God?” While a full explanation takes volumes to say and lifetimes to understand, we get an initial answer. God is nowhere and yet everywhere, shining as it were through all existence. God is no-one and nothing, yet that without which nothing can be. It is not a being or non-being, but what HPB called Be-Ness. As deity, it is the One Life, the consciousness of everything unified. While Emerson, who was familiar with the *Bhagavadgītā*, spoke of the Over-Soul in philosophical terms, the poet Walt Whitman, also familiar with the *Gītā*, put it in terms of radical unity and applied it to human beings and all life:

Each of us inevitable,
Each of us limitless — each of us with
his or her right upon the Earth.
Each of us allow'd the eternal purports of
the Earth,
Each of us here as divinely as any is here.⁶

Universal Unity is a fact in Nature and all existence. HPB spoke of Universal Brotherhood and wanted Theosophists to form a nucleus of Universal

Where, Who, What is God? — II

Brotherhood that embraced all men and women “without distinction of race, creed, sex, condition”.

Our capacity to realize what is true depends on our thinking and our perception. We find reality at whatever level of thought and perception we employ, and we can elevate that level ever closer to the unity at the heart of all existence. As our thoughts and perceptions change, what is real to us and what is discerned as illusion alters, arcing toward greater unity. As souls or monads, our pilgrimage is toward what we most fundamentally are: the Monad itself.

Speaking of the ultimate as Brahman, Sri Shankarāchārya, the great teacher of Advaita Vedanta, said:

Realize that to be Brahman which, when seen, leaves nothing more to be seen, having become which one is not born again into the world of becoming, and which, when known, leaves nothing else to be known.⁷

The great answer to HPB’s second question is given by the sacred mantra of Tibetans, often translated “Hail to the

Jewel in the Lotus”, which Raghavan Iyer straightforwardly expresses: “*Om Mani Padme Hum*, the Jewel in the Lotus, the God in Man.”⁸ Because Man-spirit is God-spirit, Man-spirit proves God-spirit. This stunning answer forces the realization that the pilgrimage of each individual is profound and compelling, and the pilgrimage of humanity luminous and urgent.

Given that we began with a poem from the *Yoga Vāsishtha* on consciousness and the perception associated with it, we can end with a quotation from Walt Whitman that captures the spirit of our reflection:

Why should I wish to see God better
than this day?

I see something of God each hour of the
twenty-four, and each moment then,
In the faces of men and women I see
God, and in my own face in the glass;
I find letters from God dropt in the street,
and every one is sign’d by God’s name,
And I leave them where they are,
for I know that wheresoe’er I go,
Others will punctually come for ever
and ever.⁹ ✧

Endnotes

4. *The Secret Doctrine*. I, 13-14. All references are to the facsimile of the 1888 ed., The Theosophy Company, Los Angeles.

5. Raghavan Iyer, “The Descent of Manas”, *The Gupta Vidya*, vol. I (Theosophy Trust Books Norfolk, VA, 2020), p. 164.

6. Quoted from *Leaves of Grass* in Jeremy David Engels, *The Ethics of Oneness: Emerson, Whitman, and the Bhagavad Gitā* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), p. 67.

7. Sri Shankarāchārya, *Atmabodha*, in *Self-Knowledge*, translated by Swami Nikhilananda (Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, 1970), sloka 55, p. 162.

8. Raghavan Iyer, “The Fire of Purgation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, vol. I, p. 356.

9. Quoted in Engels, p. 71.

Seek Out the Way: Experiential Reflections on the Inner Life

JULIANA CESANO

I WOULD like to reflect on the intrinsic and dynamic connection between challenge and the inner life, and how these two aspects play a major part in what we sometimes call “inner awakening”, or “inner unfoldment”.

Challenges are normally seen as circumstances that come to us from the outside, an external force in the shape of an event that presents itself in our lives. But if we look closer, and especially if we look back into the moments in which we were challenged, we may be able to see that those challenges were not random, and instead, they were aligned with the next step we needed to take. There was something inside of us, still very tender, very new, sometimes not even conscious, that needed a catalyst to unfold, and as the experience or challenge arises, if we take it fully, without reservations, that part of us that was incipient and somewhat ready pushes through and finds expression.

The words within and without are of course mental constructs and they are helpful for the purpose of communicating,

but although we may see these movements as two — external and internal — they are in fact one movement. The impulse from within is the one that calls forth the challenge, and we meet right in that in-existent line between the inner and the outer. Who we are before and after we take a challenge resembles the difference between a green and a ripe fruit. Potentially it is all there, but it needed the influence of the elements to ripen. It is like making cookies and placing them nicely on a tray, and then life comes and puts them in the oven.

In the fire of challenge there is transformation, and as once we were raw, we become cooked. Whether we realize it or not, this moment, and all that is in it, is the answer to our innermost aspirations. Challenge is a moving target, it is never static, it moves with us. Poetically we can say that it is a dance with the Divine. What we seek finds us and meets us at the edge of our very next step, and the difficulty we encounter helps us rise above, into the next step of the ladder.

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And we must be challenged from all directions, because all new skills need to be tested or developed.

Without a doubt, challenge is uncomfortable, and sometimes very painful, and for that reason we tend to postpone it or to push it away, sometimes indefinitely. Even though we might have already seen the tremendous transformative power of challenge, we may still avoid it and seek comfort instead. We would rather be dull or miserable in the known than jump into the unknown. So here we can ask ourselves, sincerely: “Am I really seeking to be cooked?” It seems that we all want to be the phoenix, this magnificent bird that rises from the ashes, yet nobody wants to be ashes. But, no ashes, no phoenix.

There is a line in the book *Light on the Path* that says “Kill out desire of comfort”, and if we reflect on that for a moment we will see that comfort is not just physical, it is also mental, emotional, psychological. The comfort of the known. So, I can try to keep my world confined within the known as much as possible to avoid the discomfort or the pain of challenge, or I can open up to the elements, like the fruit, or go even further and voluntarily place myself in the oven.

From this perspective, accepting challenge is key, even when we feel inadequate, and I would dare say, *especially* when we feel inadequate, not good enough, not ready enough. We must do it anyway because it is only in the doing, in the trying, that the dormant

qualities awaken, in any field, in any department of Nature, and through that doing the scope of the transformation that occurs is impossible to measure and predict.

Accepting challenge sometimes means jumping into a pool that may or may not have water. But in the very act of jumping without any assurance is where the greatest gifts are given to us. To be able to jump into the unknown, in whatever circumstance, we need courage, and the most powerful source of courage is faith, a concept that has been at times misused, but faith, at its core, is an unshakable trust in the Power that is guiding the process.

You can call that Power in any way you want: Intelligence, Love, the Self, the Divine, and so on. With this faith, with this certainty that comes from the depth of our being, fear begins to dissolve. There is a poem by the mystic Kabir that at the end says: “Seeker, listen to Me. Where your deepest faith is, I am.” So, we can ask ourselves, where is our deepest faith? In whom or what do we place it? Is it shallow? Is it deep? And can faith grow?

One of the effects of faith in a higher Power is an inner reassurance that we were never born and we will never die, and when that concept starts gaining space within our day-to-day reality we become more open and receptive to challenge, to pain, to longing, and to experience as it comes, without trying to control it or shape it. For some people this conviction is so tangible that they lose their need to protect themselves, and their inner world unfolds into a loving space that can contain it all. They sit with

their own joy or sorrow with equal peace, and because they know how to sit with their own, they can sit with others' joy and sorrow in that same peace.

And here begins the real understanding of what it means to be human. How can we sit with the pain of others if we have not established a friendship with our own pain? Or how can we love the imperfection of others if we cannot love ours? Our own inner definitions of things change with time, but if today I had to define the spiritual life in a few words, I would say that the spiritual life is *a radical act of love*. Love is our essential nature and in love we thrive. If you take anything: a plant, an animal, a glass of water, a human being and you love it enough, every day, it will bloom. And we are not the exception.

The other gift that challenge brings is that it assists us with the process of self-knowledge. Like in a garden — if you ever took care of a garden you know — the warmth of the sun encourages all plants, not just the ones you are trying to grow. Through challenge our strengths will surface as much as our weaknesses, and with that comes the chance to see ourselves patiently, objectively, and most of all, lovingly. Self-discovery becomes possible through nonjudgemental awareness, a silent observation of whatever arises. No inner dialogue or commentary, which is what we do most of the time, and what causes most of life's problems. The moment we introduce harshness or judgement, or ideas of what I should be and should not be, that in itself interrupts

the process of seeing what is, independent of judgment.

Judgement is different from discernment. It comes from preconceived ideas, sometimes we call it conditioning, while discernment comes from clear seeing, when conditioning has been removed. If we think we have to become something we are not, instead of seeing what is already here, something very curious begins to happen; inadvertently we begin to embellish and mold our outer layers to our liking and never really find out what is truly underneath. Only after several years of patient and loving observation, one day we may have a glimpse of a part of us that we perhaps created to fit in.

To fit in a family, a culture, a belief system, an organization, you name it. Skillful people sometimes can see these artificial parts in others very clearly. They say that they look like something that does not belong to the person, it feels fake. This habit of becoming, the assumption that we have to be something we are not, creates many problems. One of them is an imbalanced sense of who we are, sometimes disproportionate, sometimes quite inaccurate. Because the process of self-knowledge requires skill, patience, humility, and a huge dose of love, we tend to go for the shortcut, which is to seek reference of who we are outside ourselves. So, here we are talking about clear seeing. What does clear seeing require from us? We are blind to certain things that can be quite obvious from the outside. Have you ever wondered why

we do not see them? Is it because we cannot or because we do not want to? Or maybe a combination of both?

In one of his writings, Hugh Shearman points out something very important; he says that: “We are the captive passengers of a compulsively motivated personal self, anxiously trying to create its future out of its past.” This passage makes us wonder if it is possible to create a future that is new, and free from the past. And if it is, how do we do it?

J. Krishnamurti said “Be nothing and then Live”, and I do not think he was advocating for inaction, but perhaps pointing out that in the dangerous assumption that we have to become something, we may end up causing more damage. Some teachers have pointed out that our work is to remove the layers of what we are not, to find what we are. This process requires a type of clear seeing that is born of an awakened awareness. Looked at it from this angle, inner unfoldment does not seem to be something about controlling or building, but instead something more along the lines of dissolving and surrendering. “Become what you are”, said a Saint, and Annie Besant adds: “Become in outer manifestation what you are in inner reality.”

While on this journey, we tend to seek references of who we are outside ourselves, and also seek answers outside ourselves. As we seek out the way, we turn toward the wisdom of others. With the right attitude, that can be tremendously helpful and inspiring, but never enough, because *we* are the way, from beginning

to end. As we question, as we struggle, as we do not know the answers, as we try and fail, and try again, and become receptive to the guidance that comes from within, with sincerity and faith in the process, the way unfolds, *we* unfold. H. P. Blavatsky says that “the Universe is worked and guided from within, outwards”, this is a universal law and we are a microcosm unfolding from within outwards. Our innermost aspirations take shape in outer circumstances, and as we accept the challenge that they bring, the way unfolds.

The Sufi poet Bulleh Shah wrote:

Reading book after book
You’ve become a great scholar
But you never learned to read yourself.
You go rushing
Into temples and mosques
But never enter your own heart.
Every day you fight the devil
But never wrestle
With your own ego.
You chase after those in the sky
But never look for
The one sitting at home.

What an honest invitation to turn inwards and walk the path! The common impulse is to seek outside ourselves, but we are the question and the answer. In a little book called *An Introduction to Yoga* Annie Besant writes: “The only way you can know God is by diving into yourself”. This reminded me of other impactful words, this time in *Light on the Path*: “For within you is the light of the world — the only light that can be shed upon the Path.

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If you are unable to perceive it within you, it is useless to look for it elsewhere.” Do we have faith in this? Do we live with the absolute trust that the light within is the only one that can illumine the path? If we do, how much energy do we dedicate every day to read ourselves, to enter our own hearts, to notice dispassionately our own ego, and to be in the presence of the one sitting within.

Seeking out the way becomes a synonym of *self*-discovery, both with the small “s” and the capital “S”. The discovery of what we are not, and the discovery of what we are. One of the elements that contribute greatly to this process is to realize that each one of us has come with a temperament, and that for each temperament there is a way. Recognizing the uniqueness of our individuality becomes a key element. What inspires you is not necessarily what inspires me. What leaves you in deep contemplation or compels you to stay still and listen may not be the same that causes that in me. What makes you want to know the Truth, or what awakens the longing for Union in you, is unique to you.

Sometimes imagining scenarios is helpful. Imagine for a moment, that you have set aside all authorities, the ones that live in your imagination and the ones that live outside yourself. Remove them, one by one, and then ask yourself: Where do I feel most at home? Where do I feel most alive? And then ask: What awakens me to love? The anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* says: “If you want to find your soul, look at what you

love. That’s where your soul lives.”

It is hard to discover our temperament when we are too occupied trying to be like others, and it is even harder if those around us try to impose their views on us. Sometimes as fellow seekers we can behave like those parents who want their child to play the piano before they even know if the child has the slightest inclination toward music. We have a role and a responsibility toward one another, which is not indoctrination, but deep listening — a listening that is born of caring, of empathy, and that brings with it a seeing and a knowing of the other, and what the other may need or appreciate. The road we choose at each point in time may not continue in the same direction throughout this lifetime. In this art of being led by inner guidance we may find that at some point we are ready to take a turn and explore a part of us that we had not been in touch with before.

In the process of discovering ourselves and discovering our way, there is something liberating, which is that we do not owe explanations to anyone, and we do not need to prove anything either. This sacred journey within is always between oneself and God, between oneself and the Divine in any of its forms. In this world that we live in, that makes so much emphasis on making everything visible — achievements, opinions, aspirations, appearance, and so on — let us remember that the most powerful growth happens underneath the surface, unseen to others and many times unseen to ourselves. Like the seed

that starts growing under the surface.

An obstacle that we may find in this process of becoming the path is that Theosophy provides the mind with many tempting answers. The challenge is to use them as initial points for self-discovery instead of final statements. Rumi, the mystic, said: "Knowing too much, hinders knowing at all. Die before you die." As an exercise, we can take any given subject and through reflection look at it closely in our mind and notice, what do we really know about that subject by experience, or even by inference? Has that become a rigid structure in my mind, or is it flexible and open enough that it can become a more refined, perhaps more accurate, version of itself, or that it can dissolve and be unlearned, if needed? Ideas can have such an impact on us, that they have the power to hinder or to assist progress.

This happened to me with a very crucial subject, the subject of God, where my own theosophical ideas, rooted in an Absolute Reality instead of a more reachable, tangible God, became an impediment to feel closeness with the Divine. Sometimes we have to go to the very bases and drop everything we think we know. For me, in that particular case was asking simple questions like: What is God? How and where do I experience the presence of the Divine? In a way, undefining God and seeking the actual experience instead. We want to grasp intellectually things that can only be known through experience, and in the effort of trying, consistently in that direction, what was once hidden becomes somewhat tangible. Then, inner

guidance assists us, sometimes from within, sometimes through external signs.

Continuing in this direction, let us explore a little now, how this self-discovery looks like in our day-to-day reality. How do we actually do it? Let us look at it from the two perspectives we already spoke about, again, as two movements that can be seen as one. The first one as the recognition of what we are not, of all that is impermanent in us, and the second one as the intentional attempt to remain receptive to our true nature, to what is permanent.

Let us take any given situation. We are cutting vegetables on a wooden board. We tell ourselves, "I am going to pay attention now, and become aware of the present moment." We begin to notice the light of the room, the texture of the vegetables, their fragrance, the movement of the hands, so coordinated, so fast, that we cannot perceive what is commanding them to move. We notice the breath expanding and contracting the chest, and for a moment we reach the part of us that is witnessing all that experience. In that moment we find ourselves in the presence of a peaceful silence and the complete absence of conflict. All of a sudden, a thought pops up, usually a memory of the past or some projection into the future. That is a crucial moment.

If we are alert enough we see the thought appearing, we recognize it, and because the task was to pay attention to the present moment, we relax, we let go of the thought, and go back to the experience. If we are not alert to the appearance

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of the thought, we immediately become the thought, completely inadvertently. We get hooked, we take shape. We were shapeless in a peaceful silence, a thought appears and we become the thought. Now we take shape. If the thought is neutral, it just causes movement, but if the thought is entangled with emotion, as they can be, we either get hooked into the emotion and take that shape, bringing along some level of suffering, or we notice it, let go of it, and come back to the present moment, sometimes noticing for a while the lingering sensation the emotion left.

In this “returning to the present moment”, again and again, the presence that is witnessing gains ground. We begin to feel less confined. The spaces in between thoughts become longer, sometimes allowing a steady silence to remain. For those with a devotional nature, the remembrance of God dwelling in the heart, or pervading all, may infuse the silence with a gentle loving quality. Then the importance of not taking shape becomes apparent by contrast. Now I know that when I take shape I can become a mess, and when I remain shapeless I experience peace. We now know, through experience, that in the absence of movement there is a loving silence and layers of peaceful being.

The living presence of the Divine only palpitates in the here and now. If we are not here now, we miss its presence and its influence cannot reach us. As we empty ourselves of movement, different depths of silence begin to emerge, and who we are finds expression. As the second sutra

in *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* tells us, “Yoga is establishing the mind in stillness.” The union of all the aspects of our nature with subtler levels of reality occurs in the stillness of the mind. The sutras continue to say that stillness develops through practice and non-identification, in the effort of remaining present.

As we cultivate this state of being we do not become selective, we become spacious and welcome all. We do not reject anything, we learn to stay with all that comes, pleasant or painful, in a more non-judgmental openness to ourselves and to whatever arises. This experience can gain more solid ground as we regularly sit in meditation without distractions, when we intentionally set the external conditions for outer and inner silence, but this is also something that can be practiced moment by moment as well.

To be able to advance boldly without, in whatever experience we are facing, retreating within becomes essential. Like the ebb and flow of the tide, like the inbreath and outbreath, there is also an inward and outward movement in the inner life. Retreating within will begin to reveal with greater clarity how to advance without. Living without inward movement is like living without an inbreath.

In spacious awareness, what was hidden begins to be seen — the way we justify ourselves, the way we close down, the way we want to control life, and the stories we tell ourselves. We see our motivations, and the range of thoughts and emotions that we have cultivated. We see them, in a space that is loving and

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compassionate, and we set them free, because, as a dear friend of mine says: "They, too, long to be free." On the other hand, we also begin to see a steadier center of peace become more apparent, a loving quality infusing our inner world and permeating our actions, a greater need for silence, a growing longing burning in our hearts that compels us to surrender, to offer ourselves fully, trusting in the process.

There was this Christian mystic, Bernadette Roberts, who experienced profound stages of Union. She wrote that to know the will of God we have only to remain silent. Remain in the still center which is the perfect acceptance of the present moment and what we are at the moment. As she was having the most disconcerting experiences, she was desperately seeking reference outside, until one day she realized that all the intellectual searching she was doing was nothing more than the refusal to accept the present moment, and her present state, that was unfolding constantly.

She then saw that the secret of the unitive life was the graced ability to live in a passive silence of wills, a silence which is always here and now, and always one with God. Eventually, she arrived to a knowing that many others have arrived to as well, before and after her: that the truest communication with

God is absolute, total silence, and that there is not a single word in existence that can convey this communication.

Saint Teresa of Avila says that all difficulties in prayer can be traced to one cause; "praying as if God were absent". That is not only true for prayer, or for meditation, but for living as well. Just sitting here, is not just sitting here, it is sitting in the presence of the Divine. Listening to someone is not just listening to someone, but listening to a fragment of the Divine Life. Cutting the vegetables is not just cutting the vegetables, but being in the presence of the Divine. There is nothing small or big, all is equally sacred.

The natural consequence of this understanding is the realization that there are no others. And with that blooms effortlessly the responsibility to lessen the suffering of all. The measure of that understanding will determine the measure of our unconditionality and our commitment.

To close, an invitation through the words of the poet David White:

Enough. These few words are enough.

If not these words, this breath.

If not this breath, this sitting here.

This opening to life

we have refused

again and again

until now.

Until now. ✧

When I come to inquire into something, if I have prejudices or conclusions about it I cannot inquire. Therefore there must be freedom to inquire.

J. Krishnamuti, San Diego, CA, 27.2.1974

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

297. CALM and unmoved the pilgrim glideth up the stream that to Nirvāna leads. He knoweth that the more his feet will bleed, the whiter will himself be washed. He knoweth well that after seven short and fleeting births Nirvāna will be his. . .

300. . . Yet one word. Canst thou destroy divine compassion? Compassion is no attribute. It is the Law of laws — eternal harmony, Alaya's [the Universal Soul, the root of all things] Self; a shoreless universal essence, the light of everlasting right, and fitness of all things, the law of love eternal.

301. The more thou dost become at one with it, thy being melted in its being, the more thy soul unites with that which is, the more thou wilt become compassion absolute.

307. Now bend thy head and listen well, O Bodhisattva — compassion speaks and saith: "Can there be bliss when all that lives must suffer? Shalt thou be saved and hear the whole world cry?"

309. Thou shalt attain the seventh step and cross the gate of final knowledge but only to wed woe — if thou wouldst be Tathāgata [Buddha-like], follow upon thy predecessor's steps, remain unselfish till the endless end.

310. Thou art enlightened — choose thy way.

311. Behold the mellow light that floods the eastern sky. In signs of praise both heaven and earth unite. And from the fourfold manifested powers a chant of love ariseth, both from the flaming fire and flowing water, and from sweet-smelling earth and rushing wind.

312. Hark! . . . from the deep unfathomable vortex of that golden light in which the Victor bathes, ALL NATURE'S wordless voice in thousand tones ariseth to proclaim:

313. JOY UNTO YE, O MEN OF MYALBA [hellish earth].

314. A PILGRIM HATH RETURNED BACK FROM THE OTHER SHORE.

315. A NEW ARHAN [saviour of humankind] IS BORN . . .

316. *Peace to all beings.*

H. P. Blavatsky (1831–1891), from *The Voice of the Silence*

Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge: How It Was Written — II

DANIEL H. CALDWELL AND DOSS McDAVID

IN the first part of this article we have shown how HPB's original set of cryptic notes evolved into the polished philosophical explanation that appears in the *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge*. In the following pages we continue showing how the process occurred.

Example 6.

HPB's Notebook:

Responding to "5. A MAN CAN CHOOSE WHAT HE SHALL THINK ABOUT, CAN THE ANALOGY BE APPLIED TO AH-HI?"
5. No; a man has free will and individual will. The Ah-hi have only a Collective one will among them, the original impulse of the Law that emanates from the Causeless Cause, periodically.

Transcription of the meeting:

Mr A. Keightley: "A man can choose what he shall think about, can the analogy be applied to Ah-hi?"

Mme Blavatsky: No, because a man has free will and the Ah-hi have no free will. They have collective will. They are obliged to act simultaneously. It is one law that

gives them the impulse and they have to act just according to that law. I do not call it free will. Free will can exist only in man, in a man who has a mind with consciousness, which acts and makes him perceive things not only within himself but outside himself also. These Ah-hi simply are forces; you don't take them to be men, do you?

Mr A. Keightley: No, but I take them to be conscious agents in the work.

Mme Blavatsky: Conscious in so far that they act within the universal consciousness. The Manasaputra is a different thing when they come on the third plane.

Mr Hall: Can the Ah-hi be said to be enjoying bliss?

Mme Blavatsky: Why should they enjoy bliss or non-bliss? What have they done to do so? I don't think they enjoy anything of the kind. They cannot smoke cigarettes even when they like. Why should they enjoy bliss? What extraordinary ideas you have! You can enjoy bliss only when you have known what suffering is.

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Mr Hall: I was making a distinction in my mind between bliss and happiness.

Mme Blavatsky: I thought it was the same thing; you can have neither happiness nor bliss if you have not known suffering.

Mr Hall: I was thinking of bliss as the state of the Absolute.

Mme Blavatsky: You suppose the Absolute is bliss? The Absolute can have no condition, no attribute, nothing at all. The Absolute is conditionless; that is the first thing to learn about the absolute. It is only that which is finite and differentiated which can have some attribute or something of the kind.

Dr Williams: How can they be said to be conscious intelligences in as much as intelligence is such a complex thing?

Mme Blavatsky: Because the English language does not furnish us with a better word . . .

Dr Williams: There may not be one word, but I think a collection of words would express Anything.

Mme Blavatsky: Oh, then try, if you please, to do so!

Published Transactions:

Q. *A man can choose what he will think about; can the analogy be applied to the Ah-hi?*

A. No; because a man has free will and the Ah-hi have none. They are obliged to act simultaneously, for the law under which they must act gives them the impulse. Free will can only exist in a Man who has both mind and consciousness, which act and make him perceive things both within and without himself. The "Ah-hi" are Forces, not human Beings.

Q. *But are they not conscious agents in the work?*

A. Conscious in as far as they act within the universal consciousness. But the consciousness of the Manasaputra on the third plane is quite different. It is only then that they become *Thinkers*. Besides, Occultism, unlike modern Science, maintains that every atom of matter, when once differentiated, becomes endowed with *its own* kind of Consciousness. Every *cell* in the human body (as in every animal) is endowed with its own peculiar discrimination, instinct, and, speaking relatively, with intelligence.

Q. *Can the Ah-hi be said to be enjoying bliss?*

A. How can they be subject to bliss or non-bliss? Bliss can only be appreciated, and becomes such when suffering is known.

Q. *But there is a distinction between happiness and bliss.*

A. Granting that there may be, still there can be neither happiness nor bliss without a contrasting experience of suffering and pain.

Q. *But we understand that bliss, as the state of the Absolute, was intended to be referred to.*

A. This is still more illogical. How can the ABSOLUTE be said to *feel*? The Absolute can have no condition nor attribute. It is only that which is finite and differentiated which can have any feeling or attitude predicated of it.

Q. *Then the Ah-hi cannot be said to be conscious intelligences, when intelligence is so complex?*

A. Perhaps the term is erroneous, but owing to the poverty of European languages there seems to be no other choice.

Q. *But perhaps a phrase would represent*

the idea more correctly? The term seems to mean a force which is a unity, not a complex action and reaction of several forces, which would be implied by the word "intelligence". The noumenal aspect of phenomenal force would per-haps better express the idea.

A. Or perhaps we may represent to ourselves the idea as a flame, a unity; the rays from this flame will be complex, each acting in its own straight line. the Ah-hi are the flame from which the rays stream forth, becoming more and more differentiated as they fall deeper into matter, until they finally reach this world of ours, with its teeming millions of inhabitants and sensuous beings, and then they become truly complex. . . . Are not the prismatic rays fundamentally one single white ray? From the one they become three; from the three, seven; from which seven primaries they fall into infinitude. Referring back to the so-called "consciousness" of the Ah-hi, that consciousness cannot be judged by the standard of human perceptions. It is on quite another plane.

Example 7.

HPB's Notebook:

Responding to "6. YOU SAY THAT DURING SLEEP 'MIND IS NOT' ON THE MATERIAL PLANE, BUT IT IS IMPLIED THAT DURING THIS PERIOD MIND IS ACTIVE ON ANOTHER PLANE. CAN YOU GIVE US A DEFINITION OF THE CHARACTERISTICS WHICH DISTINGUISH MIND IN THE WAKING STATE FROM MIND DURING SLEEP OF THE BODY?"

6. The reasoning higher mind of the

physical man is not; his front brain or cerebrum sleeps; but his back brains or the cerebellum is wide awake. This human mind passes in sleep from the plane of the objective & illusionary Universe, to the astral & still more illusionary plane. I say still more because it is so full of these terrestrial emanations. Unless the Higher Ego helps it, it becomes more confused than ever.

Transcription of the meeting:

Mr A. Keightley: Next question. You say that during deep sleep "mind is not" on the material plane; but it is implied that during this period mind is active on another plane. Can you give us a definition of the characteristics which distinguish mind in the waking state from mind during the sleep of the body?

Mme Blavatsky: Well, I suppose there is a great difference between the two. You see, the reason in higher minds sleeps, but the instinctual mind is awakened. That is the difference. The reason of the higher mind, in the physical man, is not always the same. Today I have been looking at a book and I learnt at last the great difference between cerebrum and cerebellum. I was always mixing them up in my mind, I was not sure of them, and this morning I on purpose went to look and I at last learnt that this is the cerebellum (pointing to the head) and this the cerebrum. The one sleeps when the other is awake.

Published Transactions:

Q. "During deep sleep, mind is not on the material plane"; is it therefore to be inferred that during this period mind is active on another plane? Is there any

definition of the characteristics which distinguish mind in the waking state from mind during the sleep of the body?

A. There is, of course; but I do not think that a discussion upon it would be pertinent or useful now; suffice to say that often the reasoning faculty of the higher mind may be asleep, and the instinctual mind be fully awake. It is the physiological distinction between the cerebrum and the cerebellum; the one sleeps and the other is awake. . . .

The instinctual mind finds expression through the cerebellum, and is also that of the animals. With man during sleep the functions of the cerebrum cease, and the cerebellum carries him on to the Astral plane, a still more unreal state than even the waking plane of illusion; for so we call this state which the majority of you think so real. And the Astral plane is still more deceptive, because it reflects indiscriminately the good and the bad, and is so chaotic.

Q. The fundamental conditions of the mind in the waking state are space and time: do these exist for the mind (Manas) during the sleep of the physical body?

A. Not as we know them. Moreover, the answer depends on which *Manas* you mean — the higher or the lower. It is only the latter which is susceptible of hallucinations about space and time; for instance, a man in the dreaming state may live in a few seconds the events of a lifetime. For the perceptions and apprehensions of the Higher Ego there is neither space nor time.

Example 8.

HPB's Notebook:

Responding to "7. IT HAS BEEN STATED THE MANAS (MIND) IS THE VEHICLE OF BUDDHI, BUT THE UNIVERSAL MIND HAS BEEN SPOKEN OF AS MAHA-BUDDHI. CAN YOU DEFINE FOR US THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN MANAS AND BUDDHI AS APPLIED IN A UNIVERSAL SENSE AND MANAS AND BUDDHI AS MANIFESTED IN MAN?"

7. Cosmic Buddhi is certainly the vehicle of the Universal Mahat, for in this sense Buddhi is Prakriti nature, in all its seven stages from Akasa down to Bhumi, Earth, or Malkuth, as it is called in the Kabala. But the human Buddhi derives its essence only from Akasa, the 2d principle, which is Mulaprakriti, the place of Atman being taken by Parabrahman. In man it is divine as man is in the higher triad, the posttype of the Higher never manifested Triad as Father Mother and Son (Manas).

Transcription of the meeting:

Mr A. Keightley: Next question: It has been stated that Manas (mind) is the vehicle of Buddhi, but the universal mind has been spoken of as Maha Buddhi. Can you define the difference between Manas and Buddhi as applied in a universal sense, and Manas and Buddhi as manifested in man?

Mme. Blavatsky: Well, cosmic Buddhi is the vehicle of Mahat, that is to say, in the sense of Buddhi being Prakriti and this is Prakriti; at least it descends in the seven planes, that is the difference, and the Buddhi of man proceeds from the highest Akasa. He does not go on the highest

plane until he comes to the most objective plane. Maha-Buddhi is used there in the same sense as Prakriti in its seven manifestations.

Mr B. Keightley: But is the vehicle of Mahat, the universal mind? Does the Manas in man proceed from the universal mind too?

Mme Blavatsky: Yes it proceeds from Akasa — Buddhi, I mean, or Manas on a lower plane. The Manasa-Dhyanis are the same Ah-hi I just told you of on a lower plane.

Mr B. Keightley: Because, of course, one would naturally think, as Mahat is the universal mind, that Manas in man proceeds from the universal mind.

Mme Blavatsky: It is just the same Prakriti in its last manifestation. It is what in the Kabbalah is called Malkuth, the Bride of Heavenly Man — well, earth, everything earthly, or atomic.

Mr B. Keightley: I.e., the plane of objective consciousness, in fact, waking consciousness.

Published Transactions:

Q. Manas is said to be the vehicle of Buddhi, but the universal mind has been spoken of as a Maha-Buddhi. What then is the distinction between the terms Manas and Buddhi, employed in a universal sense, and Manas and Buddhi as manifested in man?

A. Cosmic Buddhi, the emanation of the Spiritual Soul, *Alaya*, is the vehicle of Mahat only when that Buddhi corresponds to Prakriti. Then it is called Maha-Buddhi. This Buddhi differentiates through seven planes, whereas the Buddhi in man

is the vehicle of Atman, which vehicle is of the essence of the highest plane of Akasa and therefore does not differentiate. The difference between Manas and Buddhi in man is the same as the difference between the Manasaputra and the Ah-hi in Kosmos.

Example 9.

HPB's Notebook:

Responding to "8. CAN THERE BE CONSCIOUSNESS WITHOUT MIND?"

8. Consciousness is only a faculty of the mind, the quality of self-perception in the rational Ego. What is mind — in our understanding it is the Soul. Then you may just as well ask if a conscious Soul exists . . . which survives. To doubt that Consciousness can exist without mind is the same as saying that there is no Soul, no individual self-conscious soul, at any rate.

Transcription of the meeting:

Mr A. Keightley: Question 8. "Can there be consciousness without mind?"

Mme Blavatsky: There we come to the great question. Consciousness — what is it not? It is only the faculty of the mind, is not it? It is that which permeates the mind or the Ego, and causes it to perceive that such a mind has action, that such a thing is so — is not that it? How do you explain it otherwise? Consciousness is not a thing per se. It is a faculty of the mind. That is what Hamilton will tell you and what all the Eastern idealists will tell you. They cannot tell you anything else. It is a thing inseparable from mind — unless it is the mind of an idiot, of course you won't have any consciousness.

Mr A. Keightley: You say the fashion

nowadays amongst philosophers is to speak slightly . . . of the idea of making mind an entity.

Mme Blavatsky: Of course, but mind is still the soul. It is perfectly synonymous with soul. Those who don't believe in soul certainly will tell you that there is no such thing as consciousness apart from brain, and once the brain is dead and the man is dead, there is no consciousness. The Nihilists, and Atheists, and the Materialists will tell you so. If you believe in mind, mind is the soul or the Ego. What kind of a soul is that if it has not any consciousness?

Mr A. Keightley: But they accept consciousness.

Mme Blavatsky: But not after the death of man, while we accept consciousness after death, and say the real consciousness and the real freedom of the Ego or the soul begins only after the physical death of man. It is then that it is no longer impeded by terrestrial matter that it is free, that it can perceive everything.

Mr A. Keightley: Because they confine their consciousness to sense of perception.

Mme Blavatsky: That is what they do, and we don't. That is the difference between us.

Published Transactions:

Q. Manas is mind, and the Ah-hi, it is said, can no more have any individual Mind, or that which we call mind, on this plane than Buddhi can. Can there be Consciousness without Mind?

A. Not on this plane of matter. But why not on some other and higher plane? Once we postulate a Universal Mind, both the brain, the mind's vehicle, and Conscious-

ness, its faculty, must be quite different on a higher plane from what they are here. They are nearer to the *Absolute ALL*, and must therefore be represented by a substance infinitely more homogeneous; something *sui generis*, and entirely beyond the reach of our intellectual perceptions. Let us call or imagine it an incipient and incognizable state of primeval differentiation. On that higher plane, as it seems to me, Mahat — the great *Manvantaric* Principle of Intelligence — acts as a Brain, through which the Universal and Eternal Mind radiates the Ah-hi, representing the resultant consciousness or ideation. As the shadow of this primordial *triangle* falls lower and lower through the descending planes, it becomes with every stage more material.

Q. It becomes the plane on which Consciousness perceives objective manifestations. Is it so?

A. Yes. But here we come face to face with the great problem of Consciousness, and shall have to fight Materialism. For what is Consciousness? According to modern Science it is a faculty of the Mind like volition. We say so too; but add that while Consciousness is not a thing *per se*, Mind is distinctly — in its Manvantaric functions at least — an Entity. Such is the opinion of all the Eastern Idealists.

Q. It is, however, the fashion nowadays to speak slightly of the idea that the mind is an entity.

A. Nevertheless, mind is a term perfectly synonymous with Soul. Those who deny the existence of the latter will of course contend that there is no such thing as

consciousness apart from brain, and at death consciousness ceases. Occultists, on the contrary, affirm that consciousness exists after death, and that then only the real consciousness and freedom of the Ego commences, when it is no longer impeded by terrestrial matter.

Q. *Perhaps the former view arises from limiting the meaning of the term “consciousness” to the faculty of perception?*

A. If so, occultism is entirely opposed to such a view.

Example 10.

HPB’s Notebook:

[Numbering of questions starts over.]

Responding to “1. WHAT ARE THE SEVEN WAYS TO BLISS?”

Sloka 4.

1. Practical faculty of which you may learn hereafter.

Transcription of the meeting:

Mr A. Keightley: Then we come to the fourth Sloka. “The seven ways to bliss were not. The great causes of misery (Nidana and Maya) were not.” The question, is what are the seven ways to bliss?

Mme Blavatsky: Well, they are practically faculties, of which you will know more later on, perhaps, if you go a little deeper into esotericism.

Mr A. Keightley: Then the seven ways are not mentioned?

Mme Blavatsky: No, they are not mentioned in *The Secret Doctrine* are they? They are not, I should say not.

Mr A. Keightley: I don’t think they are.

Published Transactions:

Q. *What are the seven ways to bliss?*

A. They are certain faculties of which the student will know more when he goes deeper into occultism.

Example 11.

HPB’s Notebook:

Responding to “2. ARE THE FOUR TRUTHS OF THE HIMALAYAN SCHOOL THE SAME AS THE FOUR TRUTHS MENTIONED BY EDWIN ARNOLD IN HIS BOOK *THE LIGHT OF ASIA*?”

2. Almost the same. Read them.

3. All these are either theological dogmas or mysteries of the ways of the unfolding Soul which belong to the highest Esoteric Teaching.

Transcription of the meeting:

Mr A. Keightley: Then the question is: Are the four truths of the Hinayāna School the same as the four truths mentioned by Edwin Arnold in his book, *The Light of Asia*?

Mme Blavatsky: Almost the same. He mentions something which is somewhat different from it.

Mr A. Keightley: The first is of sorrow, the second is of sorrows’ cause, the third of sorrow’s ceasing, and the fourth is the way.

Mme Blavatsky: What do you understand by Edwin Arnold’s explanation?

Mr B. Keightley: Read the passage please, Arch.

(Mr A. Keightley then read the passage indicated in *The Light of Asia*.)

Mme Blavatsky: All this is theological and all this exoteric; this is what you can find in all the volumes that any Buddhist Priest will give you; but there is far more explanation, of course, in Aryasanga’s works, though that is esoteric,

too. Arnold took it from the Singhalese Buddhism.

Published Transactions:

Q. *Are the Four Truths of the Hinayana school the same as those mentioned by Sir Edwin Arnold in "The Light of Asia"; the first of which is the Path of Sorrow; the second of Sorrow's cause; the third of Sorrow's ceasing; and the fourth is the WAY?*

A. All this is theological and exoteric, and to be found in all the Buddhist scriptures; and the above seems to be taken from Singhalese or Southern Buddhism. The subject, however, is far more fully treated of in the Aryasanga School. Still even there the four truths have one meaning for the regular priest of the Yellow Robe, and quite another for the real Mystics.

Example 12.

HPB's Notebook:

Responding to "4. ARE NIDANA AND MAYA (GREAT CAUSES OF MISERY) THE ASPECTS OF THE ABSOLUTE?"

4. They are the manifestations of the One Law, which acts universally.

5. Nidana is the cause producing effect, the concatenation of causes & effects, & Maya is simply illusion. If you call the Universe an illusion then of course it is Maya with everything else like Nirvana, etc.

Transcription of the meeting:

Mr A. Keightley: "Are Nidana and Maya the (great causes of misery) aspects of the Absolute?"

Mme Blavatsky: Is that number 4?

Mr A. Keightley: That is number 4.

Mme Blavatsky: Now what can Nidana,

I ask myself, and Maya have to do with each other? Nidana is the concatenation of cause and effect. The twelve Nidanas are the enumeration of the chief causes which produce material for Karma to strike you very heavily. Maya is simply an illusion. Now what has Nidana to do with Maya? I cannot understand what analogy, what idea one has in common with the other. If you take the universe as an illusion, a Maya, then certainly the Nidānas as being in the universe are included in the Maya, but apart from that, what has one thing to do with the other.

Mr B. Keightley: Then why do you class them together in that way?

Mme Blavatsky: They are two distinct things. Maya is an illusion. You think yourself a very grand fellow, that you can go and compete with any Ah-his. . . But you make a fool of yourself and then comes Nirvana and shows it to you. It is just then, I think that the man cannot take into his own head that he is not separate from the one and he goes and thinks himself a very great man in his own individuality, and he is nothing at all. He is still one in reality. It is nothing but Maya, an illusion; but taking this Maya it is illusion or ignorance that brings us to commit all the acts which awaken the Nidanas, which produce the first cause of Nidana; this cause having been produced, the effects follow and there is Karma. Of course Nidanas and the production of bad Karmic effects and Māyā are at the root of every evil. If we knew what we are, we would not do such things. Every one of us thinks he or she

is a unit and something very grand in the eyes of all the authorities upstairs that you may think of; we are simply a drop of water in the ocean not to be distinguished from another drop, that is all we are. This sense of separateness is at the root of all evil.

Published Transactions:

Q. *Are Nidana and Maya (the great causes of misery) aspects of the Absolute?*

A. Nidana means the concatenation of cause and effect; the twelve Nidanas are the enumeration of the chief causes which produce the severest reaction or effects under the Karmic law. Although there is no connection between the terms Nidana and Maya in themselves, Maya being simply illusion, yet if we consider the

universe as Maya, or illusion, then certainly the Nidanas, as being moral agents in the universe, are included in Maya. It is Maya, illusion or ignorance, which awakens Nidanas; and the cause or causes having been produced, the effects follow according to Karmic law. To take an instance: we all regard ourselves as Units, although essentially we are one indivisible Unit, drops in the ocean of Being, not to be distinguished from other drops. Having then produced this cause, the whole discord of life follows immediately as an effect; in reality it is the endeavor of Nature to restore harmony and maintain equilibrium. It is this sense of separateness which is the root of all evil. ✧

Acknowledgement: Thanks to Michele Sender for transcribing HPB's notes.

Woman's mission is to become the mother of future occultists — of those who will be born without sin. On the elevation of woman the world's redemption and salvation hinge. And not till woman bursts the bonds of her sexual slavery to which she has ever been subjected will the world obtain an inkling of what she really is and of her proper place in the economy of Nature.

Koot Hoomi
From "Eminent Occultist", notes on treatise by Eliphas Levi

“Don’t Become Anything” — A Parable

KAMALA NELLEN

I HAVE followed the same spiritual path for over 46 years and received much understanding through dedication to my Masters and the path they showed me. Since I started writing this article and sharing this teaching as told by my Guru, it has been a deepening learning experience for me. The more I opened myself to examine the intention with which I began, the more has been revealed to me, as I shifted from a cursory remembering into a much deeper understanding and, finally, into an assimilation of the universal truth of it.

My Guru never wasted his words; inherent in them was the will that we imbibe the concepts he shared with us through contemplation or direct experience and make them our own. Everything he said has unfolded through continued study along with some event on my spiritual journey that catapults me into deeper understanding. Always the Master held the intention that his students become skillful and joyful in navigating our lives, and for that I am eternally grateful.

This is how the process of writing this article began. Recently someone told me

they were listening to a public talk by a spiritual teacher on the topic of not harming (*ahimsa*). During the talk, the speaker criticized the listener's teacher. The listener was shocked in hearing her teacher's name spoken of in such a way by someone who didn't know him. It felt to her counterintuitive in the context of not harming. It is distressing to hear these kinds of stories, especially when one is doing their best to embrace not harming. Her experience reminded me of a parable my Guru related to our assembly several decades ago to illustrate a profound spiritual teaching. So I shared it with her:

“Don’t become anything.”

Once a Master told his disciples: “Don’t become anything.” Shortly thereafter he went on a journey and asked a disciple to accompany and assist him while traveling. After a long day of walking, they came across a cabin in the woods. There was no one inside so, since they were tired and, in addition, it being late in the day, they decided to rest there for the night. Several hours after they had retired, they were roughly awakened by soldiers who

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“Don’t Become Anything” — A Parable

had banged on the door and stomped into the cabin. The soldiers had come to prepare the place for the arrival of the King. In fact, it was the King’s private cottage and they were quite alarmed at finding two mendicants sleeping in the beds. One soldier shouted at the Master: “This cottage belongs to the King! Who are you and why are you here?!” The Master remained mute and expressionless. After a few minutes, assuming he was in fact a deaf-mute, and therefore harmless, the soldiers carried him out and left him in the yard.

Re-entering the cabin the soldiers went to the disciple: “Who are you and why are you here?!” He began to explain himself: “I am the disciple of a great master.” Then he proceeded to tell the story of why they were there. The soldiers beat him up soundly and threw him out of the house. Badly bruised and broken, and in a lot of pain, the disciple moaned to his master: “Oh Master, I can hardly move, yet how is it that you yourself are unharmed?” The Master then reminded the disciple: “I told you not to become anything.”

This teaching is found across arguably more than a few esoteric spiritual traditions, especially in their origins. I have personally experienced being the brunt of harmful criticism when I have defended a teacher or path I subscribe to, as well as feeling hurt from reading stories in the news about others doing the same on a much larger scale, through videos, movies, or reading gossip spread liberally in print media. It seems whenever one becomes something, and in some way comes into

open public view, we have compounded the issue by opening ourselves to those who do not understand — in fact, whenever we become someone or something, we become vulnerable to being unjustly criticized by somebody.

After having heard my friend’s story and sharing the parable with her, my comprehension immediately catalyzed into an even deeper awareness of the consequences of comparing or criticizing one who has become something. I saw that I had become acutely sensitized to witnessing myself and others, having been guilty, more times than I like to admit, of harming others as well as myself when I or another criticized a spiritual teacher or path, opinion, or belief espoused by another that I compare as less than my own. The lesson has been made crystal clear to me. Why? Because my heart hurts when I see or hear my own or another’s denigrating words. When I compare one path or belief to another, claiming one is greater and the other lesser, I am hurting another’s heart, whether they are aware of it or not; my heart knows. This is the very opposite of the teaching of *ahimsa*.

In light of my deepening examination, the challenge becomes clear. When we come across someone who has become something — a Master or teacher — can we refrain from offending that person because we disagree or follow a different path, or no path?

In Kali Yuga¹ it is not just a few, but hundreds of thousands who jump up ready to malign valuable truths,

“Don’t Become Anything” — A Parable

teachers, and paths on which we or others are walking. Again, this results in profound harm, not only to the listeners but also to the speaker. Therefore, it would very much benefit us to weigh our words before uttering them. Perhaps, I should add, as Jesus said, not to speak about what we know before those who do not comprehend, and therefore may be inclined to harm us.

Many of us who cast such aspersions with our words or actions have had only a cursory experience with the Teacher or the path, and in many cases have never even set foot on that path nor ever met the Master. It is easy to unfairly criticize what and whom we do not understand or even know at all. If one is sensitive, the heart always aches a little whenever

we see this happen or do so ourselves. The result for me has been bumps and bruises while trying to explain or justify the teachings of my path or the value of my own Master to others who do not understand.

To endeavor toward seeing the shared reality of all the great traditions while staying true to my own path, without the need to justify or prove my own understanding, is a shift that has taken root. In my experience, we are all here to learn and grow into mutual love and compassion for *all* life, no matter what may be our personal journey. To remain silent in the face of criticism is a high bar and, I believe a call of our times. Let us simply keep walking our journey, staying true to ourselves, as we continue growing into the Light. ✧

Endnotes

1. The last of four ages described in Indian scriptural texts, when righteousness has only one quarter of its original strength and unrighteousness is found everywhere.

Do not think that God is only in your heart. You should be able to recognize him in every garden, in every forest, in every house, and in every person. You should be able to see him on every path, in every philosophy, and in every group. You should be able to see him in all acts, in all deeds, in all thoughts and feelings, and in all expressions of them. . . . If you really love him, if you want to find his love and be blessed by it, then see him in every corner of the universe.

Shams Tabrizi

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