

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.

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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.



THE THEOSOPHIST

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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.

Practice and Freedom

TIM BOYD

I WOULD like to consider two ideas that are central to the life of anyone whose focus is unfoldment. The two ideas are dissimilar in many ways, but are completely interrelated. They are the ideas of spiritual practice and freedom. Those people who have demonstrated some degree of experience of freedom have great difficulty describing the nature of that experience.

What is freedom? Anything we read or hear falls short of the clear definition which our minds demand. Unable to say what freedom is, the great and inwardly free people generally speak in terms of what freedom is *not*. We can understand that a little better. So we have H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) speaking about the spiritual path being a road steep and thorny that leads to the center of the universe. But what is meant by “the center of the universe”? J. Krishnamurti describes Truth as “a pathless land”. He is not saying what it *is*, but what it is *not*. It is not a place where there are well-worn pathways that can describe its dimensions and outline.

Whether we look to the Buddha, Jesus, Ramana Maharshi, or anyone regarded as enlightened and free, what people like these do describe in great depth, is Practice. All of them spent most of

their lives teaching ways to remove the obstacles that prevent our experience of genuine freedom. Even though they themselves were beyond the need of these practices, they set the example of a life steeped in a practice that has the potential to lead to the state which characterizes their norm.

So what is practice? Practice is any regular action or activity that we undertake under a certain system or set of rules that develops a skill in action. Familiar examples are in the field of music or sports. Someone who plays a musical instrument is not born playing that instrument. They familiarize themselves with the methods of making sounds. They learn the notation relating to how those sounds are generated. There is a physical aspect to it, with a condition of body that is required to do it, and do it well. No one is born looking at dots on a piece of paper and knowing that it relates to notes, specific sounds, and rhythms that they indicate. Day after day the body, the eye, and the mind are trained before the skill becomes innate and unthought. It is the same exact training with sports.

The result of this is that someone becomes able to act without the distraction of thought. One experiences a sense of ease in the midst of sports competition

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or the differing sounds and rhythms of orchestral music. That is the experience of the skillful musician or athlete. But there is something beyond skill that can arise from intensive practice. Occasionally there comes a moment where the skill has been developed and where there is an intense involvement in the piece of music or the sporting event, where they enter another state of being.

There is a branch of psychology that has developed around the study of this condition of being described as “flow”, when the individual enters a space where the limits of one’s normal boundaries dissolve. It no longer becomes a matter of paying attention to notes on a page, or movement on a basketball court. It moves to a state where the people describing the experience say that it felt as if their movement was directed by something else.

Often it is described as if they are even in a river, and it is this more expansive river that is moving the music or their part in a sporting event. To those who have had that experience of “flowing”, inevitably the word “free” is associated with the experience of moving outside of long-accepted personal boundaries. Practice and intense involvement precipitate such a moment.

Our first encounter with a spiritual path usually moves us to study, to regularly exposing ourselves to materials that elevate the mind. Annie Besant was famous for saying “If we read for one minute, we should think for two”. Also at an early stage of developing a practice we are advised of the value of meditation;

that to meditate we first need to learn how to relax the body so that its demands do not overwhelm the moment. We learn to concentrate the mind so that it is not distracted by the varying emotions and thoughts continually passing through it. And we learn to enter into a state of quiet in which there is the potential for deepening states of stillness, and ultimately even the possibility of a genuine silence.

Purification is part, maybe even the root, of this daily practice. We are advised to refrain from foods or behaviors that cause harm to others. There is the idea that in our personal relations we take in, and expose others to energies. These, too, should not be harmful.

Then there is *service*, which is also part of the practice. From regular practice we develop a certain skill, to quiet the mind, to recognize the upwelling of a compassionate impulse, and to express it through service of all different types. With the foundation of practice the possibility presents itself to enter the realm of genuine *freedom*.

Our focus has been on practice, but this practice is geared toward something else. So, what is freedom? If we are going to be honest, we cannot define it any better than Jesus or the Buddha, or Ramana Maharshi did. What we can say is that there are things that characterize freedom. When we are at an early stage there is the “freedom from” certain things. Often we get stuck there and go no farther.

For example, in the case of someone who is focused on the cultivation of the

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inner life there is the freedom from the commanding presence of the body and senses. Through practice their demands can be quieted. There is the freedom from thoughts and the thinking process that hooks us like a fish, and drags us along in whatever direction it chooses. That is another “freedom from” that *can* develop out of this genuine practice.

There is the freedom from preferences, including personal, family, and cultural preferences. We are swimming in an ocean of them, so much so that we do not know that we are living, and speaking, and presenting them every moment.

For example, I come from the United States. As we know, in the US women and men often walk around in jeans, t-shirts, and things like that. Here in India it is a different cultural presentation, particularly for women. The US has a culturally defined costume, and India has a costume. The US has its values that are national and regional. India, and every country, every family, has preferences that we internalize.

Then there is the freedom from the controlling self. This overwhelming core sense of a certain identity and reality — the ego — masquerades under the guise of self-control, which is nothing less than a *controlling self* that distorts the possibility of an experience of genuine freedom. Clearly that is not freedom. It is the clothing that freedom wears. In this practice/freedom relationship there are profound paradoxes. Practice involves repetition, discipline, control, and restrictions. That these limitations can lead

to freedom is, in many ways, counter-intuitive. But the idea that “habit overcomes habit” is rooted in this practice concept. It takes enormous effort to become effortless.

Because we cannot define freedom, some analogies might help us to *feel* it. The experience may be like the raindrop that falls into a body of water — a river, a lake, an ocean. The isolated drop that somehow merges with an infinite body of the same essence; the soap bubble that the child blows into the air, that bursts, frees what was apparently defined and contained within it. And finally an example that we may aspire to, that comes closer to our own experience, is that of a heart consumed, inflamed with love for another — a person, a cause, or a mate. A heart that is consumed with love is the heart that is free. It is the sign of a person who is free.

A brief poem is included at the very end of Krishnamurti’s *At the Feet of the Master*. It speaks to this movement from practice to preparedness, to freedom:

Waiting the word of the Master,
Watching the Hidden Light;
Listening to catch his orders
In the very midst of the fight;

Seeing his slightest signal
Across the heads of the throng;
Hearing his faintest whisper
Above Earth’s loudest song.

This suggestive rhyming poem is profound in the context of our consideration. What are we talking about when we consider

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practice? Waiting to hear the word, preparing ourselves to be able to wait, to attend, to watch, is the process of practice. We prepare ourselves. And in that process, what are we doing? In the imagery of the poem we are watching for something that is hidden, a hidden light. We are also listening for the sound, for the current of “sound” that can move us to another plane, to connect us with that Master which is spoken of, whether that is a person, or the central core of our being.

We watch, we listen. As we become more proficient in our watching, there comes a point when we see. “Seeing his slightest signal” — from the practice and effort of stilling, we see, and in listening ultimately we hear above “Earth’s loudest song”. So we see and we hear. In and of itself, this is not freedom. What it is, is that moment of possibility poised for the experience of freedom to make itself known through us.

As a final analogy, let us look at a musical instrument. In past times, before flutes were made of metal, they had their beginnings as a reed, or a piece of bamboo. A flute began as one among many reeds growing out of a marsh somewhere, anywhere. Its growth followed the normal course of any blade of grass. It expanded

and stretched toward the sun. However, at some point a particular reed is harvested, cut off, then placed into the hands of a master instrument maker, who shapes, carves, and tunes it. The main quality the reed has to offer is the fact that it is hollow, it is empty.

After it has left the hands of the musical instrument maker, it is ready. It is poised to make music, but it is not playing any music whatsoever. The purpose of that former reed, which has now been cultivated, shaped, tuned, is to be played; and the prayer of that instrument becomes: “Play me. I am empty. I am hollow. I am waiting for the lips and breath of the master musician to blow through me.”

In that process, “I”, as that instrument, know I have a form, I have limitations, I have qualities. But in the hands of the musician all of it becomes music. Through countless hours, days, years, lifetimes of practice, there does come the point where this channel is open and the breath of spirit can flow through us. We do not have to know anything about the music that is playing, we certainly cannot control it, but we hear, and in that process we are blessed, and anyone who has ears to hear is also blessed. ✧

Each celestial body, in fact each and every atom, produces a particular sound on account of its movement, its rhythm or vibration. All these sounds and vibrations form a universal harmony in which each element, while having its own function and character, contributes to the whole.

Pythagoras

“The Golden Stairs” — I

DAVID P. BRUCE

INTRODUCTION

The prolific pen of H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) left a rich legacy for future generations of theosophical scholars, students, and curiosity seekers. It includes masterworks such as *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* as well as smaller but still notable works such as *The Key to Theosophy* and *The Voice of the Silence*. One of her shorter literary contributions — often overlooked by those familiar with her major works — is quietly nestled away in vol. 12 of her *Collected Writings*, “The Golden Stairs”. Containing just under 120 words, and devoid of technical terms requiring the assistance of a glossary, this is probably one of her more underrated and underappreciated works. But those who have studied it carefully know that its modest appearance belies its true worth. Essentially, it is a list of 13 short precepts for the spiritual traveler, followed by a brief coda:

1. A clean life
2. An open mind
3. A pure heart
4. An eager intellect
5. An unveiled spiritual perception
6. A brotherliness for all
7. A readiness to give and receive advice and instruction

8. A loyal sense of duty to the teacher
9. A willing obedience to the behests of Truth
10. A courageous endurance of personal injustice
11. A brave declaration of principles
12. A valiant defense of those who are unjustly attacked
13. A constant eye to the ideal of human progression and perfection

How we are to interpret each of these steps, and how each step relates to the others, will be discussed in due course.

Two Challenges

When we survey the considerable number of works authored by HPB, it is tempting to discount a shorter piece like “The Golden Stairs”. Its modest size and easy readability no doubt contributes to its being passed over by more ambitious readers who prefer the intellectual challenges posed by *The Secret Doctrine* or *Isis Unveiled*. Whereas these two major works combined fill nearly 3,000 pages, “The Golden Stairs” can be printed on a single sheet of paper. Also, the two aforementioned works present the reader with a slew of technical terms, the meaning and pronunciation of which require consulting a glossary. On the other hand, the language of “The Golden Stairs” could

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not be more lucid and simple. Because of these factors, a cursory reading may leave the impression that “The Golden Stairs” is nothing more than a compact collection of pleasant sounding pieties. Having duly read through them once — maybe twice — the casual reader concludes that he may now check it off his theosophical reading list and move on to something more substantial.

Nevertheless, there is more to “The Golden Stairs” than meets the eye. It contains a couple of challenges that may not readily be apparent, but they are not a matter of language, syntax, or strange terminology. The first is a matter of *application*, of putting the thirteen steps into practice, day in and day out. That sounds like a truism, but is that not always the case with short lists of moral precepts? Reading them is so much easier than applying them. Of course, this will not come as a surprise to those who have made the attempt to live according to some moral code of conduct, regardless of the religious or spiritual tradition that gave rise to that code.

The other challenge may not be so obvious, and this is where it gets interesting. Essentially, it is one of *understanding*. How can that be, you might ask? You say you have read “The Golden Stairs”, two or even three times, and you feel that you understand it completely. But do you, really? The casual reader often underestimates writings such as this. It is almost as though the unsophisticated simplicity of the language serves to camouflage the deeper layers of meaning hidden beneath

the surface of the words, just waiting to be discovered. If we are in a hurry, we will deprive ourselves of the opportunity to uncover new insights, which only come to those with patience and perseverance.

A Random List?

“The Golden Stairs” provides a set of enduring guidelines for spiritual aspirants. Its structure is simple and consists of three sections: (1) a terse directive, (2) the thirteen steps, and (3) a concluding statement. The opening sentence (often omitted in some versions) serves as an injunction to those who would climb the stairs: “Behold the truth before you.” The verb *behold* seems to be significant and deliberately chosen. Had Blavatsky written, “*See* the truth before you”, or “*Look at* the truth before you”, would the effect have been the same? I think not. Whereas the words “look” and “see” often apply to perception that is casual and momentary, the word *behold* carries the particular connotation of holding something in view, of considering it in all its aspects, of retaining in the mind’s eye a profundity, all of which suggest a deeper level of perception, as in this line from Sonnet 106 of William Shakespeare: “For we, which now behold these present days, have eyes to wonder. . .”

We may well wonder at the thirteen steps: are they a random list, or is there some logic to the sequence? Can they be divided into groups, and if so, how might that be done? Let us review them:

- [1] *A clean life*, [2] *an open mind*,
- [3] *a pure heart*, [4] *an eager intellect*,

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[5] *an unveiled spiritual perception*, [6] *a brotherliness for all*, [7] *a readiness to give and receive advice and instruction*, [8] *a loyal sense of duty to the Teacher*, [9] *a willing obedience to the behests of TRUTH, once we have placed our confidence in, and believe that Teacher to be in possession of it*; [10] *a courageous endurance of personal injustice*, [11] *a brave declaration of principles*, [12] *a valiant defense of those who are unjustly attacked*, [13] *and a constant eye to the ideal of human progression and perfection which the secret science depicts*.

For those hoping to gain a deeper understanding of “The Golden Stairs”, it would be quite beneficial to spend some time contemplating the interrelationship of the thirteen steps.

Organization

Are these thirteen steps organized in some way, or are they just an eclectic collection of admirable qualities and inspiring advice aimed at spiritual aspirants? In 1958 the Theosophical Press published an article by theosophist, Sidney Cook:

It should not surprise us if we find that HPB has given us much more than a random list of steps or stages. Does not the fact that she names them a stairway suggest that there must be order and sequence to the steps on the stairs; that the stairway has structure and form and that every step must therefore be trodden in its proper turn?

Other respected theosophical writers, including John Algeo and Joy Mills, have drawn the same conclusion, which is why

we are looking at the overall structure of the “The Golden Stairs” before discussing its thirteen steps, one at a time. I believe that knowing how the stairway is organized can lead to a deeper appreciation and understanding of its component parts.

The first four steps — *a clean life, an open mind, a pure heart, an eager intellect* — form the base of the stairway; they provide the bedrock for later stages of development. Without a strong and stable foundation, the aspirant will not reach the temple of divine wisdom, which is ultimately where this metaphorical stairway leads. Algeo includes the fifth step, *an unveiled spiritual perception*, with the first group, but I agree with Cook and Mills, who list it separately, the first four being prerequisites to its emergence. To continue, all are agreed that the remaining eight steps fall into two groups of four: *a brotherliness for all, a readiness to give and receive advice and instruction, a loyal sense of duty to the teacher, and a willing obedience to the behests of truth* form the next group, while the last one includes *a courageous endurance of personal injustice, a brave declaration of principles, a valiant defense of those who are unjustly attacked, and a constant eye to the ideal of human progression and perfection*. In other words, the steps are organized thus: $4 + 1 + 4 + 4 = 13$.

To summarize, steps 1–4 are preparatory in nature, which lead to step 5 — an unveiling of the spiritual sight. Steps 6–9 outline additional training within the context of relationships, and steps 10–13 describe the expression of

soul qualities such as courage, valor, and constancy. We have now concluded our overview of “The Golden Stairs”, and will begin our examination of each of the thirteen steps.

1. A Clean Life

There is a good reason why these thirteen steps begin with *a clean life*. It serves as the foundation for all the other steps that follow. Sidney Cook has described it as “a required basic quality for all inner development”. Similarly, John Algeo called it “an inescapable preliminary”. Some may be tempted to discount the importance of this step, as it lacks the dramatic appeal found in later ones, such as “a courageous endurance”, “a valiant defense”, or “a brave declaration”, all of which are capable of stirring the heart and imagination of the neophyte with visions of heroic action.

But “The Golden Stairs” is not an express elevator whereby one arrives effortlessly at the top floor. In order to ascend to the temple, the learner must tread each individual step, beginning with the first. In point of fact, most spiritual regimens begin with a preliminary stage designed to acclimate and prepare the novice for what lies ahead. Part of this training involves a cleansing and purification of undesirable qualities and habits. Speaking metaphorically, one does not enter the temple of divine wisdom with muddy shoes. This idea is strikingly illustrated in Dante’s masterful allegory, *Purgatorio*, wherein Dante makes the long, arduous climb up Mount Purgatory in order to ascend to Heaven.

Those of us who are drawn to esoteric teachings are accustomed to having to dig deep for hidden meanings. The elements of a clean life, however, are not shrouded in mystery or buried in occult symbolism. They are obvious, widely accepted, and easily understood. They are found in the ethical teachings of the world’s great religions, and have been put into practice by countless people who adhere to the precept that cleanliness is next to godliness.

So, what are the elements of a clean life? They include replacing falsehoods with truthfulness, both in word and action; treating others fairly and not deceptively; replacing crudeness and vulgarity by cultivating refinement and cleanliness in our patterns of thought and speech; showing kindness and charity to others, even to complete strangers, rather than going about our business with a self-absorbed and callous indifference; and finally, eliminating distractions, disorder, and non-essentials from one’s life.

If all this seems a bit daunting, those sages who have ascended the stairs tell us not to be discouraged. Absolute perfection is not required at this stage, only a reasonable degree of attainment. If we keep this in mind, the task becomes manageable and not impossible.

2. An Open Mind

Maintaining an open mind is considered to be a virtue. Here the word *maintaining*, as opposed to *having*, is chosen deliberately. To maintain something implies a conscious effort over a period of time, whereas the word “having”

may suggest passivity. The human mind is easily conditioned, a process that begins in childhood and continues through adolescence and into adulthood. Even if we were fairly open-minded as a youth, we probably settled into predictable patterns of thought as we got older. To avoid this conditioning of the mind, a process that is both natural and universal, vigilance and self-awareness are required.

In pluralistic societies, an open mind is conducive to comity and affability in social relations. Everybody has their point of view, their perspective on life, some of which may differ radically from ours, and a closed mind creates barriers that divide instead of bridges that connect. In a technological world that seems to be changing at a breathtaking pace, the solutions of yesterday may no longer be applicable today. Keeping an open mind allows us flexibility and provides options in how we respond to changing circumstances.

Does an open mind preclude us from holding opinions or beliefs? Not necessarily, as long as we hold them lightly. Admittedly, this can be difficult for some people who, when their beliefs are challenged, become defensive or adversarial. Yet our opinions may, and often do, change. Even our most cherished beliefs may change over time. We may believe in the principle of justice, for example, but our understanding of what justice means may change as we gain knowledge and experience. When we are young, our understanding is limited, but as we grow so does our capacity to understand subtle-

ties or complexities that were previously beyond our reach. Consider what G. M. A. Grube says in his *Plato's Thought*: “As we look back over Plato's works as a whole we find that his belief in an order and a purpose in the universe is the same throughout, but that the meaning of his gods deepens and develops from one period of his life to the other.”

Plato did not abandon his principles and neither should we, but an open mind makes it possible for us to see those principles in a new light and with a new understanding.

3. A Pure Heart

“The Golden Stairs” lists a pure heart as one of the preliminary qualifications needed before a genuine spiritual awakening can take place. As such, its importance to the aspirant cannot be overemphasized. Employing the metaphor of a ladder instead of a stairway, *The Voice of the Silence* issues a warning to those who are overly eager to forge ahead without having done the necessary preparatory work: “Beware lest thou shouldst set a foot still soiled upon the ladder's lowest rung.”

Cleansing impurities from the heart can be a monumental task, especially for those who live in a world of thoughts and ideas and look to logic and reason to solve all their problems. They would do well to heed the words of the French philosopher Pascal: “The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of.” As noted above, the process of purification must begin before one can safely ascend the stairway leading to the temple

of divine wisdom. Fortunately, the task is made much easier if one has practiced the first step of “The Golden Stairs” — a clean life. The person who has met that challenge is described in Psalm 24 as “He that hath clean hands and a pure heart.” (It is worth contemplating how the preliminary requirements of a clean life and a pure heart reinforce each other.)

Also of interest is the fact that in the *Book of Psalms* the word “heart” appears over 100 times. It speaks of clean hearts and pure hearts; wounded hearts and broken hearts; proud hearts and hardened hearts; troubled hearts and rejoicing hearts. Clearly, the heart is the place wherein the shifting drama of human affairs takes place. The Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky apparently had this in mind when he wrote, “Beauty is mys-terious as well as terrible. God and devil are fighting there, and the battlefield is the heart of man.”

“Harden not your heart,” says Psalm 95. One who does this erects rigid barriers to shut out things which are uncomfort-able, painful, or distasteful. Perhaps, we all do that to some extent. By contrast, a pure heart is an open and receptive heart, one that is in communion with life. It feels sorrow as well as joy. The thought of lowering those barriers may seem risky to some, but a heart that feels the rain as well as the sun is a heart that is alive. And we are encouraged to do this in a lovely verse from *The Voice of the Silence*: “Hast thou attuned thy heart and mind to the great mind and heart of all mankind.”

4. An Eager Intellect

The fourth precept of “The Golden Stairs”— *an eager intellect* — together with the first three — *a clean life, an open mind, a pure heart* — form a quaternary providing the pilgrim a safe and stable foundation for the ascent. As noted earlier, this undertaking is not without its perils and pitfalls, and those who proceed prematurely are like amateur climbers attempting to scale a steep precipice without the benefit of extensive training and conditioning.

Before commenting on the role that an eager intellect plays in “The Golden Stairs”, we should consider the meaning of ‘intellect’. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines intellect as “the faculty of knowing and reasoning”. As a short working definition, this is fine, but the writings of HPB provide much greater depth and detail as to the nature of this important and defining faculty. Referring to her sevenfold model of the human constitution (found in *The Key to Theosophy* and elsewhere), intellect corresponds to the principle of *manas*, a Sanskrit word meaning “to think”, “to cogitate”, or “to reflect”. This ability to engage in rational and abstract thought forms a distinct line of demarcation between the human and animal kingdoms.

Another feature of *manas* is its dual nature, the higher and the lower, which HPB describes in *The Key to Theosophy*: “There is a spiritual consciousness, the Manasic mind illumined by the light of Buddhi, that which subjectively perceives abstractions; and the sentient

consciousness (the lower *manasic* light), inseparable from our physical brain and senses. . . . It is only the former kind of consciousness, whose root lies in Eternity, which survives and lives forever, and may, therefore, be regarded as immortal. Everything else belongs to passing illusions.” More specifically, intellect corresponds to the higher aspect of *manas*. It is what survives from one incarnation to the next. Purucker’s *Occult Glossary* tells us that “*manas* itself is mortal, goes to pieces at death — insofar as its lower parts are concerned.” The only portion of it that survives death is “only what is spiritual in it and that can be squeezed out of it, so to say — the ‘aroma’ of the *manas*; somewhat as the chemist takes from the rose the attar or essence of roses.” Having framed the word “intellect” within a theosophical framework, let us continue by exploring the significance of an *eager* intellect.

An eager intellect is driven by the need to know and understand. It is different from an open mind. While the latter is characterized by receptivity to new ideas, it lacks the fervent intensity found in the former. An open mind allows one to become familiar with many facets of knowledge, but is often prompted by momentary curiosity or happenstance. In contrast to this somewhat passive state, an eager intellect is marked by an ardent and persistent search for more knowledge and greater understanding. It may also exhibit a penetrating quality that helps one see through the shallowness of clichés and platitudes, and beyond the bound-

aries imposed by conventional thought.

The uncritical acceptance of popular opinion provides a false sense of security, especially when cloaked in the mantle of authority. Though it may contain some element of truth, it is second-hand knowledge and of little value if we have not thought the matter through for ourselves. To this point, a comment by Leonardo da Vinci bears repeating: “Whoever in discussion adduces authority uses not intellect but rather memory.” Being able to repeat something we have heard does not mean we have understood it. Furthermore, those who exercise their intellect are not afraid to stand apart from the crowd. As Thomas Paine observed, “I do not believe that any two men, on what are called doctrinal points, think alike who think at all. It is only those who have not thought that appear to agree.”

The Secret Doctrine describes *manas* as “the seat of Intellect”, but we should remember that *manas* has a dual aspect — a higher and a lower. The part that deals with the ordinary and commonplace is the lower; that which apprehends truth, whether philosophical, mathematical, or spiritual, is the higher. Both functions are necessary, but the content of the lower fades after an incarnation has completed its cycle, while that of the higher is retained in the causal body. Another way of saying this is that the lower mind deals with particulars, the higher mind with universals. The transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson understood this. In his essay entitled “Intellect”, he says, “He who is

immersed in what concerns person or place cannot see the problem of existence. This the intellect always ponders.” In other words, if you are always immersed in particulars — the quotidian details of daily existence — you will never be able to see with clarity, for your vision will be obscured by the ephemeral and transitory.

5. An Unveiled Spiritual Perception

The fifth step of “The Golden Stairs” marks a point of transition in the life of the evolving soul. The first four — a clean life, an open mind, a pure heart, an eager intellect — are foundational to the steps that follow. They are developed with conscious intent and effort over the course of many lives, but not necessarily within the context of an overriding spiritual vision. The motivation may simply be one of self-improvement: eliminating coarseness and crudeness from one’s personality, developing catholicity of mind, and cleansing one’s heart of base desires — all of which are commendable but still revolve around the personal self.

Cook’s fine analysis of “The Golden Stairs” describes the first four steps as *preparation, receptiveness, transmutation, and searching*. Throughout this long process there has been “a gradual thinning of the veils, an opening of the mind, a purification of the heart, an eagerness of search”. As a result of this rarefaction, the spiritual faculty that had been largely

dormant now becomes activated and a point of transition is reached in the development of the soul. Visions of numinosity are experienced, and although they may be brief and infrequent, even one such experience has the potential to make a profound impact. Instead of seeing everything through the personal lens of self-interest, a wider and more universal outlook is possible. Purucker’s *Golden Precepts of Esotericism* describes it this way: “An unveiled spiritual perception is merely the loss of personality in opinions, in views, and of self-satisfaction.”

The thinning of the veils is a good metaphor, but one should not assume that the sudden influx of light is analogous to that of a lamp that has been turned on by a toggle switch with only an on and off position. It is more in the nature of a lamp with a dimmer switch, allowing a gradual brightening or dimming along a sliding scale. Purucker’s *Fountain Source of Occultism* notes that “behind every veil there is another, but through them all shines the light of truth, the light that liveth forever within every one of us, for it is our inmost self.” We may see that numinous light but momentarily, and lament its inevitable fading from view as the veil descends. But Cook encourages us with this observation: “Once there has come the dawning of this spiritual perception, the new direction . . . can only be but temporarily forsaken.”

(To be continued)

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.

Cicero

A Holistic View of Who We Are

CARLOS PÉREZ MENÉNDEZ

ONE of the most universal requirements expressed for those who want to develop their internal potential is that the candidates must know themselves. In the Apollo temple portal in Delphi, it was an inscription saying “Man know yourself”. There is an agreement in every esoteric tradition on the need to know ourselves. Ramana Maharshi promoted self-inquiry with a question: “Who am I?” This question is not intellectual or conceptual, but one that will gradually produce deeper, more conscious answers.

Who are we really?

We are used to introducing ourselves with our name, age, studies, profession, hobbies, and so on. But all of this refers only to the facts of our lives and it does not reflect our psychological nature, our aspirations, or, more importantly, our internal reality. It is not easy to answer the question of who we are really. Are we the kind and tender mask that we show to the outside world, or perhaps the hard and severe one? Are we the fears and prejudices that accompany us from an early age? Are we the angry, envious, and competitive person? Or are we the kind, caring, and friendly person that we

reveal at other times? Are we the child, the spouse, the parent, the sibling, the friend, or the coworker? These are all facets of our life and we display them all simultaneously.

Are we the fleeting thoughts and emotions that are constantly changing, or perhaps the more persistent ones? According to the research of Dr Fred Luskin of Stanford University, a human being has about 60,000 thoughts a day. Therefore a thought lasts us on average 0.7 seconds, counting while we sleep. But the shocking discovery of this study is that 90% of thoughts are repetitive. Or maybe we are the ones who observe and reflect on this?

How to know ourselves?

We try to know what we are by looking inside ourselves: our thoughts, our emotions, the greatness of the mystery that we are. But our psychological nature distorts what we observe and it is not possible for us to fully understand ourselves because there are some barriers to doing it:

- ◆ We design models of how we want to be, using preconceived ideas obtained

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from the family environment, education, or culture, to mention just a few sources. These acquired concepts do not allow us a clear vision of our own nature because they act like colored glasses, making us project an illusory reality.

◆ We mask those characteristics of our personality that we do not want to see or accept because they conflict with our ideas of what we should be. We throw them into the shadows of the unconscious. It is what the psychologist Carl Jung called the “shadow”, or hidden side of our personality — hidden for us. But they arise unexpectedly when we react to certain situations.

◆ Looking only inward gives us the illusion of an “I” separated from the world and this prevents us from seeing clearly. We need a “reality bath”.

Relationships portray us

To know ourselves, a part of the answer is to see how we relate to other people and the world in general. How are our relationships? Do we have lasting relationships? Or do we change friends and partners too frequently? No two relationships are the same, but let us look at the generality.

Are our relationships healthy and satisfying for ourselves and also for others? Are they based on freedom and mutual respect or are they plagued with mistrust and control? Are they win-win relationships? Do we love and are we loved? Do we feel life flowing through our relationships or are they conflicted and neurotic? Do we believe that our

friends and relatives regard us with respect and affection?

The influence of the social network

All of our relationships form a network, our *social network*. This does not mean Internet platforms for social networking like Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. The social network is made up of all the people with whom we have some kind of relationship: relatives, friends, coworkers, customers and suppliers, neighbors, and even the people we buy from frequently. It does not matter the channels we use for communicating with them. We can communicate face to face, by email, phone, or through a social network platform, as mentioned above.

Between 2007 and 2010, two Social Sciences researchers, Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler, carried out a statistical analysis from the perspective of social networks of the “Framingham Heart Study”, initiated in 1948 and active until now, on lifestyle habits and cardiovascular diseases of people living in Framingham, Massachusetts, USA. They found that we influence people in our network to as much as a third degree of connection. What we do, feel, and think influence our social network up to a third degree.

That is to say, that we influence our friends but also influence the friends of our friends, and also influence the friends of the friends of our friends. Here the related people are called “friends” even if they are relatives or neighbors. In turn, the people who make up our social network, our friends, also influence us in

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the same way. We are all mutual *influencers* in real life.

It should be noted that the probability of influence, or contagion, as the researchers called it, is stronger the more direct the relationship is. For example, the friends of a person who becomes obese have a 45% chance of becoming obese if they are at the first degree of the relationship, 20% if they are at the second degree, and 10% if they are at the third degree.¹ In degrees of relationship greater than three, the influence is negligible.

Influences on social networks are very important. British anthropologist and psychologist Robin Dunbar estimated that an average person in the world today can sustain 150 relationships, which is known as Dunbar's number. In this way, one person influences and is influenced by about $150^3 = 3.3$ million people. The actual figure is likely to be less because many of our friends are also friends with each other.

The global brain

Some thinkers from different fields, such as Peter Russell,² have proposed the idea that humanity is building a *global brain*. Due to the development of the Internet connecting many people and devices, an enormous amount of information is generated and stored, which flows between people like signals flowing between neurons in a brain. Social networks and the web with its hyperlinks, play a fundamental role in disseminating information. This is an example of collec-

tive intelligence. The intelligence of the network is distributed as in the neurons of our brain, and there is no central node that controls everything, although some people try to do it.

People with petty interests try to “poison” this collective mind by disseminating fake news and creating fake users on social networks with the sole purpose of manipulating the thoughts of many individuals who are not so clear about their own ideas. By doing so they can twist the direction of public opinion on a subject or they can win an election.

But we, the people who make up the global network have the tools to defend ourselves against these attacks if we are vigilant. A truth seeker should not spread lies without first verifying their veracity. In the same way, our social network has its intelligence distributed. We make decisions influenced by it and we are also present in the decisions made by our friends even if we have not commented on them. James Fowler has said that “social networks influence us more than mass media”.

Interdependence with Nature

We depend on other beings such as bacteria, fungi, plants, and animals, and they in turn depend on us. In our body, there are bacteria that we need for our regular functioning. We need the oxygen that plants produce and they need our carbon dioxide. Insects and fungi break down our waste, returning the materials to the ecosystem. We are part of the innumerable life cycles of Nature.

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Everything is wonderfully interconnected, making up a system. We are part of many systems. We are part of the Unity of Life. In a system, the whole is more than the sum of the parts. In each one of us, there is a reflection of the Whole.

By ignoring this reality that we are getting to understand more and more deeply, we are endangering the ecosystem of the Earth, Gaia. Doctor James Lovelock elaborated the theory that the set, or collection, of all biological organisms, minerals, water, gases, rocks, and everything on Earth, is a self-regulating system which he called Gaia.

In Nature, cooperation is more important than competition. Nature gives us much evidence of how cooperation between individuals has been more important in evolution than the competition and the struggle for subsistence. Just by existing we leave a footprint in Nature. We need water, air, space, and food, and in turn, we leave waste. But if we understand that we are an inseparable part of Nature, we will try to do as little damage as possible, using resources consciously and discarding cruelty and exploitation of our smaller brothers, the animals.

We are not apart

If we realize the Oneness of all Life, we can understand more about ourselves. We are a radiation of Life and within us is the potential of the One. All beings and matter are interconnected and interdependent. The self is dissolved — we realize more and more that although we are a singularity, no membrane or envelope

separates us from the whole. The separation is only in our mind that has elaborated the structure of the separate “I”.

So knowing ourselves is a quest, an adventure. It is the discovery of our essence, of what is sacred and permanent that is within us, but also outside. If we can see the potential greatness within us, we will also see it in other beings. And if we do not see it in them, we do not see it in ourselves either. Interior and exterior are concepts elaborated by the self because everything is related. We can believe we are very good, but how our relationships are will tell us a lot about who we really are. Others act as mirrors.

Self-discovery

An inquiring, mindful attitude is required. How do we do it? Study and meditation are important, but it is through service that we can get to know ourselves better: how we relate, what we feel, and how we react. We may believe that we are very spiritual and elevated above ordinary human beings, but observing the difficulties of everyday life and our treatment of others is how we realize where we are.

Every act of life is in some way a service. It does not matter what we do. Whether we are caring for a family member, building a house, manufacturing a product, teaching in a school, working as a public servant, or solving a customer’s problem, we are always serving. There is something sacred in all our actions, feelings, and thoughts.

All life is constantly changing and transforming, and that includes us. It is

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not enough to obtain a static image of our psychological nature once and for all life, even if this were possible, because we change with life experiences and with learning. Self-discovery is an ongoing process and requires constant attention.

An integrated vision is necessary, a holistic vision to understand ourselves, which is the same as understanding Nature, or Life. The vision we have determines our real scale of values, and this, in turn, determines our behavior on a day-to-day basis. The sense of oneness with Life and the compassion that derives from it makes us respect all living creatures, human beings, animals, plants, fungi, and even minerals or the landscape as something precious of which we are part.

J. Krishnamurti said:

Discovering oneself is endless and requires constant investigation, total aware-

ness, choiceless awareness. In reality, this journey consists of opening a door for the individual in relation to the world.

When we contemplate the immensity of the Universe our sense of self vanishes. Our admiration for the immeasurable, the infinite, allows us to overcome the illusion of feeling separate. So, rather than asking ourselves in the singular form “Who am I?” we must ask ourselves in the plural: “*Who are we?*” Because the discovery of ourselves is the realization of the One Life in us, like in the entire Universe.

You are not IN the universe, you ARE the universe, an intrinsic part of it. Ultimately you are not a person, but a focal point where the universe is becoming conscious of itself. What an amazing miracle.

Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth*



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There is one eternal Law in Nature, one that always tends to adjust contraries and to produce final harmony. It is owing to this law of spiritual development superseding the physical and purely intellectual, that humankind will become freed from its false gods, and find itself finally — SELF-REDEEMED.

H. P. Blavatsky
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Three Years from Now

TIM WYATT

IN just a few dozen months the Theosophical Society (TS) will celebrate its 150th anniversary, a major milestone for any organisation and especially the TS which has been beset by challenges, obstacles, conflicts and divisions from the very outset. Two questions immediately spring to mind: (1) What has the TS achieved over the past fifteen decades? (2) Will the TS survive in its present form for another 150 years? The brief answers to these twin questions are: (1) A great deal; and (2) definitely not.

Dealing with the first question of its track record since 1875, the TS has had a major impact in remoulding world thought in so many areas. This work has often been carried out almost unnoticed. Madame H. P. Blavatsky's (HPB) brave and radical assertions alone created a mind revolution. And yet ironically 99 per cent of the world's seven and a half billion people have never heard of her, the TS, Theosophy, or the Ageless Wisdom teachings.

TS membership may have shrunk alarmingly in recent times. Nevertheless, it is not numbers alone which create influence; it is the verity, power and

importance of those ideas themselves. And Christ's eternal truth about there being power in just two or three people gathered together for a sacred purpose still holds firm.

The TS had a difficult birth, a disruptive childhood, and somewhat unruly youth before drifting off into a lethargic middle-aged indifference where it now lingers.

It would be inept to ignore the conflicts, splits, factions, and often personal acrimony which have been a perpetual feature of the organisation since its earliest days. Divisions in Theosophical country Sections and individual Lodges have occurred regularly down the years. Sometimes these have been wounding and extremely damaging. But perhaps we have to regard this as inevitable and unavoidable collateral damage as we painfully and slowly evolve.

And despite all the ongoing turbulence during its journey, the TS has had massive covert influence on the modern mind. It has acted as a new Invisible College to globalise previously hidden, timeless truths in order to recalibrate human thought and endeavour for the new cycle. (The original Invisible College was

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a group of leading thinkers gravitating around the natural scientist Robert Boyle, who coined the term in 1646. This first scientific organisation in the modern world was the forerunner and prototype of The Royal Society in Great Britain.)

The TS reintroduced occult ideas and esoteric explanations of ourselves and the cosmos to an increasingly materialistic and conflict-ridden world. HPB may have railed against the evils of materialism but the world has become a far more material place than in her day. The TS may not have single-handedly been able to stem this relentless tide of materialism, but it has acted as both a bulwark and guerrilla-style resistance force working behind enemy lines to help unlock the secrets of ourselves and the universe, the mysteries of time and space, and the infinite possibilities which are our destiny.

So, will the TS survive in its present form? This may seem a slightly facetious question since one of the core tenets of Theosophy is that nothing remains the same for even the tiniest fraction of a second and that everything is in a state of perpetual flux and transmutation. Religions and their organisations, as well as such groups as the freemasons appear to survive century after century with their central belief systems intact and their outward ceremonies little changed. Of course, there are minor modifications. But over time this rigidity causes them to lose much of their original purpose or dynamism.

The TS is neither a religion nor a ritual-based group. But it is a fraternity

whose principal object is to create and grow a brotherhood to serve humanity. A core theosophical assertion is that brotherhood is a fact in Nature.

As stated from the very beginning, brotherhood is the central (but often elusive) goal of the TS. It lies at the very heart of everything we aspire to achieve but cannot always define. At times some TS members appear as if they are trying to achieve the exact opposite. And yet the overall trajectory is positive.

What the TS is still struggling to achieve is real and lasting brotherhood. *A* brotherhood or *the* brotherhood (using the definite or indefinite article) retains rather sinister connotations of secret cabals, crime organisations, or fanatical religious cults. (And we are certainly none of these.)

Brotherhood (without the definite or indefinite article) has a much more pleasant, resonant, and encompassing tone to it. Have we created this new fraternity without the distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or colour? Yes, but a great deal of squabbling has been involved. And this after all is an intergenerational project.

Theosophy has and always will survive in some form. It may lie dormant, often for centuries, but it is a current which is regularly revived and repurposed. Periodically these eternal truths need repackaging and re-presenting in a way which suits the times in which they emerge. To be frank, adaptability has not always been the TS's most potent characteristic.

And yet if it is to survive as an orga-

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nisation, the TS will have to adapt as naturally as its inherent philosophy of eternal change and evolution suggests. There are a few black-humoured sceptics in our ranks who question whether the organisation ever fully emerged from its comfort zone of the 19th century.

The new Age of Aquarius is nothing like its predecessor, the Age of Pisces with its overriding characteristics of devotion, rigidity of thought, and “top-down” organisational structures. We are now ruled not by the Sixth Ray but by the Seventh, a ray of synthesis. Inevitably this means that existing models will break down and organisations will become thought movements rather than rule-bound clubs.

It is important to remember that the ideas we purvey are timeless ones. The organisations we use to achieve this are by definition temporary. The ideas are the eternal individuality, and the organisation the temporary lower personality.

In many places now, especially in the West, people are increasingly reluctant to join organisations with the same enthusiasm they once showed. Both the climate and landscape have dramatically changed since 1875. The digital age alone with its all-pervasive technology has remodelled everything. Similarly, the TS needs a new modified approach to the way it operates and disseminates this panoramic and comprehensive view of

the cosmos to the wider world. We must not evangelise but simply state the truths as we know them as best we can.

It means constantly finding innovative ways to inject new vitality into what we do as theosophists. One initiative with which I have recently been involved is the “twinning” of my own Lodge in Leeds, Yorkshire, England with the Orpheus and Helios Lodges in Athens, Greece. It operates in much the same way as the twinning of towns in different countries.

We held a ceremony to mark the occasion in Greece and I gave a lecture. Greek speakers have already visited Leeds. We plan many further activities for the future. As well as being of symbolic importance, it is also highly practical. Underpinning this move is the creation of new energy currents, connections, and networks beyond the usual confines of country sections on both the outer and inner planes. We shall probably twin with Lodges in other countries, too. And we urge that other Lodges consider doing the same thing.

This in no way undermines the strength of the TS internationally. It merely serves to strengthen it. Creating stronger connections between Lodges and individuals is crucial during these times of perma-change and conflict. Only vibrant and living networks of people can achieve the continuity of thought, purpose and determination we require to fulfil our mission.



We must live together as brothers or perish together as fools.

Martin Luther King Jr

Light and Love in Us

STEPHANIE VARGAS

J. KRISHNAMURTI's little book *At the Feet of the Master* is considered one of the three gems of Theosophy. It tells us about the four qualities that we must have not only to enter the spiritual path, but at every stage, every day, and until the end. These qualities are Discernment, Desirelessness, Good conduct, and Love. I would like to discuss the last two.

We will start with *good conduct*. Krishnamurti tells us that we should calm and quiet our mind, not let the mind wander, concentrate on the things we are doing at the moment, and do them as well as possible, having positive thoughts and avoiding the negative ones, letting our thoughts have good motives. If we have good thoughts and intentions, they will become right action. And to fulfill our own duties, we need to always offer help to others, being kind, gentle, and tolerant with them.

Krishnamurti also said we need to learn to bear cheerfully the bad things that happen to us, understanding the law of karma, accepting and being able to see in those situations the lessons they

have for us. He quotes an instructor who told him: "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." When we do things from the heart, things go better, and this we should do at every moment of our lives, and finally have confidence in ourselves and in our inner Master, trust in the things we do, belief in ourselves, and have the will to continue on this path.

Madame H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) wrote in one of her letters to her friends: "With each morning's awakening try to live the day in harmony with the Higher Self. 'Try' is the battle cry taught by the Teachers to each pupil. Nothing else is expected of you. One who does his best, does all that can be asked."

The other quality I want to mention is *love*. Krishnamurti tells us that love is the most important quality, and as he explains, love is will, and it stimulates us to fill ourselves with the other qualities that are needed to tread the path. Love is that unity from which we all emanate, that deep love that, as students of Theosophy, leads us to believe and aspire to

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brotherhood; that powerful feeling that can do anything, and can change things, and how we see them.

As mentioned earlier, we need to have good thoughts at every moment, and about the things that we do, and to do them with love. We need to create a habit of taking out the bad thoughts, and replacing them with love. Any inconvenience that we have, for example, with another person, we are not to judge, because we do not know what he or she feels or the problems that person has. So, if we add love, that is, thinking about the other person with affection, love, without judging, our perception of that person and the situation itself will change, our reaction will be different, and everything will surely turn out better than it would have if our reaction had been anger. Then it would no longer be a reaction that we would have, but a response. And the difference between reaction and response is quite significant. It is also important for us not to judge ourselves, not to be too hard on ourselves, to treat ourselves with love.

Albert Einstein said: "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." As students of Theosophy, we know that miracles, as religion puts it, do not exist, even HPB said so. Everything in the cosmos, including us, follows universal laws of Nature. But I would like to see the "miracle" in this phrase as an extraordinary and wonderful event. So, everything that happens every day around us

is extraordinary, wonderful, and can be seen as the wisdom of Nature, and how interconnected everything is around us.

For example, let us think about how a forest is kept alive: we could not do it without considering the interactions that occur between plants, animals, and other organisms that inhabit it. We know many examples such as the work of bees, birds, or when an animal dies in the forest, the interconnection between plants and trees underground, helping each other when one of them needs nutrients. Without forests there would be no oxygen that we need to live. So all life of which we are a part is interconnected, and it is wonderful.

I heard once about a Chilean psychologist who said in a conference that she had a blind patient and he was very depressed. She asked him as an exercise to write down in a notebook, of course with someone's help, all the good things in his life. The patient arrived the following week with four full notebooks. Here are some of the things he wrote: the temperature of the shower in the morning, the wonder of drying myself with a towel, being able to lie down on a bed with clean sheets, the smell of a toast, the texture of tomato sauce, the sun hitting my face when I walk, the smell of flowers, the kindness of a cashier at the supermarket.

This blind patient wrote about everyday things that we take for granted and do not value. The psychologist then said: "I am more blind than my patient." It is true that sometimes we are blind to what

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surrounds us, maybe because of our daily life, work, studies, problems, and so on. We forget, in most cases, to stop, to appreciate, to value, and to be grateful for these things.

If we are able to perceive everything that is part of this world, all that surrounds us, even ourselves, as something extraordinary and wonderful, we cannot help

but be grateful, appreciate the details of our lives, and be thankful for everything. I believe that if we always keep this in mind, and are conscious of it, we will see things in a different way, closer to unity, to fraternity, that everyone and everything is interconnected and interdependent, as the Masters of the Wisdom have taught for millenia. ✧

**No one is born hating another person
because of the color of their skin,
or their background, or their religion.
People must learn to hate,
and if they can learn to hate,
they can be taught to love,
for love comes more naturally to
the human heart than its opposite.**

Nelson Mandela
(18 July 1918 – 5 December 2013)
Received Nobel Peace Prize in July 1993

Patterns of Thought

BENJAMIN UPTON

How we can own our future through understanding

This is a reflection of my own personal journey. Starting as a devout Christian, moving towards staunch atheism, passing on through conspiracy theory, until realizing that these dogmas were not serving me, that I was in fact a servant of my own belief. Each of these patterns of thinking offer a unique view on reality but can also conceal the truth about ourselves and veil the simple beauty of reality as it is.

First, let us establish some common ground. What is thought? Strictly speaking a thought is information travelling through the nervous system. This information flows as a barely perceptible electrical signal. In terms of the brain, this area of the nervous system is arranged as a series of gates called synapses. Each synapse can be triggered by an electrical signal and each synapse can allow that signal to pass along to other synapses. This is the basic mechanism which allows thought to exist and be measured here in the physical world.

But thought transcends a lot of the specificity that language allows us.

A thought in its raw form can contain so much meaning to us personally that it can sometimes feel difficult to articulate. When presented with certain stimuli, our entire nervous system seems to respond at once, causing a rush of emotion and insight. We often find these moments of thought quite compelling, causing us to fall in love or fight for our life.

The thought, even here in the physical understanding, can be seen from two aspects. The perspective of the brain, which is the physical mass inside our skulls and the perspective of the mind which is the element of a person that enables them to be aware of the world and their experiences, also known as the faculty of consciousness.

A noteworthy observation regarding human behaviour in general is the seeming reliance on patterns, on routine. With repetition the work gets easier over time and, given enough time, our routines become like second nature.

This is when a flow state can emerge,

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as one thought passes it makes room for another, and, as more thoughts flow, a pattern emerges where we see that there is a particular sequence or order to these thoughts.

These repeated thought patterns actually grow and strengthen passageways in our brain, creating an express lane for that thought to exist and flow again and again. Each time the neural pathway grows stronger and receives more resources to maintain a healthy connection. Unused pathways can wither and eventually disconnect. There is constant feedback between the mind and the brain — the brain being built by the mind and the mind existing upon the structure of the brain. This I believe is an important point as we find this sort of feedback in other systems which we will go into later.

Our thoughts may be able to be represented as electrical activity on the brain, but that does not help when we are trying to communicate our thoughts to each other. For that, we humans seem to prefer oral language.

These expressions of language inevitably generate thoughts within us. These thoughts can take any shape based on who we are and how we interpret what we hear.

Language and society have a similar relationship to the brain and the mind. It is shaped by society but it is also the basis for society to exist upon.

Language and society develop together in this feedback loop. Over time new

words are created to express something that society feels is important and society shifts its view towards the importance of that new language.

For example, we added a few bits to our language recently. We have these new terms “social distancing” and “self-isolation”. Since these words first hit my ears I have heard them nearly every day since. Both terms use words we already understand, but with their new combination, new meaning is drawn and there is the potential for a new neural passageway to be formed and strengthened in the brain.

This reliance on the spoken word has ensured that our thoughts are commonly language-based. Some think in terms of images, others are not quite sure how their thoughts are represented, but most people believe their own thoughts exist in their mind as language. It could be fair to say that the day-to-day patterns of thought that we develop are mostly influenced through our use and understanding of language.

Religion itself can be defined as a pattern of thought. As “social distance” is made of two words with their own definitions and the new term is a mixture of those meanings, so too is the word “religion”. The origin for our modern English use of the word comes from the Latin “religare” meaning to “repeatedly bind”. So what is it that is being bound through the practice of religion? Patterns of thought, of course. Repeatedly inviting the minds of others to inhabit

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faith-based belief can cause them to hold that belief higher than truth.

These patterns, in my experience, create a very clear pattern of thinking. I was taught where everything good comes from and where everything bad comes from, and the idea that God's people are separate from society and that we must wait for God to come and make everything right. At least in my case, this seemed to be the central message which I was receiving on a weekly basis.

But if we take that original definition for religion and ignore the existing religions of the world, what else can be seen as this "repeated binding of thought"? For example, I might say that software is my religion because it is a pattern of thought that I repeatedly bind myself to.

Each day I wake up and try and squash my brain substance into a shape that the computer will accept. After a long week of this practice I can end up feeling a little bit numb. This is where meditation can be so useful for me, to help me get back to myself.

"Government" is another word with an interesting Latin origin. "Govern" — to control, to steer. The control that a government exerts may be over resources or economic values, but ultimately these value-based systems influence and steer the minds of the citizens, guiding their decisions and ambitions, dividing them by class or status.

It might not always be obvious but one of the main objectives of governments worldwide is to keep the people united

and holding faith in the currency put into circulation by that government. This can only be achieved by exerting a certain type of influence on the minds of the population.

This is really where the idea of patterns of thought can take a dark turn, the patterns we are susceptible to creating can be deliberately implanted within our minds when we are subjected to half-truths, lies, and various other forms of confusion. This confusion can lead to a distorted view of self, a trapped self, one who is powerless and hopeless.

When looking into the research being done on addiction we find that the addicted person will have a belief that they are powerless to create the life they want.

Feeling intense emotions, not just anger but certainly more evident with anger, we can enter into thought patterns which allow us to be easily manipulated into doing something we would otherwise be opposed to, such as mob justice.

Our emotions can be likened to a pack of wild horses, when calm they can easily be contained, but once they begin to stampede there is very little that can slow them down.

When we have a strong neural structure supporting a reaction of anger, we are susceptible to having our emotions overrun us. This overrun of emotion can be the result of something like bad traffic, which is naturally occurring in this world, but it can also be incited by the deliberate use of information.

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This is partly what we are seeing around the world now. Those with reach, via the internet, are able to radicalize massive segments of the population through their anger towards those who are seen to be the oppressors. Through anger we are able to be manipulated, but there are other more subversive methods which can be applied to our patterns of thought.

This is a well-known and trusted playbook for controlling populations large and small. The way these three Ds work is quite elegant in its simplicity. The deception and distraction work quite well on their own to produce a population that is apathetic and mostly ignores politics. But it is when division is employed on the population that the control is cemented.

The division works so well because humans seem prone to falling victim to a certain kind of fallacy that there is the “us” and then there are the “others”. Throughout history that thought pattern has given humankind a platform to build horrific fantasies of violence and wage enormous wars. This division of self from others is a crucial step towards suffering.

A false dilemma (sometimes also referred to as a false dichotomy) is a logical fallacy, which occurs when a limited number of options are incorrectly presented as being mutually exclusive to one another or as being the only options that exist, in a situation where that is not the case.

Here are some examples of what

that might sound like:

“You’re either with us, or against us.”

“Either you support this new national security law, or you must have something to hide.”

“If the theory of evolution can’t explain life on Earth then we must have been created by God.”

Does any of that ring a bell? These ideas form patterns in the mind, which lead us to draw incorrect conclusions.

So what is the message, what can we learn from all these examples of how patterns in our thinking can lead us astray? Ultimately we are all here as pilgrims on the path and these thought patterns which lead to confusion and destruction are what we are trying to avoid. Of course it can be helpful to know what it is we need to be wary of, what pitfalls are waiting for us on our journey, but that is not the lesson we should be taking away from this.

These patterns of thought which influence our day-to-day lives come from our experiences and our attitude towards them.

So to build patterns of thought which might benefit us on our path, it must all come down to our relationship between our inner self and the outer world. Of course this is the information we find in the Ancient Wisdom.

Throughout history the triangle has been used as the symbol of balance, structure, and harmony. We find three-way relational systems in the laws of

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physics and in the wisdom teachings.

The importance of a triangle is its relative stability as a shape. The relationship between the three nodes is what gives the shape its strength, each equally weighing and supporting each other.

In terms of this idea of patterns of thought these three basic principles can be applied in balance to escape the patterns we no longer wish to perpetuate.

Rather than knowing oneself as an imperative, we could work towards developing an ability to observe the self, in the same way that a figure-skating judge is able to evaluate movements that happen so quickly that most would not be able to perceive them.

Practicing an observation of the mind will sharpen your ability to know your own mind at any given point in time.

Clearing the confusion of thought during meditation to achieve a state of total peace of mind can be a rather difficult goal and many who try never find that moment of silence, so instead, during meditation, the goal could be to observe what the mind is doing without judgement.

Unbalanced, an inward-focused mind will eventually lose reference to this wonderful illusion we are currently incarnated in.

This loss of perspective can lead to self-defeat.

It is important to bring an evenness to our mind, and this involves learning about the world around us. With a reference of ourself in the world as a calm

and stable individual we are much more prepared to carry out our will here in this physical realm.

This comes with a caveat, of course: the universe is difficult to know in the same way as the mind. To learn about our universe through observation and consideration is a good way to build a stable belief in reality, but we must be prepared to be wrong, too.

In terms of belief in science, I like to remind myself of this example: when crossing the road with a child, you may hold their hand securely but not so tightly as to hurt them. This is the same kind of grip we must have on our world view.

The third point on this triangle is to take time to experience the relationship between the two. This can be done in so many ways that it is really easier to list what experiences lack this relationship:

- Virtual worlds such as in video games.
- Fictitious scenarios as experienced through TV movies and books.
- Social networks.

It is not that these experiences take place outside of reality. It is more that the patterns contained within are the products of the mind and lack the full bandwidth of sensory experience.

Going for a hike which pushes your body to uncomfortable limits is a great way to observe yourself in Nature. Taking a trip to somewhere you have never been to see a society so unlike your own is another example.

Coupled with self-observation and a passion to learn, the experience of life can be seen through new eyes.

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These three ideas can produce a pattern of thought within us that is empowering. The truth is that none of us are alone, none of the problems we see in society are society's problems, these problems are ours, we are society.

This idea puts all the power and responsibility on us, we are the change we have been waiting for. We vote with our state of mind, with the expansion of our consciousness we improve society as a whole. ✧

Is it possible not to be self-centred, what are the implications of not being self-centred, which, if I do it by will, I am still self-centred? If I say, I must not be self-centred, the "must not" is still part of the self. I can renounce — not I — one can renounce property, beliefs, all that, the very renunciation in order to achieve something is part of this self-centredness. So one wants to find out, is there a way of living, daily life, not in heaven or in some kind of community, living where we are, our daily life, without being self-centred. There must be no escape into some kind of illusion, ideologies, into some kind of fanciful living, but actual daily living in which self-centred action doesn't take place.

Jiddu Krishnamurti
Ojai, April 1979

NOTICE

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION 2022-23

Theme: "Our Responsibility in the Interconnected World"

In accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the Theosophical Society, the 147th International Convention will be held in person at the International Headquarters, Adyar, Chennai, India, from 31 December 2022 to 4 January 2023. It will also be online for the main talks. More details about registration, and so on, will be forthcoming in the August or September issues of *The Theosophist*, and the tentative Convention programme will appear in the December issue, as usual.

Marja Artamaa
International Secretary

Just Say “Yes”

CELESTE SASUMAN

THE National President of the Theosophical Society (TS) in the Philippines, Mr Chally Romero, asked me to give a talk. I had no idea what to talk about, when, or where; I just said “yes”. Then, he told me that my talk was to be given for the 145th TS International Convention. I was terrified. Thinking about the Theosophical Society’s international speakers started to intimidate me, as I am far from being experienced or learned. I have not even finished a book by H. P. Blavatsky; even if I did, I am not sure if I would fully understand it. So I took a deep breath and just recalled the times that I just said “yes”.

Japan Experience

When I was 16 years old our school offered a program in which students would be granted an all-expense-paid trip to Japan, sponsored by their former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Most of my classmates did not apply because they said that only those with high academic achievements and our seniors would most likely be accepted. They thought that it would be a miracle if they would even bother looking at our one-page resumés.

Even with the slim chance, I applied and was interviewed. Surprisingly, I was among the ten students who were accepted, despite my lack of academic achievements compared to others who applied. They had us stay at a five-star hotel and we even got to experience homestays with Japanese families. All it took was just to say “yes”.

United States of America Experience

When I turned 18, I learned of a program that would allow me to fly to the United States using a J1 visa. Almost everyone said that it would be impossible for me to be granted a visa since I do not come from a wealthy family. What if they would asked me how much my parents earn, or how much would be my pocket money when I would go to the US? I was uncertain as to how to answer these questions, but I applied. That was my way of saying “yes”, and guess what, I was granted visa! So off I went to the US.

Youth

When we are young, and, in addition, coming from a third-world country, a lot

Ms Celeste Sasuman is a young member of the Philippine Section of the TS. This article is based on an online talk given for the International Convention of the TS in Adyar in December 2020.

Just Say “Yes”

of things may seem far from our reach because we think that there are people who are better off than us and we lack experience and resources. But this is not the case. As a youth we have all the time to explore, to learn, to win, and to fail.

I have failed a lot of times but have realized that the best time to fail is when we are young, because time is on our side. Time gives us the chance to try to win until we succeed. Thus, youth becomes our greatest ally in saying “yes”. So, EVEN WHEN YOU ARE YOUNG, JUST SAY “YES”.

The 11th TS World Congress

In 2018, I was asked whether I would like to join the 11th World Congress of the TS. I learned that it would be the first time it would be held in Asia, in Singapore, and that it only takes place at most every 7 years. I found it quite interesting, yet also quite expensive, but I just said “yes”. The first thing I did was to open an airline website, chose the dates, looked at the price, closed my eyes, and booked a ticket!

A week later, I received an unexpected salary bonus which covered some of my expenses. My application for work leave was approved without question. It was as if it was meant to be, if only I said “yes”. I am glad I did, as I learned so much from the World Congress, meeting theosophists from all over the world, and was able to realize what a great chance it is to be part of the TS.

Self-Transformation Seminar

Another recollection is from March

2019, when I went to the Golden Link College in the Philippines to observe how Mr Vic Hao Chin, Jr, conducts the Self-Transformation Seminar for abused and abandoned children. Then, Mr Hao Chin asked me if I could do the talk on “Diet and Health”. I was not sure how to do it, but I just said “yes”.

Having an audience from ages 7 to 21 was nerve-racking. I thought that if I was boring, they might fall asleep right in front of me. They were not so responsive with my audience engagements and I thought I might not have made my message come across. But after the talk some of the kids came to me and said how inspired they were with my stories and how grateful they were for what I shared. Had I not said “yes”, I would not have inspired those abused and abandoned, but most deserving children.

TS in the Philippines Joint-Lodge meeting

During this pandemic the Philippine Section was looking for volunteers to give talks for the Joint-Lodge meetings, which we do every Saturday. I said “yes” by volunteering to do the first talk for the meeting and we have been doing it successfully ever since.

Preparedness

Most of the time we have the tendency to think of what is worst whenever we say “yes”. We choose not to act because we think of how people will think of us, and not how great our help could be or the lesson that we could offer. We think

Just Say “Yes”

we will be prepared next time, and that we are unprepared now. Yet the question is: “When will we be ready?” EVEN WHEN WE THINK WE ARE UNPREPARED, LET US JUST SAY “YES”.

Usefulness

Ralph Waldo Emerson said: “The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.” I was struck by these words — “not to be happy, but to be useful”. How many of us would rather seek to be happy than to be useful? Becoming useful entails effort. Effort does not always come easy nor is it convenient, so we would rather say “no”. What we often do not realize is that when we say “no” to something, we are actually saying “yes” to something else. So if we were to say “yes” to either, it might as well be useful.

A common reason why we do not say “yes” is that when we are young, we are afraid that we are too young. When we are old, we are afraid that we are too old. We also do not say “yes” because we are afraid of the responsibility and

accountability, especially if we fail. But what we have to keep in mind is that all we have to be is to be useful. The outcome need no longer be our concern, so, EVEN IF IT SCARES US, LET US JUST SAY “YES”.

Yes Man

Lastly, let us not become like Jim Carrey’s character in the movie *Yes Man*, where he made a covenant to say “yes” to everything, because he was afraid that if he did not, unfortunate things would happen to him.

Duties of a Theosophist

It would be helpful to remember that the first qualification for the Path according to Jiddu Krishnamurti’s *At the Feet of the Master* is Discrimination, or discernment. Let us learn to say “yes” to the real from the unreal, to the right from the wrong, to the important from the unimportant, to the useful from the useless, to the true from the false, and to the unselfish from the selfish.

Three important objectives of the Theosophical Society are study, meditation, and service. If we do not say “yes”, how will we accomplish any of them? ✧

**I slept and dreamt that life was joy.
I awoke and saw that life was service.
I acted and behold, service was joy.**

Rabindranath Tagore

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

THE ASALA FESTIVAL

[ONE of the most significant occasions each year in the Buddhist tradition is] the full moon day of the month of Asala (in Sanskrit Ashadha) usually corresponding to the English July. This is the anniversary of the delivery by the Lord Buddha of his first announcement of the great discovery — the sermon which he preached to his five disciples, commonly known as the *Dhammachakkappavattana Sutta*, which has been poetically translated by Rhys Davids as “The Setting in Motion of the Royal Chariot Wheels of the Kingdom of Righteousness”. It is often more briefly described in Buddhist books as “The Turning of the Wheel of the Law”. It explains for the first time the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, expounding the great middle way of the Buddha — the life of perfect righteousness in the world, which lies midway between the extravagances of asceticism on the one hand and the carelessness of mere worldly life on the other. . . .

That great sermon of the Buddha is wonderfully simple, and its points are repeated. There was no shorthand in those days, so that it might be taken down and read by everyone afterwards; his disciples had to remember his words by the impression made on them at the time. So he made them simple, and he repeated them again and again like a refrain, so that the people might be sure of them. One may readily see in reading it that it is constructed for this special purpose — that it may be easily remembered. Its points are arranged categorically, so that when it has once been heard each point reminds one of the next, as though it were a kind of mnemonic, and to the Buddhist each of these separate and easily remembered words suggests a whole body of related ideas, so that the sermon, short and simple as it is, contains an explanation and a rule of life.

C. W. Leadbeater

The Masters and the Path

TPH Adyar, 4th ed., 1983, ch. XIV, p. 214

Theosophical Work around the World

East & Central African Section Convention and 75th anniversary

The 49th Annual Convention of The Theosophical Society in East & Central Africa was successfully hosted by Nairobi Lodge from 15 to 17 April 2022 at the Lodge premises, and had as its theme “The World at the Threshold of Change”. The 75th anniversary (Platinum Jubilee) of the Section was also celebrated. It was a hybrid convention, allowing members to participate either physically or online.

The opening remarks were given by Mrs Rekha Shah, Chairman of Nairobi Lodge. She touched briefly on the Lodge’s early history as she introduced the Convention’s Guest of Honour, Mr Navin Bharmal Shah, past General Secretary of the Section. During the evening programme he traced the history of the Section’s Conventions over 75 years since its formation on 17 February 1947, with a thrilling photographic journey down memory lane.

In his thought-provoking address, the General Secretary of the Section, Mr Narendra M. Shah, touched on various current issues, including how the Covid-19 pandemic changed everyone’s lives around the world and the “normal” routine all had been accustomed to. He spoke about the devastating effects of environmental changes which were all brought about because of human carelessness. He concluded with the remarks: “We need to change our LEVEL OF CON-

SCIOUSNESS to a different dimension. We have to take care of our mother EARTH, or else we stand to be destroyed.”

The keynote address, “The World at the Threshold of Change”, was the first public lecture, delivered by international President Mr Tim Boyd after the pandemic. Prof. P. Krishna gave the second public lecture on “Freedom from the Self”, and Mr Charlton Romero, President and General Secretary of the Philippine Section, gave the third public lecture, titled “Papillon: On the Wings of Change”. Mr Hitesh Chohan of Dar-es-Salaam Lodge and Mrs Shah, were the panelists for a discussion, answering five questions revolving around the Convention theme. Short talks, a symposium, a panel discussion, and a group discussion were also part of the Convention, which was well received by about 50 registered delegates, 35 attending physically and 15 online. As the Convention came to a close, the General Secretary welcomed new members with presentation of diplomas and spoke about the importance of Theosophy as they embark on a new journey in their lives.

The **Pan-African Theosophical Federation** (PATF) held a General Meeting during the above Convention, where the following new officers were elected: Chairman, Mr Navin B. Shah; Vice Chairman, Mr Narendra M. Shah; Hon. Secretary, Mrs Rekha Shah; and Hon. Treasurer, Mr Tom Davis.

Theosophical Work around the World



Narendra Shah, Gen. Secy of the Section and (to his left) Guest of Honour Navin B. Shah



Chair of Nairobi Lodge Rekha Shah (front-centre) and Nile Lodge Secretary Aruna Mendon (on the right)



Asst. Gen. Secy of Uganda and Chair of Nile Lodge, Virchand M. Shah (far right)



(L. to r.) Vice Chair Nilesh H. Shah, Hon. Treasurer Mansukh Khimashia, and Hon. Secretary Vimal Shah — all officers of Nairobi Lodge for 2022

Theosophical Work around the World



49th Convention Group: (*Front row, 6th from right*) General Secretary of the East & Central African Section, Narendra M. Shah; to his right is Mrs Rekha Shah, the new Chair of Nairobi Lodge; to her right is Convention Guest of Honour and past General Secretary of the E. & C. African Section, Mr Navin B. Shah; and behind him is his wife, Sunita

Theosophical Work around the World

New School in Damodar Gardens

On May 31 the Theosophical Society (TS) in Adyar finalized a lease with the Shiv Nadar Foundation (SNF) to build a new day school on 13.86 acres of TS land. The process leading up to this moment was 2-1/2 years in the making. For more than 80 years the area known as Damodar Gardens has been used exclusively for high quality educational institutions. For 40 years it was home to the Besant School, started by former TS president George Arundale. Next it was leased to the Krishnamurti Foundation India's "The School", which operated one of the best private schools in India from there for another 40 years. The current lease with SNF is for 43 years.

Although the SNF and TS are separate organizations with differing objects, we found common ground in the area of education. SNF is not a commercial operation. From the Foundation's website <shivnadarfoundation.org/>: "The Foundation is committed to the creation of a more equitable, merit-based society by empowering individuals through transformational education to bridge the socio-economic divide. To that purpose it has established institutions and programs in the underdeveloped disciplinary areas in India related to rural and urban education and art." Their schools are recognized as some of the best in India and they have made a special commitment to a school in Chennai, the birthplace of Shiv Nadar, founder of SNF.

Developing the space for this day school will require extensive construction. Because of the TS's values and long-time role as a steward of Nature in that area, from the beginning we emphasized the importance of a construction process that is respectful to Nature. SNF shares the same values. The school will be constructed to the highest LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) sustainability standard, and will not only be "carbon-neutral" but will actually be "carbon-positive", creating an environmental benefit by removing carbon dioxide from its environment. No old growth trees will be cut down or damaged during the course of construction, and any trees that are encroaching on built spaces will be moved and planted elsewhere on the grounds.

Initially the TS had contemplated a number of possible uses for the land. In the process of exploring possible uses it became clear that the highest benefit to the city of Chennai, to the nature of the place, and to the TS could be achieved through the present arrangement with SNF, which is historic.

The new school and the conscientious way it is being built is the most responsible course for the TS, and the highest benefit to the city of Chennai.

Recent Appointments

The TS in Iceland has a new General Secretary, Mr Haraldur Erlendsson, since 31 May 2022. ✧

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