Freedom of Thought

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

Freedom of the Society

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

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

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***Cover*:** "The Road of The Soul", sacred geometry mandala by artist and poet Joma Sipe. Panel in silver and gold ink and crystals on black canvas, 70 x 70 cm, 2006 (Illuminated Version). <jomasipe.com>. (See poem corresponding to this image on p. 20 of this issue.)

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.

Are We Pacifists?

Tim Boyd

During the question-and-answer period at a recent meeting in Europe, I was asked, "Are we pacifists?" The question was prompted by two things. Although it was not my subject, during the course of talking to the group I had made some general mention of war. Another motivation for the question, which I discovered later, was that the outbreak of armed conflict in Ukraine had caused a division of opinions among the local Theosophical Society (TS) group, and the imprimatur of the International President was being sought. At the meeting I shared my initial thoughts, but the question stuck in my mind.

Peace and its possibility are central to any genuine process of self-transformation. Throughout time people have embraced spiritual paths of all types pointing toward the realization of peace in one's life and in the world. "My peace I give unto you" is the promise of the Christ. "Peace comes from within, not from without" and "Cultivate this very path of peace" are Buddha's words. "*Shānti, shānti, shānti*" is the threefold invocation of Peace that closes a Hindu session of prayer, recitation, or meditation.

In responding to the questioner, I began with a question of my own: Who do you mean by "we"? Is the intended "we", members of the TS? Or, the people of this nation, or humanity in general? The simple fact that there are soldiers fighting and others supporting one side or another would seem to exclude them from the pacifist camp. Even supposing that there is a "right side" in this most massively destructive of all human activities, only in the blinding realm of sophistry, can "peace" be argued as an outcome of war. The intended "we" seemed to be theosophists, or, more generally, spiritually inclined people.

Like so many words we freely use, it is easy to assume that there is a single, universally accepted meaning. Is pacifism intended in its most common meaning of "anti-war-ism", or something deeper? Is the scope of our view confined to violent disputes among nations, or does it include violence in interpersonal relationships? Is the true pacifist a practitioner of the doctrine of *ahimsa* (harmlessness) and the profound teaching of the Christ that we should "Resist not evil"? Or, is pacifism a graded scale of situationally correct behaviors? While such distinctions may seem like mere shadings of meaning, the difference in life orientation associated with each expression is enormous.

A pragmatic view sees that the destruction and organized violence of warfare defiles the sanctity of human life and should be universally avoided. But given the fact that the human family still clings to war as a viable approach to conflict-solving, how is the aggression of one party to be met by the one being attacked? Is fighting "fire with fire" in the name of self-defense an option?

Some of the most profoundly transformational social movements in modern history have been rooted in a pacifism of non-violence. A core principle was that one's body can be abused, but a violent response from the one who is attacked is an even greater injury — a self-inflicted wound to the soul. Because such a response is, at its core, unloving, it renders one incapable of uplifting the abusers, who are equal participants in the equation of transformation. Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi both advocated civil disobedience rooted in non-violent resistance to entrenched social ills. In both cases great societal goals were accomplished. However, as magnificent as was the light of these non-violent campaigns in India and America, so was the violence spawned in their shadows. Millions died in the post-Independence partition of India and Pakistan. And even devout followers in these two movements went on to advocate for the effectiveness of selectively applied violence.

There is the familiar quote attributed to Albert Einstein that "no problem can be solved at the same level of consciousness that created it". It points to a human condition that must be acknowledged. Our functioning in all realms — political, personal, environmental, and so on — is determined by the range of our perception. We cannot embrace what we cannot see. We do not possess imagination enough to sense what we are missing.

During Gandhi's lifetime, Sri Aurobindo made the pointed observation: "Gandhi's theories, like other mental theories, are built on the basis of one-sided reasoning and claiming for a limited truth (that of non-violence and passive resistance) a universality which it cannot have. Such theories will always exist as long as the mind is the main instrument of human truth-seeking." Other great nation builders, like Annie Besant and Nelson Mandela, while praising Gandhi for his selflessness, character, and effectiveness in accomplishing his goals, held opinions similar to Aurobindo.

Genuine peace, the "peace which passes understanding", is inaccessible in the realm of the mind. Lacking a clear vision we create approximations of peace according to the scope of our perception. At the lowest level the equation is: stop killing = peace. At this level suppression of physical violence through "victory" in war defines peace. Higher levels invoke an expanding vision of Love in which self and others are inseparable.

Our mental construct of peace is rooted in harmlessness (*ahimsa*). The scope of this construct expands according to our understanding — at the minimum, we should not fight and kill one another; a more comprehensive version would

have us avoid injury to others, both physically and emotionally; a further extension relates to our interaction with all kingdoms of Nature — avoidance of harm to "sentient beings" is the language of Buddhism. This is the moral basis of vegetarianism and its extension to veganism — a dietary approach that excludes anything involving the exploitation of the animal kingdom (milk, leather, honey, and so forth). There are even more nuanced approaches to a harmless diet — fruitarian (one who only consumes fruits); then there are fruitarians who don't even harm the tree by picking the fruit, but only eat it when it has fallen to the ground; and the ultimate, "breatharians" who live solely on the prana they draw from the atmosphere. When the mandate to "Do no harm" takes root in the mind, behavior must conform.

During his lifetime Joseph Campbell, the great writer and lecturer on myth and human experience, often spoke at the Theosophical Society's Krotona Institute in California. In addition to his erudition he had a wonderful sense of humor. On one occasion while speaking to a group he commented that "You theosophists feel so good about being vegetarian, but how do you think a carrot feels when it sees you coming?" The real question is, where does one draw the line between "sentient" beings and those without feeling? Numerous experiments have been conducted indicating the responsiveness of plants to violence, even to the projected thought of violence.

Two central facts of embodied existence are that 1) all creatures want to live; and 2) all creatures feed on each other. To be human is to dwell in the realm of duality and with the paradoxes that necessarily arise from that condition. One of those paradoxes is that although *ahimsa*, no harm, is recognized as the spiritual ideal of human living, sometimes failure to engage in violence is harmful. In a world of relativism/duality, while no harm is the ideal, to do the least amount of harm is most often the practice. Surgery causes pain and damages the body, but can save the life. A difficult truth spoken skillfully and with love can bruise the ego, possibly damage a relationship, but ultimately lead to healing.

Regardless of the fact that, from a spiritual, or unitive perspective, war is regarded as reprehensible, anti-loving, and life-negating, it is also recognized as a continuing feature of our current state of consciousness. As Plato said, at our present stage of unfoldment, "only the dead do not know war".

The great teachers acknowledged the fact, even the need of war and counseled rulers, warriors, and common folk alike on the application of compassion and *ahimsa* during the cycles of peace and of war. They recognized that people are at different levels of soul and personality development, have different social roles and responsibilities, and different needs according to their individual karma. So, while there are principles such as *ahimsa* that are universally true for all people, there can be no formula of behavior that applies to everyone. Each of us has to

choose, hopefully according to our highest intuitions. For good or ill we reap the consequences of our choices, and, ideally, we learn.

One of humanity's greatest literary expressions of spirituality, the *Bhagavadgitā*, begins with Krishna's admonishment to the warrior, Arjuna, to shake off his hesitancy and enter into battle, to fully engage in the war that he knows will kill friends, teachers, and relatives. He also described to Arjuna the nature of the devotee who, even in the fiercest battle, acts with full commitment, without anger, or personal preference, never losing connection with their spiritual center. It is a lofty teaching for everyone, but one which only a few are prepared to follow.

Buddha, who was born into the Kshatriya, or warrior, caste, was emphatic about violence and war. In the Dhammapada he is quoted saying: "All tremble at violence; life is dear to all. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill." Even so, he occasionally used martial imagery to describe the spiritual path, in one teaching equating the Victorious Monk to the Victorious Warrior. In that teaching he identifies five temperaments, or types of warriors, from the one who "falters and fails" on first seeing the cloud of dust raised by the approaching army in the distance to the one who does not falter and is "victorious in battle". Though unequivocal in his view of violence, in dealing with actual incidents of war, he faced challenges. In the final year of his life Buddha's birth clan, the Śākyas, were attacked by King Virudhaka, a neighboring king with a deep enmity toward the Śākyas. Three times Buddha met the king and his army advancing on the road. Out of respect for the Buddha, King Virudhaka turned his forces around, averting an attack on the Śākya clan. On the fourth occasion Buddha did not attempt to stop the king, permitting the genocide and its karmic consequences to unfold. In the Mahatma Letters the statement is made: "We *advise* — and never *order*. But we *do* influence individuals."

Within the TS, whose mission is to serve humanity, its founders and many of its luminaries had strong views and experiences with war. HPB was wounded in Garibaldi's war with the papacy in Italy. Whether she was an active combatant in Garibaldi's volunteer army, or only a bystander at the battle of Mentana is not clear. What is clear is that she wholeheartedly supported the war and the ideals it promoted. Although he did not participate directly in the fighting, the other principal founder of the TS, Henry S. Olcott, served as a Colonel in the Union Army during the United States' Civil War, and fully supported the goals of national unity and ending the institution of slavery; Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater believed that World War I was a "righteous war" that was spiritually justifiable; Geoffrey Hodson served as a commander of a tank unit in that war; George Arundale, the third President of the TS, was fully committed to the Allied fight against Germany, Japan, and Italy in World War II, believing that total-

itarian government was a brutal opponent to human freedom and happiness.

One of the beauties of the Ageless Wisdom is that it gives principles, not prescriptions. There is no one royal road that applies to the entire human family. Principles are universal and can be applied according to one's karma, understanding, and will. In the Bible the statement is made: "When I was a child I spoke as a child, understood as a child, thought as a child, but when I became grown I put away childish things." Humanity, though not in its infancy, is still developing. The fact that wars exist; that even in the face of certain knowledge of dire consequences we continue to abuse the planet, its atmosphere, waters, and life forms; that massive poverty and suffering of the many coexists with an ever-increasing concentration of wealth for the few is a testament to our collective immaturity.

We are not pacifists. We are human beings struggling to find peace, all the while unknowingly blocking our own experience of it. We are warriors, like Arjuna, engaged in a battle that becomes progressively more internal, against the massed forces of our long cultivated selfishness, ignorance, and misguided activity. Whether that battle takes place on the physical battlefield, or as the intense effort of the pacifist to refrain self and others from war, or within the recesses of our own being is the choice each of us makes.

A day will come when the useless, wasteful folly of war will end. Until that day arrives, our role is to root ourselves in the deepest peace we can access, always knowing that something more profound lies beyond, and to extend what we discover to others through our words, our actions, our living. ✧

When the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will know peace.

Jimi Hendrix

Religion and Music — III

ANNIE BESANT

AS the more delicate and finer sequences of sounds are produced in music, the subtle body is affected in its finer grades of matter, and similarly more massive harmonics affect the coarser grades. Hence, when this is thoroughly understood, as by a trained occultist, the vibrations can be chosen with reference to the results they produce, and we have the science of mantras, while people of lesser knowledge can produce lesser results. Emotions of any grade can thus be initiated or stimulated, and as the music is made to express finer and finer emotions, especially those of self-sacrificing love and self-surrendering devotion, responsive, sympathetic thrillings may be set up in the *buddhic* body — the *ānanda-maya-kosha* — and, lifted on the wings of the vibrations that are music, a man may reach the threshold of the spiritual world. Thus, music subserves religion both in eastern and western lands. In the West, the greatest musicians have strained their powers to express in sequences of sounds the highest emotions of man [and even animals and plants], and if you have ever the opportunity of listening to one of the Masses written by the noblest Western masters of the divine art, you will find that, though you may be ignorant of Latin and unaccustomed to the use of chords, the charm of the music will gradually steal over you, you will feel soothed and quieted, apt for meditation, and perhaps your eyes will fill with tears. . . .

I have not found in Western music, however, strong and ennobling as it is, that peculiar and elusive power which in Hindu music predisposes to the higher forms of meditation, by which, as its own sounds sink into silence for the entranced mind and heart, the consciousness slips away from the body, leaving it cradled in the melody, and passes into the higher regions. There are delicate notes given out by the instruments which thrill softly out and cause the subtlest vibrations in the higher bodies, till all sounds are left behind and spirit is set free. Those single delicate notes seem to have a power greater than any chord; the chord raises passion or emotion; these single notes thrill to spiritual ecstasy; the one predisposes to activity, the other to quiescence, contemplation, and peace. This seems to me to be

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Dr Annie Besant (1.10.1847–20.09.1933), International President of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, during 1907–1933. Based on a lecture delivered on 7 March 1908 in Triplicane, Madras (now Chennai), India, published by the Theosophical Publishing House (TPH), Adyar, Chennai, India, in 1921.

the greatest service that music can do to religion. For the difficulty met with in meditation is very largely a difficulty caused by the subtle body. Accustomed to respond continually to impacts from without, this body is ever vibrating and ever changing its vibrations. These vibrations bring about continual changes in consciousness, and these again react on the body. Religious music checks these movements, imposes its own vibrations on the body and, instead of the jungle that is noise, there are the rhythmical vibrations of the music. Gradually the whole body is calmed, and held to these steady vibrations, and the calm is answered by the steadiness of the consciousness, responsive to its rhythmically vibrating vehicle. Thus, by music can the subtle body be made a help to the steadying of consciousness instead of being, as it usually is, a hindrance. This calming and steadying, then, is one of the services that music can render to meditation. . . .

As we grow into spiritual reality, transcending the dissonance of the world in which we live, we are playing the true music, creating the true melody, and are summing up our being in one pure note with countless harmonious overtones. As the earthly mantras aid in harmonising us, we are going towards chanting that final mantra which shall be ours when the Spirit realises its freedom, and thus reaches the true liberation, the true moksha, the mantra which shall make our bodies impervious to the jangling noises of the earth. Music will help you, if you choose it well; music will hinder you if you use it to stimulate the lower instead of the higher in you. Knit religion to music, and music to religion, and then music will become more inspired, and religion more beautiful, until the highest music and the most spiritual religion will be the atmosphere in which you can most freely breathe. ✧

The highest goal of music
is to connect one's soul
to its Divine Nature,
not entertainment.

Pythagoras
(570 BC – 495 BC)

Poetry in *The Voice of the Silence*

DAVID P. BRUCE

THE Voice of the Silence (*VS*) is like none of H. P. Blavatsky's (HPB) other literary works. Considering her voluminous output, that claim is noteworthy. Those unfamiliar with this small but inspirational book may ask, "Why is it so special? Why is it so revered in the hearts of theosophists?" In terms of its size and scope, it does not even come close to *Isis Unveiled* or *The Secret Doctrine* (*SD*). In terms of providing an exposition of theosophical teachings, it does not compare to *The Key to Theosophy.* In spite of these differences, it is considered by many to be a priceless gem.

At the same time, it is somewhat baffling that *VS* has been featured far less prominently in our journals than Blavatsky's larger works. For instance, during the eighty-seven years of the *Canadian Theosophist*'s publication, 213 articles on the *SD* were featured but only eight on the *Voice.* During the sixty-three years of *The American Theosophist's* existence, seventy-nine articles on the *SD* were featured, but only four on the *Voice.* The *Theosophist* journal from Adyar had a more respectable ratio. During a 142-year period, it published 135 articles on the *SD* and fifty-six on the *Voice.*

Once again, we return to the question: "What accounts for the high esteem theosophists accord to this seemingly overlooked book?"

To those who have taken time to familiarize themselves with its 316 verses, the answer is obvious: *it is the exquisite beauty of the language employed therein*.[1]

> Let not the fierce sun dry one tear of pain before thyself hast wiped it from the sufferer's eye. (60)
>
> Chafe not at Karma, nor at Nature's changeless laws. But struggle only with the personal, the transitory, the evanescent, and the perishable. (65)

We do not normally think of HPB as a poet, but there can be no doubt that *VS* abounds with remarkable poetic imagery. It reveals an artistic side not found in her other writings, a sensitivity to nuance and delicate shades of meaning not found in her fiery polemics. Turn to virtually any page and you will find verse after verse, passage after passage, equaling in esthetic beauty anything penned by Shelley,

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David P. Bruce served as the national secretary of the TS in America from 2010-2023, as well as the director of education from 2003-2010. He is the author of *Serving a Higher Purpose*, published by Quest Books.

Wordsworth, or Whitman. That is a bold statement, but the examples provided in this article will back it up.

Students of poetry know it contains key elements distinguishing it from prose. This article lists a few of those and provides examples: first, with verses from famous poets; secondly, with verses taken from the *Voice.* The reader may then compare how the poetry of HPB stacks up against that of the great poets of our era. This is not to say that the *Voice* is a poem. It is not. It would be more accurate to characterize it as a *prose-poem*, a hybrid form containing elements of poetry and prose. The English poet Percy Bysshe Shelly, in his essay "A Defense of Poetry", explained: "The parts of a composition may be poetical, without the composition as a whole being a poem."

Of course, not everybody is a fan of poetry; but for those attempting to live a life guided by higher truths, an appreciation of poetry should not be discounted. Poetry opens a window to a special genre of beauty, the kind which speaks directly to the heart. Without question, the *Voice* is a book which appeals to the heart. We may recall the oft-quoted line from Shelley's *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." The higher truths that theosophists attempt to understand and live by cannot adequately be described by prosaic, pedestrian language. Poetry, metaphor, and symbolism are much better suited to that purpose, because they *allude* rather than proclaim, *suggest* rather than announce, *intimate* rather than dictate, thereby elevating and enlivening the higher imagination to subtler realms of thought. The American poet Wallace Stevens intuitively understood this when he said: "The poet is the priest of the invisible."

In *The Yoga of Beauty*, a small pamphlet published in 1969, the English theosophist Laurence Bendit noted:

> The classical Greek philosophers used to speak of a trinity of the Good, the True and the Beautiful, giving all three a similar value in the life of a human being. In the modern theosophical movement, we have paid a great deal of attention to the first two of these, very much to the neglect of the third.

Similarly, in a 1936 article from *The Theosophist* (vol. 57, June issue) entitled "The Sense of Beauty", the dancer Rukmini Devi said:

> We must respond eagerly to that which is beautiful, to true refinement. . . . We must not be compromising as regards anything that is ugly or lacking in culture.

How important that message is in today's world where ugliness and mediocrity seem omnipresent, where coarseness of speech and manner prevail in all echelons of society!

Before launching into an examination of the literary and rhetorical devices used by poets, it is worth considering an excerpt from a letter written in 1914 by the American poet Robert Frost:

> The ear is the only true writer and the only true reader.

His point is that poetry is best appre-

ciated when it is heard. We listen to music with the ears, but it is an entirely different experience from reading a musical manuscript with the eyes. Frost continues:

> I know people who read without hearing the sentence sounds and they were the fastest readers. Eye readers we call them. They get the meaning by glances. But they are bad readers because they miss the best part of what a good writer puts into his work.

We need to keep this in mind when exploring the *VS.* Don't be an eye reader! Instead, try reading the passages out loud and experience the difference.

Let us now consider some of the common techniques used by poets, techniques which HPB has employed so skillfully in this remarkable book.

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of initial consonant sounds in two or more neighboring words. Here is an example from Robert Herrick's poem "The Argument of His Book".

> I sing of brooks, of blossoms, birds, and bowers,
>
> Of April, May, of June, and July flowers.

The repetition of "b" in the first line is obvious, but don't overlook the repeated "j" in the second line. Without alliteration, the first line might read: "I sing of creeks, of flowers, birds, and gardens." The meaning is essentially the same, but the charm has vanished.

Sometimes Blavatsky uses alliteration in small groups of words: "Soundless Sound" (2), "Silent Speaker" (11), "voice of virtue" (69), "Lion of the Law" (134), "dread Dag-Dugpa" (227). This adds a rhythmical quality to the lines. A further point of interest is that the monikers "soundless sound" and "silent speaker" are also paradoxical in nature.

How many instances of alliteration can you hear in verse 122 of the *Voice?*

> But if thou kneadest husks with Maya's dew, thou canst create but food for the black doves of death, the birds of birth, decay and sorrow.

Assonance

This term refers to the close juxtaposition of similar sounds containing the same vowels but with different consonants, as in "beam" and "green," or "black" and "hat." Assonance adds an element of harmony and sweetness to the lines.

The sounds of assonance sing unabashedly in Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem "God's Grandeur":

> The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
> It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
> It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
> Crushed. Why do men then not reck his rod?
> Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
> And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
> And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
> Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

Turning to the *Voice,* notice the assonance in these short lines: "Behold the hosts of souls" (36) and "If thou wouldst

reap sweet peace." (139). How many instances of it can you detect in verse 99?

> Behold! thou hast become the light, thou hast become the sound, thou art thy Master and thy God. Thou are Thyself the object of thy search: the Voice unbroken, that resounds throughout eternities, exempt from change, from sin exempt, the seven sounds in one.

Consonance

Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds, which may appear in the middle or end of the words. In these lines from the poem "Out, Out —" by Robert Frost, we find both consonance and alliteration:

> The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard
> And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,
> Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.

Frost uses alliteration with the letters "s" and "d" and consonance with the letter "t." Note, too, the interesting bookend effect with the letter "z" appearing in the words "buzz" (first line) and "breeze" (last line).

How many instances of consonance can you identify in these lines from the *Voice?*

> When he has ceased to hear the many, he may discern the ONE — the inner sound which kills the outer. (7)
> The mind needs breadth and depth. (114)
> Then, thou of timid heart, be warned in time; remain content with the Eye Doctrine. (147)
> Armed with the key of charity, of love and tender mercy, thou art secure before the gate of Dāna. (230)
> Thou must have mastered all the mental changes in thy self and slain the army of the thought sensations that, subtle and insidious, creep unasked within the Soul's bright shrine. (242)

As an experiment, let's remove the consonance from verse 114 while retaining the meaning: "The mind needs scope and profundity." Without consonance, a memorable verse becomes ordinary and forgettable.

Alliteration, assonance, and consonance may be described as *word sounds*. There is another category in poetry that we might call *rhythmic sounds*.

Anaphora

Anaphora is a rhetorical device wherein a word or expression at the beginning of successive clauses, phrases, or sentences is repeated for emphasis or to add a rhythmic element. It is found in poetry, prose, political speeches, and lyrics of popular music:

> Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country. — John F. Kennedy

> I came, I saw, I conquered. — Julius Caesar (in a letter to the Roman senate)

> For, either he shall win, or he shall fall. — *VS* (174)

> When to the world's turmoil . . . when to the roaring voice . . . when frightened at the sight . . . when deafened by the cries . . . — *VS* (15)

> Hast thou not passed through . . . ? Hast

> thou not conquered . . . ? Hast thou not sin . . . destroyed . . . ? Hast thou not entered . . . ? — *VS* (94–7)

> Who shall approach them? Who shall first enter them? Who shall first hear the doctrine . . . ? — *VS* (104–6)

Just as much of the charm of poetry can be attributed to the skillful use of word sounds and word rhythms, the visual magic of poetry can be attributed to vibrant poetic imagery produced by figurative language. Let us look at some examples.

Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which word or phrase that refers to the part of something is used to represent the whole. Here are some examples:

> Take thy face hence. — *Macbeth*, Act 4, Scene 3

> My restless heart journeyed all over the world. — Rumi

> Though you may wander sweeter lands,
> You will not soon forget my hands. — Dorothy Parker, "But Not Forgotten"

> The wheel of the Good Law moves swiftly on. . . . The hand of Karma guides the wheel. — *VS* (121)

> If thou art told that to gain liberation thou hast to hate thy mother . . . tell them their tongue is false. — *VS* (124)

Hyperbole is extravagant language that represents something as greater or less, better or worse, or more intense, than it really is. It is often used to emphasize or draw attention to an idea, fact, or situation. Blavatsky does not hesitate to use it for dramatic effect.

> Behold the hosts of souls. Watch how they hover o'er the stormy sea of human life, and how, exhausted, bleeding, broken-winged, they drop one after another on the swelling waves. (36)

> Strive with thy thoughts unclean before they overpower thee. . . . For it will grow, increase in size and power, and then this thing of darkness will absorb thy being before thou hast well realized the black foul monster's presence. (54)

> The fearless warrior, his precious life-blood oozing from his wide and gaping wounds, will still attack the foe . . . (273)

Irony

Irony is the use of words to express something other than, and especially the opposite of, the literal meaning. It is often delivered with a touch of humor, ridicule, or light sarcasm.

> Oh, life is a glorious cycle of song,
> A medley of extemporanea;
> And love is a thing that can never go wrong;
> And I am Marie of Romania.
> — Dorothy Parker, "Comment"

The following verses from *VS* have a touch of sarcasm:

> The first repeat in pride: "Behold, I know." (119)

> If thou needest help thyself and fearest to offer help to others — then, thou of timid heart, be warned in time. (147)

> He, who becomes Pratyeka-Buddha, makes his obeisance but to his Self. (191)

A specific type of irony is situational irony, as illustrated by the following:

The English are so nice
so awfully nice
they are the nicest people in the world.

And what's more, they're very nice about being nice
about your being nice as well!
If you're not nice, they soon make you feel it.

— D. H. Lawrence,
"The English Are So Nice"

Alas, alas, that all men should possess Alaya, be one with the great Soul, and that possessing it, Alaya should so little avail them! — *VS* (107)

Now he shall surely reach his great reward! — *VS* (283)

Simile

Another example of figurative language is simile, which Blavatsky has utilized at least fifty times in the *Voice.* A simile makes a comparison of dissimilar objects or situations that have something in common, often using "as" or "like" to link the two. Its use is quite common in poetry and literature, as one can see from these examples:

My love is like a red, red rose.

— Robert Burns

I wandered as lonely as a cloud.

— William Wordsworth

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun.

— William Shakespeare

The very mystery of him excited her curiosity like a door that had neither lock nor key. — *Gone with the Wind*

In the eastern sky there was a yellow patch like a rug laid for the feet of the coming sun. — *The Red Badge of Courage*

The unhappy Hook was as impotent as he was damp, and he fell forward like a cut flower. — *Peter Pan*

Blavatsky's use of simile in the *Voice* is nothing short of exquisite:

When to himself his form appears unreal; as do on waking all the forms he sees in dreams. (6)

For mind is like a mirror; it gathers dust while it reflects. (115)

If Sun thou canst not be, then be the humble planet. (155)

The Dhyāna gate is like an alabaster vase, white and transparent. (277)

She is also quite imaginative in her use of simile, comparing karma to a tidal wave (185), and comparing thoughts to hounds (260) or to a lifeless butterfly (266); lust is likened to a fat worm (76), the timid soul to a shy turtle (15), and the unwary soul to a moth caught in the viscid oil of a night-lamp (35).

Metaphor

VS contains at least 39 examples of metaphor, many of which are used more than once. A metaphor is a word or phrase that literally denotes one kind of idea used in place of another to suggest some kind of likeness or analogy. Aristotle had high praise for writers who could use it skillfully:

It is a great thing, indeed, to make a proper

> use of these poetical forms, as also of compounds and strange words. But the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars. — *Poetics* 22:5

In the passage below, John Keats uses two metaphors to describe not physical travel but his exploration of books. The "realms of gold" refer to the gilded binding on his leather-bound books, and "states and kingdoms" refer to the imaginary worlds of the authors.

> Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold, and many goodly states and kingdoms seen. — "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"

In *The Prelude,* William Wordsworth compares deep and honest introspection to the removal of an article of clothing.

> Gently did my soul
> Put off her veil, and self-transmuted, stood
> Naked, as in the presence of her God.

The metaphors used by Blavatsky in the *Voice* include "castle of illusion" (14), "webs of delusion" (16), the "Three Halls" (22), "cloak of darkness" (203), "children of thy thoughts" (243), "Thou art that vase." (278), and many, many others. Streams, shadows, and gates appear as metaphors at least a dozen times, while ladders, portals, and shrines also appear but to a lesser extent. All this adds color and richness to the text.

Personification

Another favorite device of poets is personification, a powerful technique which gives human attributes to abstractions or inanimate objects.

> The sea lay laughing at a distance. — Wordsworth, *The Prelude*

> Why does the sea moan evermore? — Rossetti, "By the Sea"

The *Voice* contains over two dozen different instances of personification, including "the Voice of the Silence" (13), "the voice of flesh" (33), "the voice of virtue" (69), "the breath of fear" (238), and "the throbbing heart of earth" (263).

Symbolism

The last type of figurative language we will consider is symbolism, which is the art of expressing the invisible or intangible by means of visible or tangible representations. Black and white, light and darkness are symbols found in art, film, poetry, and literature. Whether its use is artful or heavy-handed depends on the artist. The popular Western films from the 1940s tended to feature the good guys wearing white and the villains wearing black, an obvious cliché. The film noir school of the1950s used more subtle and interesting camera techniques to reveal various shades of contrast between black and white. *The Third Man*, a 1949 British film noir classic, comes to mind as an outstanding example of that genre.

Unlike the early B-movies of the Western genre, Blavatsky does not treat

light and darkness in a one-dimensional or monochromatic way. Her interpretation is subtle and often surprising. In the following passages, light is used to represent truth, courage, glamor, and worldly pleasure:

> Seek for him . . . in the Hall of Wisdom . . . wherein all shadows are unknown, and where the light of truth shines with unfading glory. (32)
>
> The path that leadeth on is lighted by one fire — the light of daring, burning in the heart. (239)
>
> This light shines from the jewel of the Great Ensnarer (Māra). The senses it bewitches, blinds the mind, and leaves the unwary an abandoned wreck. (34)
>
> If thy soul smiles while bathing in the sunlight of thy life . . . (14)

In the excerpts below, darkness is used to represent evil, fear, ignorance, and illusion:

> It is the shadow of thyself outside the Path, cast on the darkness of thy sins. (204)
>
> A dark and threatening shade will fall from thine own heart upon the path, and root thy feet in terror to the spot. (239)
>
> Behold all those who, knocking for admission, await in ignorance and darkness. (101)
>
> Thou must divest thyself of thy dark garments of illusion. (33)

Final thoughts

Many people have read *VS* without realizing how essential the poetic language is to the messages contained in that spiritual guidebook. The notion that the stylistic elements are superfluous is profoundly wrong. There is no dichotomy here between style and substance; both are integrally fused together.

Returning to Shelly's views on the power of poetry:

> [Poetry] awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar. — *A Defense of Poetry*

This is what occurs when one approaches the *Voice* with an open heart. Familiar concepts are seen in a new light, for example, how unusual it is to see karma compared to a tidal wave (185) or the mind to a lifeless butterfly (266). Many more fascinating depictions await the observant reader.

As said earlier, the best poetry can elevate and enliven the imagination. Just as the stylistic elements of the *Voice* should not be discounted, the role of the imagination should not be disparaged. The English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge took a metaphysical view of that faculty:

> The Imagination, then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.
>
> The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the

> conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the *mode* of its operation. — *Biographia Literaria*

HPB also had something to say in that regard:

> In Occultism this [imagination] is not to be confused with fancy, as it is one of the plastic powers of the higher Soul, and is the memory of the preceding incarnations, which however disfigured by the lower Manas, yet rests always on a ground of truth. — *Theosophical Glossary*

Taking all this into account, it seems that the best way to approach *VS* is for the reader to patiently savor the verses in an unhurried manner and with an open heart, allowing the sublime beauty of the verses to inspire, awaken, and elevate. ✧

Endnote:

1. References to numbered verses are from the 1982 Adyar Centenary Edition.

***The Road of the Soul**

The night has come and with it
The hugeness of dreams
A long time forgotten
In the mist of the past
That comes after me.
The night has come and
No more white dawns
Obscure my eyes.

The dark shadows have fallen,
Covering with its dark cloth
My eyes and dreams.
And today I show myself to the world.
The night has come,
And with it the strength and courage
To make my inner Light shine.

Joma Sipe

***This poem relates to Mr Sipe's image on the cover of this issue and the cover caption on p. 3.**

Pythagorean Harmonics:
Sacred Number and the Golden Verses — I

KIRK GRADIN

I. Introduction

> Since it is usual with all men of sound understanding, to call on divinity, when entering on any philosophic discussion, it is certainly much more appropriate to do this in the consideration of that philosophy which justly receives its denomination from the divine Pythagoras. For as it derives its origin from the Gods, it cannot be apprehended without their inspiring aid. To which we may also add, that the beauty and magnitude of it so greatly surpasses human power, that it is impossible to survey it by a sudden view; but then alone can anyone gradually collect some portion of this philosophy, when, the Gods being his leaders, he quietly approaches to it.
>
> — Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*

H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) affirms that the system of knowledge called *philosophia*, or the "love of wisdom" by Pythagoras, was brought to the West from Indian sanctuaries. It is the same perennial teaching that the true *raja-yogin* of the East would call *Gupta-Vidya*, which was symbolized by the Egyptians as Thoth (Hermes), the god of wisdom and secret learning, what Plato and Plotinus — the two greatest students of Pythagoras — called "noetic work". It is the same in its essence as the gnosis of the true Judeo-Christian Gnostic and what the third-century Alexandrians called *Theosophia* — Divine Wisdom or God-knowledge.[1] If we accept this view, then when we undertake a study of Pythagoras and his school, we would understand that we are not simply attempting to approach a brilliant intellectual genius or an institute of advanced academical learning which had a fundamental transformative impact on Western philosophy, science, and the arts spanning many centuries. Instead, we would recognize that we are examining a few veiled fragments left in the wake of one of the greatest Adepts of known Western history who, in an age of growing spiritual darkness founded a true Mystery School.

In the theosophical view, Pythagoras not only "awakened the deepest intellectual sympathy of his age",[2] but was one

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in a long lineage of awakened Seers guided by the Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas who both preserve and pass on to receptive souls the deepest hidden truths of Nature. For the aspirant to this wisdom approach always requires the fusion of theory and practice, the recovery of true soul etiquette, natural reverence, silence, and rigorous self-discipline — both moral and mental — testing and trials, and the most exalted mastery of meditation and service. Aspirants are put through a theurgic fire over many lives and emerge refined through the awakening of soul memory, inner vision and initiation. Pythagoras brought the Path to the West, an expression based on the oldest and most archetypal forms of the Sacred Science — that of number, geometry, and sound. In this regard, the original Pythagorean community was a three-fold *buddha-dharma-sangha*, meant to develop the purest altruism and universal love as well as the highest noetic faculties — leading to spiritual awakening in union with cosmic celestial harmonies — a kind of portal of entrance into the path of renunciation and service to the whole of humanity.

And as is the case with all such great Teachers, some considerable portion of the transmission was only given orally and only to those bound by vows of silence. Especially its more advanced features would never be made a matter of public record unless there was a violation, or until such time as the great Brotherhood which stood behind the effort saw that humanity would benefit by its release. In addition, as many scholars of the esoteric tradition would admit, the form in which teachings became public was enigmatic, symbolic, and allegorical — purposely designed to conceal the underlying meaning and perplex the uninitiated. This is why even the little that is known of Pythagorean teaching requires both intellectual and spiritual exegesis, a slow and patient penetration into the layers of its archetypal meanings ultimately requiring the awakening of intuitive faculties.

It is also well documented that, even before Christianity was adopted as the official religion of the Roman Empire by Constantine in 323 CE, the demonization of all forms of so-called pagan philosophies and their proponents had begun. To establish itself as the sole repository of spiritual doctrine, there was a well-organized and systematic effort by the early Christian church to convert or destroy temples and texts, inscriptions and monuments which recorded the life and work of great teachers.[3]

Given all this, it is not surprising that so little can be found written about Pythagoras or his teaching during the century in which he lived and even in the two that followed. We do know that at least ten or twelve early biographies existed because they are mentioned by later authors, but the original texts have not yet been recovered. So, rather than pursuing the nearly impossible goal of establishing the rigorously verifiable "truth" about Pythagoras, we can with better confidence describe what later writers wrote about him and his teaching.

Pythagoreans were famously preoccupied with numeric principles and their application to cosmology, ethics, geometry, harmony, divination, and other fields both practical and mystical. Contemporary scholars are also carefully documenting their influence on the visual arts and architecture. Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier has written two commendable books on this theme. The first is *Measuring Heaven — Pythagoras and His Influence on Thought and Art in Antiquity and through the Middle Ages* (2006).[4] It uniquely offers a thorough outline of the history of ideas drawn from original sources in combination with that of the arts. Joost-Gaugier points out that most previous historical reviews of Pythagorean thought have tended to focus on one area of scholarly expertise only: philosophical, musical, mathematical, scientific, or religious. Such specialized studies she says are "risky", because for Pythagoras, his immediate followers, and those who in later centuries called themselves Pythagoreans, there were or should be no such definitive boundaries. It is the very synthesis and harmonious integration of art, science, philosophy, and spirituality that characterizes the tradition. "The compartmentalized scholarly diligence of the modern world risks underemphasizing or missing this fundamental feature, so foreign to us today." It is by looking holistically at "the literary evidence in tandem with the visual arts", especially when we seek for the meaning of such works in their "geometrical, proportional, or numerical characteristics",[5] that will help us to transcend preconceived borders.

A comparative approach is also extremely helpful in seeking to assimilate Pythagorean Mysteries. Plato, for example, is said to have put the same teaching into a different form. Some familiarity with the classical forms of Advaita Vedanta, Mahāyāna Buddhism, and the Kabbalah are also illuminating. For students of Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, *The Secret Doctrine*, *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge* and her less familiar articles such as "The Beacon Light of the Unknown" are deeply explanatory. Blavatsky's profound knowledge and *buddhic* erudition regarding the esoteric meaning of many misunderstood ideas such as "the music of the spheres", the Pythagorean Triangle, the Tetrad and Decade, can be found nowhere else. A further synthesis of theosophical and Pythagorean teaching, both metaphysical, moral, and metapsychological, also runs like a current in the three volumes of *The Gupta Vidya* (2020), by Raghavan N. Iyer.

Finally, while few would be willing to spend the years of effort needed to assimilate more than the rudiments of the Greek *Quadrivium*, any sincere seeker, young or old, could opt for Euclid's *Elements*.[6] This extraordinary, self-explanatory treatise on planar and solid geometry will fascinate, clarify, and strengthen the mind. Armed with a sharpened pencil, compass, and straightedge in order to work through each proposition, theorem, and proof, a pristine logic unfolds — cultivating the capacity for systematic reasoning applicable to

every dimension of life. It is also a treasure trove of universal symbolism. When studied in the light of correlations with *Dzyan* metaphysics and ethics, the *Elements* will enhance one's meditative reveries and deepen one's conviction regarding the laws of soul-mathematics, the logoic realities pervading all of visible and invisible Nature.

Based on the historical record, the 3rd and 4th century CE witnessed an efflorescence of activity inspired by the memory of the sage of Croton, "further enriching the extraordinary legend of a virtuous wizard noted for his holiness, preeminent as a philosopher, and revered as a harmonizer of mankind".[7] It was during this time that the three most important ancient biographies of Pythagoras (that are still available to us today) emerged.

The first is that by Diogenes Laertius (*The Lives and Opinions of Philosophers*), a scholar about whom little is known, but who must have studied a vast collection of Greek philosophical works in order to assemble his historical accounts. The second biographer is that of the Roman Syrian, Porphyry of Tyre (ca 232–305 CE), known as a sagacious philosopher and prolific writer who produced over seventy works including the teachings of Plotinus, of whom he was the student. The third biographical account is that by Iamblichus (ca 245–325 CE), a Syrian Neoplatonic philosopher of Arabic origin and illustrious student of Porphyry. Iamblichus was a mystic and mathematician, "renowned for his severe morality",[8] who founded the first school of practical theurgy in the Christian era, exemplifying "an almost superhuman purity and holiness of life".[9] Among many other cogent mystical texts, Iamblichus wrote a ten-volume work covering Pythagorean philosophy, theology, geometry, music, and astronomy as well as the *Life of Pythagoras* and the early Pythagoreans. Only four of the ten volumes are still extant. His biography[10] is the longest and most detailed one we still have from antiquity and appears to have been highly influential even into the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Through these biographers, we begin to see why, despite the secrecy and persecution, Pythagoras was undoubtedly one of the most important, the most imagined, and perhaps the most revered sage of Western antiquity who affected the life, thought, and spiritual tenor of many generations after him — both the intellectual elite and the common folk. He is also surprisingly relevant to our own time, a prophet overseeing our own age. Pythagorian teachings on "Number" as revealing the hidden laws of Nature not only pervades most of modern science, but their sacrosanct qualitative dimensions point to the deepest strains of symbolic mysticism and esotericism. Meanwhile, the example of his life and moral exhortations as embodied in *The Golden Verses*[11] speak to central themes that haunt our most intractable problems: global issues such as climate change, species extinction, epidemic violence, materialism and greed, the misuse of Nature and widespread loss of human purpose. His perennial keynote points to the end of violent conflict resolution, self-inflicted

human suffering and injustice, and the eventual conquering of all moral turpitude and psychological affliction. Pythagorean harmonics calls us to a radical and fundamental healing through altruistic self-discipline and joyous self-correction, a reintegration of heart and mind, of self and other, of soul, deity, and Nature. In addition, far more than individual solace or salvation, Pythagoras exemplified the ethics of secular monasticism, where the fruits of spiritual awakening culminate in sagely participation in civic life, infusing their healing and transformative elixir into all aspects of culture.

(*To be continued*)

Endnotes

1. *Theosophical Articles by H. P. Blavatsky*, Theosophy Co., 1981, "*Le Phare de L'Inconnu*", vol. i, p. 424.

2. *Isis Unveiled*, vol. i, p. xv.

3. *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. i, p. xl: "However superhuman the efforts of the early Christian fathers to obliterate the Secret Doctrine from the very memory of man, they all failed. Truth can never be killed; hence the failure to sweep away entirely from the face of the earth every vestige of that ancient Wisdom, and to shackle and gag every witness who testified to it. Let one only think of the thousands, and perhaps millions, of MSS. burnt; of monuments, with their too indiscreet inscriptions and pictorial symbols, pulverized to dust . . ." Such assertions made by H. P. Blavatsky are confirmed by recent historians such as Charles Freeman, *The Closing of the Western Mind* (2003), and Catherine Nixey, *The Darkening Age: The Christian Destruction of the Classical World* (2017).

4. Her second book: *Pythagoras and Renaissance Europe: Finding Heaven* (2009), similarly documents the history of ideas, art, and architecture, and the profound impact of Pythagorean teaching on the European Renaissance. For an additional scholarly tracing of Pythagorean and Platonic mathematics on western architecture, on the great anonymous masons and master builders of the Middle Ages, see *The Symbol at Your Door*, by Nigel Hiscock (2007).

5. C. L. Joost-Gaugier, *Measuring Heaven*, p. 4.

6. The 13 books of Euclid's *Elements* are the oldest extant large-scale deductive treatment of Greek mathematics. Sir Thomas Heath called it "the greatest mathematical textbook of all time". Yet, it requires no previous background in math, nor any formulas or calculations. It is second only to the Bible in the number of editions published. Scholars believe Euclid was not the inventor, but a compiler, producing his work roughly 100 years after the passing of Pythagoras. Heath asserts that most, if not all of what is found in Euclid was known or taught to the earliest Pythagoreans.

7. C. L. Joost-Gaugier, *Measuring Heaven*, p. 44.

8. *Isis Unveiled*, vol. ii, p. 100.

9. *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 3, fn.

10. *Iamblichus' Life of Pythagoras*, translated by Thomas Taylor in 1818 (Limited Traditions International, Ltd, 1986). Taylor was not only a masterful and prolific translator of ancient Greek and Latin, but is praised by HPB as an insightful commentator. He was the first to translate the entire works of Plato and Aristotle into English along with other Orphic and Pythagorean fragments.

11. *The Golden Verses of Pythagoras*, with the commentary of Hierocles (Concord Grove Press, 1983).

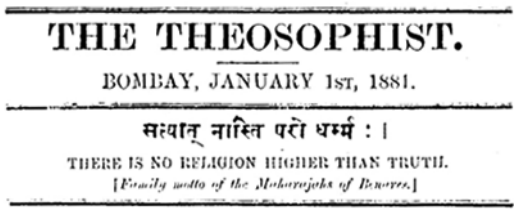
A (Pathless) Truth Beyond All Religions?

PEDRO OLIVEIRA

PUBLISHED on 30 October 1875, the byelaws of the Theosophical Society (TS) declared in their Preamble:

> Whatever may be the private opinions of its members, the society has no dogmas to enforce, no creed to disseminate. It is formed neither as a Spiritualistic schism, nor to serve as the foe or friend of any sectarian or philosophic body. Its only axiom is the omnipotence of truth, its only creed a profession of unqualified devotion to its discovery and propagation. In considering the qualifications of applicants for membership, it knows neither race, sex, color, country, nor creed.[1]

The Founders of the TS thus established for the organization a concern with truth instead of involvement with creeds or dogmas. They conceived it not as belief-based body but as an enquiry-based one. Such a concern would receive an exalted "upgrade" when the Founders visited Benares, India, in 1880 and were given the motto of the family of the Maharajahs of Benares which would be adopted by them as the Society's motto: *satyāt nāsti paro dharmah*, "There is no religion higher than Truth." It first appeared in *The Theosophist*, the official organ of the TS, in its January 1881 issue:


THE THEOSOPHIST.

BOMBAY, JANUARY 1ST, 1881.

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्म्म : ।

THERE IS NO RELIGION HIGHER THAN TRUTH.

[*Family motto of the Maharajahs of Benares.*]

The history of the TS is punctuated by three major crises: the Judge case (1893–1895), the Leadbeater case (1906–1908) and the speech by J. Krishnamurti on 3 August 1929, in Ommen, the Netherlands, in which he dissolved the Order of the Star in the East. In that speech he said:

> I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. That is my point of view, and I adhere to that absolutely and unconditionally. Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized; nor should any organization be formed to

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lead or to coerce people along any particular path.[2]

Although several elements of this passage are expressed in the spirit of the preamble of the byelaws of the Society, the reaction to his speech by some members of the TS was both strong and lasting. Some called it a betrayal of the TS and of Dr Annie Besant. Others maintained that in so acting Krishnamurti was demonstrating a spiritual failure. After more than ninety years of the original event one finds that, for some people, that sentiment has not abated. On the other hand, there are some students of Madame H. P. Blavastky that dismiss Krishnamurti as an "invention" of Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, and accuse him of having "never studied Theosophy".

In view of this, are there any indications in the teachings of the Wisdom Tradition that may support the notion of "Truth as a pathless land"? The author is very much aware that such an investigation would be considered as anathema to students of Krishnaji's teachings as they consider "comparison" a worthless activity. However, Krishnaji is on record as having had in-depth discussions and dialogues with scientists, psychologists, Buddhists, Hindus, and even a Roman Catholic priest. In such conversations, Krishnaji had his views challenged sometimes, he had to interact with the views of others and was also exposed to central teachings from the Eastern traditions.

The First Fundamental Proposition of the Proem of *The Secret Doctrine* affirms:

> (a) An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable Principle on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. It is beyond the range and reach of thought — in the words of Mandukya, "unthinkable and unspeakable".[3]

Although there are similar statements in other traditions of Esoteric Wisdom, the above-mentioned principle is referred to as "beyond the range and reach of thought", which also means beyond language, characterization, description, and definition. As Meister Eckhart once remarked, "anything you can say about God is not true". N. Sri Ram, fifth President of the TS, wrote: "God is something about which we know nothing, but can form such notions as we will." Such statements help us to understand that the essential Truth of existence cannot be reached by thought, reasoning, imagination, nor through the powers of philosophical logic.

In *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* we find the following passage:

> Believe me, there comes a moment in the life of an adept, when the hardships he has passed through are a thousandfold rewarded. In order to acquire further knowledge, he has no more to go through a minute and slow process of investigation and comparison of various objects, but is accorded an instantaneous, implicit insight into every first truth.[4]

The expression "instantaneous, implicit insight into every first truth" does

not seem to be a realization mediated by the intellect but an unmediated realization in the depths of the Adepts' consciousness. And such a realization is a realization of "every first truth"; it is not, therefore, a category of understanding, as Immanuel Kant taught, but an unmediated experience. In *The Secret Doctrine*, Madame Blavatsky referred to "the seers of the essence of things", who were able to see the "soul of things". William Blake expressed such possibility in his poem *Auguries of Innocence*:

> To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
> And Eternity in an hour

In the *Māndukya Upanishad* we find mention about what is called the fourth state of consciousness and its completely transcendental nature:

> *Turiya* is not that which cognises the internal (subjective) world, nor that which is conscious of the external (objective) world, nor that which is conscious of both, nor that which is a mass all sentiency, nor that which is simple consciousness, nor that which is insentient. (It is) unseen (by any sense organ), not related to anything, incomprehensible (by the mind), uninferable, unthinkable, indescribable, essentially of the nature of Consciousness constituting the Self alone, negation of all phenomena, the Peaceful, all Bliss and the Non-dual. This is what is known as the fourth (*Turiya*). This is the *Ātman* and it has to be realized.[5]

It has been said that to know the truth about oneself involves a relentless pursuit of what is unreal and untrue in our psychological makeup. The accumulation of experiences through many lifetimes, the hard anchoring of our sense of self on images, likes and dislikes, and a strong sense of identity radically based on the shaky premise of separateness, has buried that most glorious sense of undivided existence under layers of superficiality, self-importance and indelible pride. *Turiya* or our true Self is completely free from the archaeology of our personal history and remains untouched by it.

Referring to the Truth of existence, Śri Śankarāchārya, in his book *Viveka-Chudāmani*, sings the praises of its immeasurability:

> Brahman is the infinite, eternal, all-pervading light, it can be neither taken hold of, not abandoned, inconceivable by the mind and inexpressible by speech, immeasurable, without beginning, without end. (242)[6]

The verb "to measure" means "to discover the exact size or amount of something", "the dimensions, capacity, or amount of something ascertained by measuring". It also means to establish "the quality, value, or effect of something". Many attempts to define, conclusively, Truth or the Ultimate Reality, not only ended up in failure but also created a dogmatic, unyielding world view and virulent ideology that wreaked havoc in many parts of the world. As Śri Śankarāchārya says, the Truth or the Eternal is "inconceivable by the mind".

The writings of Madame Blavatsky

also bear testimony of the ineffability of Truth:

> *Aham eva Parabrahman* — "I am verily the Supreme Brahman" — has ever been the one living truth in the heart and mind of the Adepts, and it is this which helps the Mystic to become one.[7]

In the following passage she quotes from the famous communication from a great Adept, the Mahachohan, from 1881, who attempted to help A. P. Sinnett and A. O. Hume to see the essential nature of the work before the Theosophical Society:

> "To be true, religion and philosophy must offer the solution of every problem. That the world is in such a bad condition morally is a conclusive evidence that none of its religions and philosophies — those of the civilized races less than any other — have ever possessed the TRUTH."[8]

While philosophy became, mostly, an intellectual pastime in which experts delight themselves in the subtleties of technical discourse and linguistic acrobatics, religion, in certain quarters, has become a tool for warfare, division, and geographic domination. In certain countries, religion is a powerful influence in formulating state policies, which are mostly addressed against those who do not wish to conform to a dark, brutal, and domineering religious view, so called. In this scenario Truth becomes, for all practical purposes, non-existent, a casualty of cultural wars. This seems to be the mechanical heartbeat of Kali-Yuga.

HPB, in the quote below, reaffirms the view about the complete transcendency of Truth and also points out how self-interest makes it impossible for people in general, including the savants, to see it in its true nature:

> To sum up the idea, with regard to absolute and relative truth, we can only repeat what we said before. *Outside a certain highly spiritual and elevated state of mind, during which Man is at one with the* UNIVERSAL MIND — *he can get nought on earth but relative truth, or truths, from whatsoever philosophy or religion.* Were even the goddess who dwells at the bottom of the well to issue from her place of confinement, she could give man no more than he can assimilate. Meanwhile, everyone can sit near that well — the name of which is KNOWLEDGE — and gaze into its depths in the hope of seeing Truth's fair image reflected, at least, on the dark waters. This, however, as remarked by Richter, presents a certain danger. Some truth, to be sure, may be occasionally reflected as in a mirror on the spot we gaze upon, and thus reward the patient student. But, adds the German thinker, "I have heard that some philosophers in seeking for Truth, to pay homage to her, have seen their own image in the water and adored it instead."[9]

Perhaps it was Nagarjuna, the illustrious Buddhist philosopher and reformer of the second century CE, that threw a flood of light on the nature of truth as experienced by human perception, with his teaching about the two levels of Truth. For him, *paramārtha satya* or Absolute Truth is the knowledge of the

real as it is without any distortion.[10] It is the highest or whole truth; the real and entire truth,[11] while *samvṛtti satya* is Truth so called; truth as conventionally believed in common parlance.[12]

It is not difficult to see how truth conventionally believed becomes a source of distortion, conditioning, and domination. In a number of countries in the world the Bible is presented as, literally, "the word of God", and therefore cannot be questioned or elucidated. The only possible attitude of the believer is to accept it as such. But it becomes self-evident that no text, however lofty it may be, can be the Absolute Truth. Some teachers, perhaps Krishnaji included, would maintain that if the least amount of conditioning remains in the mind it cannot perceive that intangible Reality.

Nagarjuna seems to suggest that the perception of *paramārtha satya* amounts to Enligthenment, which for him is *śunyatā*, the fundamental emptiness of all existence. Radhaji, in a conversation, suggested that such emptiness is emptiness of everything we know. Our knowledge, because it is anchored in a self-referential "me" can never reach that abiding emptiness.

When Krishnaji mentioned the expression "Truth is a pathless land" he was not contradicting the Wisdom-Teachings but perhaps reminding TS members of the importance of unconditioned knowing. There was at that time in TS history a rather unadvised public discourse about initiations, which both the Mahatmas in their letters as well as Krishnaji refrained from. In 1925, in Ommen, there was a talk that revealed to an audience of thousands, plus the international press, that some theosophists had achieved three Initiations in one night and had thus become Adepts!

One problem in the attitude of Krishnaji towards the Wisdom-Teachings and religions in general is that, according to him, they were "put together by thought". In other words, they remained at the level of conditioning. If one accepts his statement as absolute he becomes imbued with an extraordinary authority as it would place him, for example, above the Buddha himself. But it is possible that another meaning to his provocative statement is that the moment the teachings became clothed in words they became subjected to corruption through self-interest, pride, power-seeking, and delusion, however lofty they were originally.

At the end of 1928 the TS counted in its ranks 45,000 members. After Krishnaji's historical speech and in a period of two years, the Society lost 15,000. It never regained that numerical strength. Successive Presidents, after Dr Besant's demise, led the Society through years of world turmoil and, with certain difficulties, the organization reinvented itself for the contemporary age and is now attracting a new generation of enthusiastic young theosophists.

It is very unlikely that the criticism of Krishnaji by some members in the TS will stop. Such criticism received support from a few eminent theosophists over the years. But one would risk to say

that there is a groundswell of support for him within the TS for he reminded us of what is really important — awareness of one's conditioning and of the sacredness of all life. He was educated by theosophists, lived at Adyar, became known through the TS worldwide and died on Adyar Day (17 February 1986). And in spite of all the critics there was one person who never wavered in her confidence in his mission: Dr Annie Besant. In his last visit to the Headquarters of the Indian Section of the TS in Varanasi, in November 1985, he asked to spend a few moments alone in Dr Besant's room in Shanti Kunj, her home in Varanasi. ✧

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When you are attached to property, to your wife or husband, to a belief, a conclusion, or whatever it is — don't be attached. Finished! You can't practice this. The whole question of practising is an abomination.

J. Krishnamurti
From an Interview by Renée Weber,
Ojai, 22 March 1978

When Truth and Beauty Depart

TIM WYATT

NOTIONS of truth and beauty, enshrined in so many classical philosophies and deeply embedded in the Ageless Wisdom tradition itself, also lie at the very heart of the human soul — and yet often sit there latent and deactivated. Truth and beauty are two sides of the same coin. You cannot have one without the other. They are enmeshed and entangled ideas. Today these vital values no longer have the same potent power to transform and uplift individuals the way they perhaps did in the past. These high ideals no longer resonate with the same verve or vigour. Often, they are scorned.

Truth and beauty have many rich tributaries. Integrity, ethics, honesty, morality, aesthetics, fairness, and compassion are far from an exhaustive list. They ensure balance, harmony, wellbeing, and cooperation. They unite rather than divide. They are the distillation of all that is good in human beings and they are increasingly absent in the modern world.

In our times truth and beauty have been largely exiled to the margins of contemporary, mainly materialistic, consciousness. They have been pensioned off as quaint relics of the supposedly ignorant and naïve past. They have become optional extras rather than core necessities.

For many people today truth is a purely relative concept. It has become dangerously malleable. The twenty-first century is sometimes — absurdly — described as "the post-truth era" in which truth is infinitely flexible and shifting and can be anything you choose it to be. This produces a world in which today's verity is tomorrow's heresy.

Lies, propaganda, and disinformation abound in today's world just as they have in other civilizations before us. The difference is that because of sophisticated communications systems these untruths can spread thicker and faster than ever before. As British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill put it back in the pre-digital age: "A lie can get half way round the world before the truth has even got its pants on." These days it can complete several circumnavigations.

Truth and beauty are no longer overriding and enduring human principles

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and this has a stark and debilitating effect on ourselves and the wider world. Few recognise these corrosive symptoms and even fewer appreciate the intense power of truth and beauty to harmonise and elevate.

We can only speculate about what may have precipitated this relatively recent descent away from truth and beauty and into ugliness and mediocrity. Is it part of some inevitable cycle of collapse and destruction? Could it be because of the prevailing modern mindset dominated by raw and insatiable drives for individuality, self-aggrandisement, profit, status, and the lust for power and influence? Or has modernity somehow robbed us of something primal and eternal within us? Perhaps there are deeply occult reasons which this writer isn't privy to.

What we can be certain of is that when truth and beauty are no longer the guiding principles in any era, some form of degradation and degeneration inevitably start to creep in. Systems, conventions, and codes of conduct wither. Organisations, institutions, and traditions fragment. As these values shrivel further, the world becomes poisoned. When these uniting principles finally fracture, chaos and often violent disorder quickly fill the vacuum. Human behaviour becomes progressively atavistic. These are the hallmarks we see all around us right now.

Divorced from loftier notions, this crude mass materialistic mindset creates increasingly bleak, depleted and polluted environments for humankind to inhabit. This disfigured physical fabric itself has deep-seated effects on people's well-being, emotions, interactions, and general behaviour. Those involved are then firmly locked into a loop of decline. The worse the environment becomes, the more behaviour degenerates, and vice versa.

While a great deal of beauty remains on our planet, much of it spectacular and awe-inspiring, this is mainly confined to the natural rather than the man-made world. We might somewhat sceptically remark that if you gave the big corporations enough time and finance they would ensure that every beautiful place on earth was open for plunder and exploitation. Give them their way and the world would be mined, felled, or extracted to exhaustion, or else encased beneath a thick layer of concrete.

Our built environment with all its cold grandiosity and appalling mediocrity has morphed into an often alienating and intimidating place in which the very architecture has become the tyrannical overlord of the people. Indeed, people don't seem to feature much in these isolated boxes in the air. Perhaps this is why there is so much crime and discord along with such a lack of human contact especially in the cities themselves.

There are indeed fine cities which have not succumbed to trashy travesties of modernity but these remain in a minority. Internationally, architecture has become increasingly homogenised without the plurality of style or construction methods employed in the past. The concept of sympathy with place — or indeed people — rarely seems to feature. Architects

are more interested in how investors or other architects regard their work rather than those who use the building or how it impacts the wider environment.

Architecture has a huge influence and a massive impact on people. This is a universal truth. At one time beauty underpinned almost all structures from the humblest to the noblest. Many civilizations realised the need to build harmoniously within the landscape, perhaps most notably in the Chinese practice of *feng shui* (literally wind and water), in which buildings were constructed to align in equilibrium with the geography and energies of a particular location.

Equally importantly, ancient peoples across the globe appreciated that aesthetics and proportion dictated the buildings they constructed. They knew the power of employing sacred geometry to their structures and edifices. They knew there was great power in this. They were well aware that without these elements failure would be the inevitable outcome.

Above all, they were sensitive to powerful earth energies and cosmic forces focused at particular locations and built accordingly. This is why so many people are still drawn to these classical structures today. Their energies remain intact along with their resonance. Their harmony, beauty, and proportion still scream out even to the less sensitive and even when they lie in ruins.

We don't build many sacred buildings these days — just a few temples and the occasional church. Nor do we principally build them for people. They are constructed solely for profit. Had the Pyramids, the Greek temples, or the Gothic cathedrals been constructed as part of some ancient profit-driven property portfolio, they wouldn't have been built at all, and if they had they would have crumbled long ago because of the use of cheaper, inferior materials and construction techniques. (Unlike Stonehenge and Angkor Wat most of our modern buildings will not survive for centuries or millennia. Only stones stand the test of time — not steel and concrete.)

Not only have many cities become alien environments, many of them have also become too big in both size and population. An obvious solution would be to deconstruct and reverse-engineer sprawling conurbations into smaller, separated, individualised villages interconnected by greenery and natural features. Most cities originally consisted of individual villages progressively linked up by creeping urban sprawl.

Of course, such measures are almost impossible when aggressively accelerating land values dictate that the square footage should be commercially monetised to the maximum. But this also begs the question as to what true value actually is. In the world of truth and beauty value extends beyond mere financial considerations. When truth and beauty are absent, money dictates, distorts, and dominates. Money is no lover of either.

For the past century a great many of the buildings in our towns and cities across the world have become taller, uglier, more brutalist and de-humanising.

They have almost entirely abandoned classical proportions and principles. And not only that, contemporary architecture seems determined to divorce individuals even further from the very ground beneath their feet blocking off the natural energies. They have become barriers. There is hardly a city on earth not disfigured by erupting glass, steel, and concrete eyesores which dwarf everything in their long menacing shadows.

Today buildings are bleakly functional, often without any aesthetic considerations whatsoever, or any wider understanding of the environment and its subtle energies. Indeed, the hyperconnected modern world has disrupted these finer forces, too, by flooding the planet with massive dosages of electromagnetic and other undesirable energies.

Truth and beauty are not simply abstract values but archetypal and defining concepts. They have the capacity to liberate powerful forces of transmutation which ensure harmony and balanced progress. It may be that they not only provide the necessary mechanisms for our transcendence from our current turbulence, they may be essential for our very survival. Not only are these timeless concepts absent in our architecture, they are also absent from a great many other areas of human enterprise.

It is quite clear that deep within themselves many individuals retain an innate and deep appreciation of beauty — especially in Nature. Increasing numbers of people not only appreciate the natural world but realise how wrong human activity can put it in mortal jeopardy. Environmental awareness may have mushroomed over the past half century along with a more spiritual perception of the world but beauty is still held hostage to functionality. And truth has yet to find its way again. ✧

The pursuit of truth and beauty is a sphere of activity in which we are permitted to remain children all our lives.

Albert Einstein

Books of Interest

DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE: The Theosophical View on Life After Death, Reincarnation, Spiritualism, Mediumship, Psychism, Immortality and Other Related Subjects. From the Letters of the Mahatmas Koot Hoomi and Morya to A. P. Sinnett and A. O. Hume. Compiled and Edited by Daniel H. Caldwell. Blavatsky Study Center, Blavatsky Archives <blavatskyarchives.com>, 2022, Paperback, USD $10.00, 314 pp., 152 x 229 mm.

Have you wondered what were the original teachings of Theosophy concerning death, the afterlife, and related topics like reincarnation and spiritualism? There are many distillations of those teachings in later books, some of them quite useful. But Caldwell's *Death and the Afterlife* is the book to go to find postmortem learning close to its theosophical source. Here is the doctrine in the words of the Masters Koot Hoomi and Morya, arranged in convenient short passages, together with much supportive material on the Masters and their communications. This book is the latest one of the excellent contributions of Caldwell to theosophical studies, such as *The Esoteric World of Madame Blavatsky* and *The Writing of The Secret Doctrine*.

In *Death and the Afterlife* we find selections on such topics as "Mediumship", the "Seven Principles of Worlds and Men", the "Gigantic Evolutionary Journey and the Intervals between Rebirths", "Globes and Kingdoms", "Devachan", and the difficult topic of "Suicides and Victims of Accident and Violence", among much else. The overall pattern is presented in a chart reproduced from Geoffrey A. Farthing's *When We Die*. Based on the Seven Principles, it commences with dying, or the memory dislodging from the physical brain. Then the chart goes on to a state just after death, as the ego loses awareness of the former self. The next state is the Kama-Loka or struggle between the lower principles entailing duality and the higher in which duality aspires toward oneness. The ego then develops a "chrysalis" for assimilation into the higher state. Then comes the entry into Devachan, a "dream state", in which "all the scenes and population . . . are as the Ego would most like them". Finally, for many, the ego again goes unconscious and realizes rebirth in the material world in accordance with its needs.

In more detail, according to an excerpt from Letter H, "Devachan and Kama-Loka", by Master Koot Hoomi (68 of the 4th Chronological Edition of *The Mahatma Letters*) after dying the ego enters a time of "unconscious gestation" and undergoes struggle between the Lower and Higher principles. In a very few particularly degenerate entities the Lower may prevail entirely, and the entity is dissolved. (This has been a controversial point in Theosophy.) But

for most the Higher self is privileged to enter Devachan, while the Lower remains in the Kama-Loka ("World of Desire"). Here whatever one wants or fears is actualized, and this is played out (a major teaching of *Death and the Afterlife* is that "thoughts are things") until the lesson is finally learned that we create our own afterlife by our dreams, phobias, desires, and drives. No God sends us to heaven or hell or anywhere else; we send ourselves. When the Desire World is overcome, the lower entity can join its Higher Self in Devachan. We are told that "It [Devachan] is an ideated paradise, in each case of the Ego's own making, and by him filled with the scenery, crowded with the incidents, and thronged with the people he would expect to find in such a sphere of compensative bliss. And it is that variety which guides the temporary personal *Ego* into the current which will lead him to be reborn in a lower or higher condition in the next world of causes."

I would like to mention that a vivid picture of these after-death adventures can be found in the 1998 movie *What Dreams May Come*, starring Robin Williams and Annabella Sciorra. This film, which was explicitly based in part on theosophical teachings, shows the principals after their deaths in a world where whatever they imagined, whether beautiful flowers or fearsome monsters, appeared before their eyes and in their neurons. In time they came to understand that what seemed without was actually within, and moved more and more into a homey pleasant place, though reincarnation was clearly in sight.

Finally, it should be noted that in Caldwell's work these passages are followed by five appendices offering fascinating background information: "A. P. Sinnett Tells How His Correspondence with the Mahatmas Began", "Death by the French Occultist Eliphas Levi with Editorial Notes", "Letter from Mme Blavatsky on Her Own Former Mediumship When She Was a Child", "Psychic Visions and Knowledge", and "Some Questions Concerning Reincarnation and the Fate of Victims of Accidents and Violence". The book concludes with a valuable bibliography on "Life after Death and Psychism" and a 42-page glossary providing wonderful help with the volume's many advanced and problematic terms.

Death and the Afterlife is highly recommended to students of Theosophy. It must be acknowledged that this tome is on a high level and will be most understandable to theosophists having some previous background in such studies. But it certainly belongs in all lodge and study group libraries, and in the personal libraries of serious instructors. May it find its true home therein.

ROBERT ELLWOOD
American academic, author,
and expert on world religions.

We can feel with utter certainty that we and our dead are alike in the hands of perfect Power and perfect Wisdom directed by perfect Love.

C. W. Leadbeater, *To Those Who Mourn*

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