

Presidential Address

To the 135th Annual Convention of the Theosophical Society
Adyar, 26 December 2010

It is a great privilege to welcome all of you to this 135th Convention of our Society. I hope you will enjoy Adyar, apart from benefiting from the Convention. It is a special occasion every year which enables us to meet together, and to exchange ideas and learn to be closer friends. Let us rise to pay our respects to those Great Beings who have been good enough to see that the Society started with their blessings.

May those who are the embodiments of Love immortal bless with their help and guidance this Society, founded to be a channel for their work. May They inspire it with their Wisdom, strengthen it with their Power, and energize it with their Activity.

What did the Mahatmas intend when they promoted the founding of the Theosophical Society? We cannot know exactly what was in their minds, but we do know that they spoke about the need for the work. In fact they seemed to have regarded it as a ‘forlorn hope’, but worth putting energy into because it is fundamental for human progress. One of the Mahatmas wrote to Sinnett: ‘I will send you an essay showing why in Europe more than anywhere else, a Universal Brotherhood that is an association of “affinities” of strong, magnetic yet dissimilar forces and priorities, centred around one dominant idea, is necessary for successful achievements in occult sciences. What one will fail to do — the combined many will achieve.’

The purpose behind this is not to

abolish different or dissimilar activities, but to create a sense of unity, a common purpose. There are religions, cults, communities in which people are strongly united; so much so that they do not encourage differences of opinion. But the Theosophical Society was meant from the very beginning to bring together diverse elements, people of different races, or preferring a particular religion, speaking different languages, with various cultural and educational backgrounds, yet united by common ideals and aims. It is easy to feel sympathetic to people who agree with us, or agree with any opinion that a particular leader has. But that is not what Universal Brotherhood is intended to be. Dissimilarity must flourish, but there must be oneness, cooperation in working for the progress of humanity, and of all other

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creatures. We who pledge ourselves to the spirit of Universal Brotherhood must work to bring about that spirit in any part of the world where we are working, and then only we will be fulfilling the aim of the Theosophical Society.

From time to time differences become seemingly important, and people who are speaking about Universal Brotherhood do not feel that brotherhood even towards some fellow members, colleagues or workers is necessary. Is it possible for them to be friends, even if there are differences? Can we learn to feel that differences are not very important, and therefore remain without resentment or aggressive opposition to those who differ from us? Can we differ and yet come together as friends to find a common solution to world problems, which means agreeing to disagree, and continuing to work together? If such a spirit were in the Society it would become much stronger and develop the work it needs to do much better.

A second very important point is the question of authority. In Letter No.10 the Mahatmas speak about how authority in churches or church-like organizations makes abject slaves of people. This attitude makes for total incompatibility with the work of the Theosophical Society.

Some modern scientists agree with Theosophists that all of evolution works to develop more and more intelligence. Of course intelligence in the worldly sense, ordinary intelligence, is not meant, because there is such a thing as spiritual intelligence, which is understanding based

on the absolute unity of existence. When consciousness is at the level of unity it sees everything in a different light. The growth of intelligence is obstructed when people are encouraged or even forced to believe what they are told. Therefore, in the Theosophical Society we are not called upon to believe, but to examine everything freely for ourselves. HPB wrote that this attitude will bring about real understanding. But we must not lose this sense that we are one body of people sharing noble ideals. Perhaps, this teaching is both 'profound and practical'. Therefore as members of the Theosophical Society we must be careful not to be attached to superstitions, to fixed ideas, or to all that is demanded by our environment or to truth in a particular place. This means any idea, simply because it is part of the racial prejudice or religious thinking around us. To be inwardly free is the mark of a Theosophist.

So a Theosophist must understand that he must free himself of all that holds the mind back, and at the same time have a genuine desire to bring about the brotherhood of humanity and suitable institutions that will advance the world.

This is what is needed for the Theosophical Society to make itself known in the world, and to arrest the attention of the highest minds. It is not enough to have nice friendly relationships between all of us from different parts of the world, but one that is based on free thinking and the approach to questions of life. Only this will make humanity move forward.

In one of the letters from the Mahatmas

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to Sinnett it is said that human nature has not changed for millennia, because of prejudice and the general human tendency which makes people unwilling to alter their way of life. But members of the Theosophical Society must make this Society dynamic; not clinging to old patterns of thought. Though members belong to many religions even if they are not practising them, still the mind remains conditioned by old ideas and beliefs. Many members think that one of the Objects of the Society exists in order to bring people of different religions — Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Jews, etc., together. This is only a partial truth, but in reality what the second Object of the Society tries to encourage is that Hindus should be true and not pseudo-Hindus; Christians should be really Christian, and not pretending to accept the teachings of Christ; and so on. If this Object is applied all superstitions and wrong thoughts would be eliminated from every religion, and people will become true Christians, Muslims, Hindus, etc. Unity will become a reality then, and all of them will be taught the same perennial truths, although some part of every religion will have to be discarded.

How many of us have the courage to free ourselves from the superstitions and wrong thoughts of our community and our religion? How many have the courage to realize that merely following authority does not lead to true religious consciousness. This is in fact the essence of one of the resolutions passed by the Society and printed in *The Theosophist*. We must be

seekers for the Truth and find out what is true. When we find out — although it may be what others have discovered — we will know it for certain and know this is the Truth. We have to concentrate our vital magnetic force against the hostile currents of prejudice and fanaticism. Those who know what union is, understand that truth is not an idea, but it comes from the ardent desire to know it for oneself. To be a true worker for the Theosophical cause, a true Theosophist, means rejecting all ideas which are pernicious, like a thought-made God.

HPB wrote that to be a Theosophist one may not necessarily recognize the existence of a special God or Deity. In fact this is a highly divisive idea, and gives the opportunity to some to exploit others. Rejecting such ideas can be profoundly religious if there is a recognition of the Divine Presence, that of living Nature which is everywhere.

We may say that if members are true to the Objects of the Society, the Theosophical Society would not be religious in a conventional sense, but truly religious because of a great sense of reverence and respect for everything in manifestation. That Presence is everywhere, it is needless to say. The Theosophical Society is meant to be an instrument for the upliftment of human consciousness which is imprisoned now by fear, superstition, old patterns of thought, and so on. The symbology of the *Bhagavadgītā* is the confrontation between old ways of thinking, conditioned by fellow men and women, culture, tradition, etc. It is a new

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way of thinking, to bring which an awakening has to come into being. This happens only when the mind has detached itself from old patterns and ideas. HPB tells us: 'He who abandons the old and trodden highway of routine and enters upon the solitary path of independent thought, Godward, he is a Theosophist.' He is an original thinker with an inspiration of his own. Our Society needs, not so much to enrol new members, but to be an important agent to new levels of thought, to humanity as a whole.

The solitary path is not the path of self-will, or a determination to abandon the old for the new made by the lower mind. It is the path to the sacred, the eternal, the imperishable, which may be called God. What the Theosophical Society needs is not merely to enrol new members, but to leaven the thought of humanity as a whole. Members of the Theosophical Society must be among pioneers in whatever field they are working. The Society will lose its importance and its energy, if the

members are satisfied with action at a pedestrian level. It is amazing to look back and to see what could be done by outstanding Theosophists like Col. Olcott. Not only was he able to achieve many things outwardly, but he kindled the nobility and thoughtfulness of thousands of people whom he addressed. It was a very real question for him to unite the world in every possible way by breaking down barriers of the mind, and holding up Universal Brotherhood. He was a man whom the Adepts said they could trust under all circumstances. Can we as members have something of those qualities, that spirit of self-sacrifice for the good of mankind at every level?

What one person cannot do, many can, as the Master says. Together, jointly, we can bring about changes in the world that mean real progress. For that to happen our feelings must be right, and we must cooperate and work together for the common ideal of humanity's progress and perfection.

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The special Theosophical event of the year was the tenth World Congress; such Congresses are held from time to time in some part of the world. This time it was held in the city of Rome, Italy, and was attended by more than five hundred persons. The main theme of the Congress was 'Universal Brotherhood without Any Distinction — the Road to Awareness'. The Congress had been very well organized by the Italian Section, with

the Vice-President, Mrs Linda Oliveira, keeping in touch and making suggestions. There were thirty-nine countries represented, the largest contingent being from Italy. But there were also members from other areas besides Europe, and all met in a spirit of friendship. The whole atmosphere of the Congress was harmonious, and the speakers, and other programmes, were very good. There is a comprehensive account with many photos on the website.

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The Indian Section has a membership of 12,597, the largest by far in the Theosophical Society. There were a number of interesting programmes and various activities at the Section Headquarters at Varanasi. An important occasion was the conference on 'Peace and Conflict' which was held at the Headquarters in Varanasi. The South Indian Conference and the Study Camps in different parts of the Section all helped to strengthen the work. The national lecturers travelled to different places and besides them, there were others who did similar work in this area. The *Indian Theosophist* brought out a special issue for the centenary of the publication of *At the Feet of the Master*. The Indian Section has some large problems concerning property; one of them is that the city of Varanasi proposes to take part of the peripheral area of the compound to widen a road.

The Theosophical Society has suspended its activities in Pakistan recently because the political conditions were most unfavourable.

The National President in Australia visited some of the Lodges in the Section, and Dr Edi Bilimoria, Education Coordinator, visited a number of places as did some other members who gave programmes in parts of the Section. The Education Unit has been preparing varied material to augment the work of the Lodges and Branches. Mr Colin Price toured the Section in March and visited a number of Lodges. The membership is about twelve hundred. The National Convention was held in Launceston,

Tasmania, and the theme was on the interesting subject of 'Divine Wisdom in Art, Science and Philosophy'.

In New Zealand, the National Convention was held at Napier with the theme 'After 2012, what Next?' An increased number of participants attended the School of Theosophy which was held at the Tauhara Centre. Prof. Ravi Ravindra presented a series of lectures on 'Science and Spirituality'. Many members have passed away including Mr Conrad Jamieson who lived at Adyar for several years.

The TS in the Philippines has been very active. Mr R. Doval-Santos was elected as General Secretary with Mr Victor Peñaranda as his immediate helper. The Guest Speaker at the Convention was former Chief Justice R. S. Passo.

Twenty-six delegates from the East and Central African Section attended the World Congress in Rome. The Nairobi Lodge has issued four-monthly programmes and is incorporating these in the Section magazine. The Nairobi Lodge has a rich collection of books in its library which is housed in part of the building that they own. Everything has gone on as usual. *Theosophy Explained* by Pavri was studied at Kitwe Lodge in Zambia and this resulted in an increase in the number of sympathizers. Mufulira Lodge is holding weekly programmes. Many of the Lodges in East and Central Africa do a lot of TOS work, and the Nairobi Lodge made a considerable donation as part of its programme.

In South Africa the National Convention was well attended and held

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at Durban. The theme was 'The Ocean of Theosophy'. The Germiston Lodge is constructing a new building, and programmes are going on well with an intensive course on basic Theosophy.

The membership of the West African Section has hardly changed. At Ghana, the Section celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary on 17 November 2010. Three members, Paul Kwakyi, John Boakye and Macford Attigah attended the World Congress in Rome. Copies of *The Theosophist* from Adyar are distributed to public libraries, universities, etc. The work in the Ivory Coast is beginning to show improvement after much political disturbance.

The English General Secretary has sent a report full of optimism. They are selling Tekels Park but will continue to have some programmes there. Their magazine *Insight* has been discontinued and articles will be put into another magazine called *Esoterica* which goes to many besides the Theosophical members. The Summer School was held in Liverpool, where the chief speaker, Mr David Roef, gave talks on the teachings of *The Secret Doctrine*, etc. The Section has undergone a good measure of self-renewal and a sense of purpose, we are told.

Both members and the public are attending meetings in Wales. Colwyn Bay Lodge has been revived after a break of about ten years. Mrs Maureen Atkinson visited the area.

In Scotland it was reported that they had a very encouraging year with an increase in the attendance at Lodge

meetings, and they intend to strengthen the vitality and visibility of the Lodges in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee.

The membership in Ireland is said to be growing steadily, and good work has been achieved. Belfast Lodge held regular weekly meetings and Phoenix Lodge in Dublin held monthly meetings. A number of enquirers and sympathizers are said to have attended the all-Ireland Convention, where Miss Mary Anderson's presence was much appreciated.

In Sweden the membership is small, with about one hundred and fifty members. Mr Curt Berg who was a strong pillar of the Society passed away during the year. This year they did not have a summer school, as some members attended the World Congress.

Norway does not have sufficient members to form a Section, but two Lodges have been holding meetings, and it is to be hoped that in the future new members will join and the Section be re-established.

The Icelandic Section is now under a new General Secretary, Ms Anna Valdimarsdottir, who says that there were fifty-one talks which were advertised in the main newspapers and open to the public. On Saturdays they open with a meditation followed by informal talks and refreshments. The Theosophical Society is publishing an Icelandic translation of *Seek Out the Way* and a book by Sigvaldi Hjalmarsson, *A Kind of Silence*. At its General Meeting, the Section decided on a new name which will be used within the country only.

The Finnish Section held public

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lectures in seventeen towns and regular Lodge meetings in twenty-two towns. Miss Mary Anderson was the chief guest at the Summer School. Two programmes were held at Kreivila, on 'Change your thoughts — you change your life'.

The Belgian Section has ninety-seven members in eight Lodges. Three Lodges have their programmes in the new headquarters building in Brussels, while the others function as usual. The Flemish branch in Ghent is very active as are the two in Antwerp. The Centenary of the Section will be held in June 2011 in the new headquarters building.

In France, the 111th Convention, on the theme 'Tradition and Revolution', was held. The building was renovated so that it is more useful. The magazine *Le Lotus Bleu* is sent to Belgium and other French-speaking countries.

There are ten Lodges and nine Study Centres in the Netherlands with a total membership of four hundred. The General Secretary says there is close cooperation between the Theosophical Society and the International Theosophical Centre. The publishing house, bookshop and library are open and available to the public.

In Germany, a new Lodge has been formed, which means there are seven Lodges. The Summer School had Miss Mary Anderson as Guest-speaker.

A new Lodge with twelve members has been formed in Ascona in Switzerland, where a seminar took place on Fraternity, Compassion and Liberation. The Lodge in German-Switzerland had to be dissolved.

Mr Theodoros Katsifis was again elected as General Secretary of Greece. During the year Mr Ricardo Lindemann gave an inspired lecture at the Ypatia Lodge. The magazine *Ilisos* was published regularly. A new study group named Procris was founded on the Island of Cephalonia. Kabeiros Lodge was chartered at Alexandropolis. An increase of forty-three new members added to the total membership, which is now two hundred and seventeen.

We already mentioned the Italian Section at the beginning of this report. A great deal of energy in the Section was spent in organizing the World Congress. The General Secretary, Mr Antonio Girardi, has been re-elected for a further three years. Book sales increased by 17%. Lists of new books and new issues are given in their magazine *Rivista Italiana di Teosofia*. The Theosophical Order of Service in this country has been successful in a variety of activities including making 'teddies' for children who have suffered tragedy.

The General Secretary of Spain gave some talks including speaking at Lodges in Portugal. The School of the Wisdom was held in August with Mr Martin Leiderman as guest speaker. The *Bhagavadgītā* and a book on *The Essentials of the Masters* by C. Jinarājādāsa were published.

The Theosophical Society in Hungary has a membership of forty-one, and has been trying to expand, although it is a difficult task in a country formerly under Communist rule. Three Lodges are active.

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Two of them have studied Theosophy. The Society has been able to publish translations of Powell's work on *The Solar System* and Annie Besant's *Esoteric Christianity*.

Mrs Breda Zagar has been elected as the new Regional Representative for Slovenia. At the school in Buda, *The Noble Eightfold Path* was studied by all the Lodges and a Winter School at Soncek was entirely dedicated to 'Working for Adyar'. The Lotus Lodge in Croatia has twenty-two members and six applicants. There is still only one Lodge in Croatia.

There are four Lodges and more than seventy members in the Ukraine. The keynote for study was 'Science and Spirituality'. In Kiev, about sixty persons from Russia and Ukraine took part in a conference. All the groups celebrated White Lotus Day, and several members attended the World Congress in Rome.

Although the membership in the American Section has fallen by approximately two hundred and fifty members, the National President, Mrs Betty Bland, reports 'a year of intense activity'. David Bruce was appointed as the new National Secretary, but will also be responsible for the educational work. The programmes for prisons have continued. In the audio-video department there are one hundred and thirty-five titles. The Olcott Memorial Library activities have gone on well.

There were several Summer Schools and some other programmes during the year in Argentina. *The Theosophist* in Spanish continues to be translated and is printed there. In addition to the fifteen

Lodges, the Section has an administrative connection with Lodge *Fraternidad*, Asuncion, in Paraguay, which holds weekly meetings. Regular meetings are also held at the Theosophical Centre at San Rafael.

Brazil has a membership of 747, but 1500 copies of their magazine are printed for circulation. Five regional secretaries have been appointed to stimulate the TS, and several videos were sent to each region. Emphasis is laid on relating study to practical living.

Mrs Isis Resende, from Brazil, gave a series of talks in Montevideo in December 2009. In March 2010 there was another series of talks on 'The Path of Vegetarianism'. Mrs Dolores Gago spoke on 'Ancient Wisdom — Modern Insight' in April and May.

The work continues in Venezuela, Colombia and Chile. In Colombia, meetings were held throughout the year and Theosophical books were studied. Chile reports that members have contributed towards the rebuilding of the Lodge after the earthquake. It was also reported that electronic publications were well received.

The work, including study courses, in Cuba, continued with enthusiasm. The annual convention was held with the theme 'The Law of Unity and the Present Theosophical Society'. All the members of the Lodges have tried to maintain inner harmony. Some members attended the World Congress in Italy.

The General Secretary in Mexico organized a number of well-attended courses. Ms Isis Resende travelled with

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the General Secretary around the Section and held courses for the members and the public. A Wisdom School of Theosophy was conducted by Lissette Arroyo and was held in Morelos.

The work is going on as usual in Bolivia. In La Paz, programmes were carried on and they received a few visitors. The Lodge Teotl in El Salvador celebrated one hundred years since it was founded.

In Peru, eight public lectures were arranged during the year, and a course of Esoteric Philosophy was offered by Sister Edith Pomar. On Christmas Day, a big celebration was held which all the members enjoyed. The TOS collected medicines, clothes, etc., for old people. The Theosophical Society has won the first of a three-part judgement to get their land and have a good possibility of success later.

The work has gone on as usual in Costa Rica and very recently an application to charter a new Lodge was received. Mrs Maria Orlich reported that all the important Theosophical days were celebrated but there was a small decrease of three members.

In the Dominican Republic, Mr Terry Hunt gave lectures, and visited two places. There were about forty participants and many were not members. Mrs Nelda Samarel gave a public lecture on 'The Aura and Invisible Human Fields'.

The Singapore Lodge has three hundred and sixty-six members, an increase of twenty-two over last year. Singapore could easily become a Section, except for the fact that there is only one

Lodge in this small country. The International President visited Singapore on her way back from the World Congress in Rome and spoke on 'Future Work'.

The Nippon Lodge held monthly meetings at Tokyo with an average attendance of twelve. They studied H. P. Blavatsky's works, and also published some translations, the most recent being Irving Cooper's *Theosophy Simplified*. A bi-monthly Japanese *Theosophist* goes out, which is appreciated.

In Adyar, the Headquarters of the whole Society, there have been changes in the personnel. The present International Secretary, Mrs Kusum Satapathy, and her husband, Mr Chittaranjan Satapathy, are both helping with the work. Mrs K. Satapathy has been the International Secretary since the middle of last year. Mr Satapathy is looking after a good part of the Olcott Education Society which deals not only with the education of the poor, but with the education of us ourselves. Mr Ramkumar, an experienced electrical engineer, is now the head of the Maintenance Department.

The Olcott Education Society and its components are doing well, but we intend to start work of a different kind for those who do not necessarily take a university degree. We will start as soon as the Krishnamurti School finishes its work here in 2014, on the land owned by the Society. The new programme will take the form of education in various crafts and aspects of life, such as looking after sick people, which will be taught to girls, as well as crafts like good paper making and

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electrical and other useful skills for boys.

The Olcott Education Society has several units of which the biggest is the Olcott School, founded by the first President. It has around five hundred and twenty students. All get free education, breakfast, textbooks, two sets of uniforms, note-books, etc. The children and their parents come from poor backgrounds and they get advice and support. Computer literacy has started. Talks have begun on Theosophical concepts by Mr Harihara Raghavan. Forty-eight out of fifty-three students passed out; among them a young man, Naveen Kumar, scored 477 marks out of 500, and received a laptop computer and commendations.

The Social Welfare Centre runs day-care for about one hundred pre-school children, who receive free food, fruits, etc. The children learn colouring, alphabets, songs and dance. Dr Revathy visits the Centre regularly and gives guidance on health care.

The HPB Hostel is a free hostel where accommodation is provided for boys who come from troubled homes. During recent holidays the children undertook a plastic removal campaign in the Theosophical Society's compound.

The Animal Dispensary has been working since 2001, but there is a shortage of personnel at present, which we hope will be put right soon. More than nine thousand animals were treated for infections, fractures, etc. A number of dogs and cats were sterilized, and new homes were found for thirteen puppies and other animals.

The Scout Camping Centre has gone on well, but the buildings have to be repaired. There were a number of camps during the year, which meant that many boys and girls enjoyed the camping ground.

The Theosophical Publishing House had a good year, despite decreasing grants from the US, UK and Australia. Two new publications and several reprints were brought out. Manpower constraints continue to be a problem but a co-publishing alliance with some publishers has proved a success.

The Adyar Library has functioned well. It has as its new Director, Dr K. N. Neelakantan Elayath, who was Head of the Sanskrit Department of the University of Calicut, and has many publications to his credit. Publications and reprints were brought out during the year as usual and all other work went on normally despite shortage of personnel.

The Theosophical Order of Service organized a very successful fund-raising sale at the World Congress in Rome. A variety of programmes are carried out in many parts of the world. The making of 'teddies' for children suffering from tragedies has been a huge success. Ms Lorraine Christensen is coordinating a committee which has been set up to support United Nations projects. Mrs Nelda Samarel has distributed a booklet entitled *Helping the Dying*. Those who want to, can contact the directors in various countries, and Mrs Diana Dunningham.

Members must be aware that owing

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to political changes there are also other changes; for example, Pakistan is now out of our purview but the Ukraine with its four Lodges has to be regarded as part of the Society. We hope that one day the whole world can be included. The extent of the Society's teachings and influence has a role in this work. We are hopeful of

a change in the world's position. We are entering a new era in which we find many people's lives and ideas are changing, although there is much woe and confusion at present. During this century, let us hope that there will be a move to be truly Theosophical whether it is called by that name or not.

RADHA BURNIER

We may say that a plant grows up through the soil and into the air, through the material devices enfolded in its germ and seed. But it is equally true that the latent powers in the seed are drawn upwards by the enticement and nourishment of the sun. There is far more evolution by attraction from above than by propulsion from beneath. It is not sufficiently recognized that the evolution of creatures very largely depends upon their association with superiors. Domestic animals are uplifted by associaton with humans to a higher state of intelligence, a sense of right and wrong, and a degree of faithful affection, which are sometimes as good as human, though narrower in their scope. Even in animal societies where one species is often at war with another, it is frequently the case that the battle with a superior develops capacity and strength. Nature is full of creatures that have adapted to dangers from stronger species, such as the insects that are camouflaged to resemble plant parts. . . . It is a general rule throughout life that progress comes mainly through help from above.

Ernest Wood