

DELHI METRO: THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF ITS SUCCESS

Dr E. Sreedharan

(Theosophy-Science Lecture delivered on 29.12.2012)

The first Metro in India was constructed in Kolkata, and was ultimately an unpleasant experience for the city and the nation. The 17 km Metro took 22 years to complete, was fourteen times its estimated cost, and caused a lot of inconvenience to the public during the construction period. This created much apprehension with regard to Metro constructions and when it was Delhi's turn, much effort was needed to convince people that the city would not survive without it. The Indian government did not have the funds, but the Japanese government agreed to give a very soft loan and this was sufficient encouragement to start the project. A special corporation (Delhi Metro Rail Corporation) was created. What transpired was phenomenal: they carried out the 124 km project well ahead of schedule and within the sanctioned cost. The second phase was completed in four and a half years — a

world record that no other country can boast of.

The Delhi Metro today carries 22 lakh passengers a day — a great service to the city. It has brought in frontline technologies from all over the world and given the city of Delhi an entirely different ambience. Inside the station, everything is neat and sparkling clean; outside, the city is as usual. Therefore it is an island of excellence in the city. By carrying 2.2 million passengers a day, 30 tonnes of pollutants are prevented from being let into the atmosphere every day. More importantly, there has not been a single accident or death in the ten years of operation. Over 200 lives have thus been saved, since otherwise they would have been lost due to road accidents.

The Delhi Metro and Kolkata Railways were both major infrastructure plans which were designed and planned by government agencies. Being

government agencies, they had to follow government rules and procedures. The question arises: how is it that these organizations could achieve what no other government organizations have achieved?

The answer is that they incorporated a spiritual dimension. The projects achieved what they did because of the unique work culture and organizational values instilled and nurtured in each workman. The cardinal pillars of this culture are only four — one, punctuality; two, integrity; three, professional competence; and four, a sense of social accountability.

Punctuality implies being not one minute late or one minute early. It is nothing but a respect for others' time and is so essential for this country. Both the Kolkata and Delhi projects were rail-based companies: to run trains. And if our trains are to run on time then we too have to be punctual. Last year we achieved 99.75% punctuality because there was an emphasis on punctuality at every stage.

Integrity is not simply honesty or lack of corruption. It covers a much wider area of activity and thinking. The dictionary definition is 'having good moral values' in whatever we do, whether transactions, calling for tenders, or dealing with political complaints. This is a spiritual coordinate that has shaped every aspect of our Metro. To date there has not been a single allegation of corruption or malpractice.

Professional competence was crucial with the Metro since it requires a highly technical and complex integration. The

country had not seen this technology before. When the project started, we realized that the required expertise was not there, and to avoid repeating the Kolkata Metro experience, foreign experts were used. By the time the first phase was over, we were able to learn the tricks of the trade and now we have become the prime consultants for other Metro projects. This is technical competence. We can see the spiritual dimension here: if you want to do a job, you want to do it well. If you do not know how to, learn it or get someone to teach you. Today we have experts to match anyone in the world.

Social Responsibility/Accountability has a large spiritual dimension. The loan from the Japanese government had to be repaid, and the government money was not just government money but people's money. We have a responsibility to see that it is well spent, for a good cause and properly. There is no other Metro in the world which is making a profit or running without a subsidy — the Delhi Metro is doing both. It is a major social accountability issue to see that the project does not become another burden. Another aspect of this is to ensure that during the construction work, there is no inconvenience to the public. Everything was done to ensure this, including widening of roads, and not polluting the atmosphere and the ground. Some trees had to be cut but for every tree that was cut, ten trees were planted, with the Corporation bearing the afforestation cost. It was not government responsibility or regulation to do it, but a social responsibility.

Both these were development projects, but contained a social dimension, because society genuinely benefited by this. Thus, it was social service.

How is it that we could inculcate these values? For us, the *Bhagavadgita* is not a religious text but an administrative gospel. Every employee was given a copy of the *Gita*, and encouraged to read it every day. They were taught *yogasana-s* and breathing exercises and encouraged to practise these. This completely changed their attitude towards work, co-workers and the public. It is not a thing that can happen overnight. They were sent to the finest training schools, and in every lecture hall it was written: 'Let only noble thoughts come to us.' In my own office was the quotation: 'Whatever is to be

done, I will do, but it is not I who will do it.'

It has made a huge difference. People are possessive and proud of the Delhi Metro — there is no spitting, littering or scratching of windows. A transformation of the social attitude towards public property has taken place. A new culture has been brought in. There is not a single case of vandalism. People have learnt to stand in a queue and respect others. They have learnt the discipline and respect needed to use the system. Thus a transformation in the very culture of society has occurred. The Delhi Metro is a great example to the rest of the country of how social change can be brought about by introducing a spiritual dimension into work.

LIVING MINDFULLY IN THE PRESENT

Olande Ananda Thera

(Public Lecture delivered on 30.12.2012)

When we think of living mindfully in the present, we must consider the following three questions: What is mindfulness? What is living? And lastly, what is the present? We must ask ourselves whether there is such a thing as the present moment, and if yes, what does it consist of? Does it include the past? Does it include the so-called future? We have to also ask: who is it that is trying to live mindfully in the present?

Is it possible to create and develop *karuna* (compassion), *metta* (loving kindness), *mudita* (sympathetic joy)

and *upekkha* (equanimity)? There is a difference between the technical and psychological past and the future which must be considered. Furthermore, we must study whether the wish to attain Nirvana itself is selfish?

Finally, what about developing the *paramita-s* (perfections) such as ethics, generosity, patience, truth, compassion and wisdom, while staying in the *samsara* (ocean of existence) for the benefit of all? These are some of the considerations and deliberations for us to reflect on as theosophists practising these values in our daily life.



THE THEOSOPHICAL ORDER OF SERVICE

Compassionate Care of Those Who Suffer

(Summaries of Talks delivered on 29.12.2012)

Dr Mallika Tiruvadanam

'Medicine is not about conquering disease and death, but about the alleviation of suffering, minimizing harm and smoothing the journey of man,' said Strabanek. Palliative medicine is a medical speciality which acknowledges the fact that every human being is made up of a body, mind and soul. It involves treatment of the patient as a 'whole person'.

Cancer still remains a killer disease, and in India, more than 75% of patients are in the advanced stage of the disease when first seen by the doctor. At any point of time, about 2.5 million patients have cancer and a majority of them suffer from distressing symptoms. Palliative care, that is to 'relieve pain', can do much to relieve their suffering.

Palliative care affirms life and regards dying as a normal process, neither hastens nor postpones death, provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms, integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of a patient's care, offers a support system to help patients live as actively as possible until death, and helps the family cope during the patient's illness and in their own bereavement.

Palliative care needs to be started when suffering begins, which means it may be needed at the very time of diagnosis! It is natural to go through emotional turmoil on hearing the diagnosis. Again, during treatment other

psychological and social concerns like fear, anxiety and uncertainty may arise besides the distressing side effects of cancer treatment. The care could be very demanding at the terminal phase of illness.

Not only patients with cancer, but all those suffering from chronic and long-term illnesses, like paraplegia, neurological diseases like multiple sclerosis, chronic renal/cardiac failure, chronic liver and lung disease, HIV/AIDS and muscular dystrophies, benefit from palliative care. Palliative care can be given in the hospital, in a hospice or in the patient's home. It is the care that is important. Hospital admission is necessary only to control severe physical symptoms. Community-based palliative care is a very good model in a country like India where social workers and volunteers provide the support for patients at home and function as a link between the health care and social systems. It is important to maintain hope for the patient and family; not false hope but hope appropriate to the stage of the disease. Hope for cure or control of the disease in the beginning; hope for good symptom relief and hope for a good death towards the end of life. 'The principles of palliative medicine apply wherever women and men suffer and die. Control of pain and other symptoms, empathy and spiritual awareness should become the norm everywhere.'

Dr R. Revathy

At the outset I would like to express gratitude to Dr Annie Besant and the Theosophical Order of Service for being instrumental for my entry into this noble medical profession.

Dr Besant's life was full of service and sacrifice. She lived for Truth and Love. But most importantly she was highly intuitive. This rare quality led her to discover that the essence of theosophy lies in extending compassionate care to those who are suffering. It was to realize this objective that she founded the TOS in 1908 with the beautiful motto: 'A union of all who love in the service of all who suffer'.

Dr Besant wanted to bring people to the Theosophical fold who could willingly come forward to alleviate the suffering of others with love and compassion and thus understand the 'Unity of Life'.

It should be continuous work applied suitably to the changing needs of society. It must be united action. We have not only to work individually with different capabilities but also to work in unison with others so that the action becomes more powerful and the task can be achieved with a greater degree of success.

Needless to say that there is immense suffering everywhere in the world. Poverty and starvation have not come to an end in spite of tremendous advancement in various fields. Periodically the population at large suffers from natural calamities or disasters like floods, drought, tsunamis, etc. Drug addiction, alcoholism, sexual

harassment, terrorism and other problems affect both rich and poor worldwide.

Great work has been done to combat, control or even completely eradicate certain infectious diseases like small pox, polio, etc., but on the other hand certain new types of diseases like AIDS and rare viral diseases are demanding our serious attention. Though we are able to control malnutrition to some extent, new problems like obesity, heart disease, hypertensive disorders, diabetes and malignancies are cropping up everywhere due to changing lifestyles.

A large number of people need help from others all the time. So our work must be a continuous endeavour. Help is necessary not only to alleviate but also to prevent suffering.

The work of the TOS includes the welfare of other kingdoms of life — animals, birds and plants. We must treat them with great kindness and try our best to prevent cruelties done to them. We must also take active steps to protect the natural environment. Theosophy teaches above all that 'life is one'.

Generally people do not recognize the areas in which they have been abundantly blessed but think of areas where they suffer, with the result they always think of suffering and the effect of suffering multiplies itself. All that they need is some sane advice, some wise counselling and a few words of comfort. The pity is the people around them may not be aware of the situation and hence those who suffer will

ultimately go to any extent. Even in the field of medicine there is a separate branch to deal with these patients. In the case of physically challenged people the suffering is visible and most of us readily go to their help.

In certain other cases suffering may be of a temporary nature — physical, financial or emotional. The crux of the work is to understand the real cause of suffering. For this purpose it is not enough if the help is offered in a routine manner. The person helping should go deep into the cause of suffering and try to remove that cause. Then only will it become genuine help.

We think that helping others should always be within our limit and without causing any inconvenience to us. Such an attitude is not Compassionate Care. We should be prepared to sacrifice our time, energy and also resources. In this process we should be able to develop love for helping others.

In 'Compassionate Care' we should

not mind our own suffering while helping others. Such a state of mind cannot come to us overnight. We have to constantly think of practising this principle. We may not be prepared for this sort of sacrifice until life throws out some opportunities.

To sum up we may say that Compassionate Care is an expression which includes our conscious effort to know the suffering of other people in whatever form it may be. It includes our willingness to readily reach out to those people. This reaching out should be done not as a duty imposed on us but as a consequence of our own love towards our fellow beings. When you say you are helping them with love you must also be prepared to serve them without expecting anything in return. You must also be prepared to sacrifice your own comfort. Such sacrifice, in turn will refine your heart and soul and lead you to bliss. This should be perhaps the ultimate aim of all of us.

THEOSOPHY AROUND THE WORLD

In March, in Russia and the Russian-influenced countries like Ukraine, an all-Russian Conference was organized with more than one hundred people from fourteen cities present. In April, a seminar on 'Theosophy as an Art of Living' was conducted in Moscow. In May, White Lotus Day was celebrated and about thirty people participated in Russia. Many activities have been going on in Russia. The guest lecturer was Ms Gavrylenko and about fifty people participated.

Ukraine presently has seventy-two members and four Lodges. The Ukraine Convention was held with more than one hundred participants and the first study camp was held at Crimea with thirty-six participants. The TS in Ukraine presents its work in an electronic form and on the whole it is said that some activities have taken place in a number of different associations.

The Belgian Section has ninety-five members in seven Lodges. Thirty members together make two Lodges and

conduct meetings at the Headquarters. In the provinces, there is a French-speaking branch in Wallonia and a Dutch-speaking branch in Leuven. On 16 May 2012, the General Secretary organized a seminar in Brussels which about thirty people attended. From 22 to 26 July, the Belgian Section organized a Summer School, where members from Belgium, Congo-Brazzaville, France and Gabon, Italy and the Netherlands all participated.

The English Section is conducting a diploma course, which so far 250 members have completed. The Summer School was conducted with great success. The English Section has withdrawn from the European Federation.

There are twenty-five members in Croatia and Lodge meetings take place regularly in Zagreb.

In Orlando, Lodge discussions, study classes and meetings are held regularly.

In the Nippon Lodge, monthly study meetings take place in Tokyo, Japan, and there is greater emphasis on the study of H. P. Blavatsky's literature.

The West African Section has 247 members. An Adyar Day celebration was observed. A public lecture was organized at Accra by the Blavatsky Lodge in March. The School of the Wisdom was conducted in April and August, both under the Directorship of Mr Isaac K. Zaney.

The International Headquarters at Adyar has been constrained by the lack of workers. The Indian Government at present is very strict about having foreigners work in India, and going about with their own ideas regarding what is good for India. But this has produced a vacuum at Adyar which we are slowly filling up otherwise. The property in Adyar has done well and we hope to have more information to give at the next Convention.

The whole world has to change from the present condition to a new one at a different level. The TS has to provide part of the leadership that is necessary for this to happen and so we have a great responsibility and whether we fulfil it or not depends on the amount of enthusiasm and careful management put into the work of the Society. This does not refer particularly to the Section or Lodge which we are concerned with, but with the Society as a whole — to have the courage to take the work into areas which will make it of importance in the life of the entire earth. From mineral to human beings, all have to travel to a state of perfection and we must aid this process by the quality of our whole life and the help we give to the elements of a lower order.

RADHA BURNIER

A DIFFERENT PILGRIMAGE

A film entitled 'A Different Pilgrimage' was screened for the delegates on the evening of 30 December.

Ancient India had a profound impact on the rest of Asia. Hinduism and Buddhism as well as Indian concepts of architecture, aesthetics and mythology spread all over Asia. Except for the pioneering work of a few historians, India has not paid

adequate attention to exploring this glorious relationship between India and the rest of Asia. Dr S. Krishnaswamy and Dr Mohana Krishnaswamy conceived this film on this aspect of Indian history and made this feature-length documentary film covering Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam — produced under their banner of Krishnaswamy Associates, Chennai.

Hundreds of monuments and temples reflecting ancient Indian impact were presented, including 1000-year old Hindu temples in Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia, still under regular worship. Combining a gripping journalistic style with devotion and authenticity, interspersed with the region's dance forms, the documentary was not only an eye-opener on an aspect of India's heritage and a visual treat, but also truly indeed 'A Different Pilgrimage'.

The film is written and directed by Dr S. Krishnaswamy, produced by Dr Mohana Krishnaswamy and photographed by Madhu Ambat. Dr S. Krishnaswamy — recipient of the Padma Shri besides several national and international awards for his documentaries and the Lifetime Achievement Award of the US International Film and Video Festival, whose 'Indus Valley to Indira Gandhi' created headlines three decades ago — considers *A Different Pilgrimage* to be his most inspiring work in his forty-five year career.



THREE GREAT TRUTHS

'There are Three Truths which are absolute, and cannot be lost, but yet may remain silent for lack of speech.'

'The soul of man is immortal, and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendour have no limit.'

'The principle which gives life dwells in us, and without us, is undying and eternally beneficent, is not heard, or seen, or smelt, but is perceived by the man who desires perception.'

'Each man is his own absolute lawgiver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself; the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment.'

'These Truths, which are as great as is life itself, are as simple as the simplest mind of man. Feed the hungry with them.'

