

On the Watch-Tower

RADHA BURNIER

Brotherhood is a Fact in Nature

The Mahatma Letters say that in the empire of Nature all things are linked together by magnetic sympathy; therefore there is a connection even between a distant star and a man or woman on this earth. This enormous, perhaps limitless, breadth of relationships is the basis for the statement that brotherhood is a fact in Nature. We do not have to invent brotherhood or believe in it; we have only to recognize that the cosmos itself is linked together by subtle threads of magnetic sympathy. By such recognition we spontaneously become more and more filled with the spirit of brotherhood, which means that there are always lines of communication between all things.

If there are these inextricable links, magnetic sympathy is obviously not an overt, perceivable act. It is a movement from within, of self recognizing self, of universal life being aware of its focus in one's self, as well as in all that exists. There is a natural communication between all these things. Nature is not only in the physical dimension, it is also at the gross, subtle, and spiritual levels. In fact, in the enormous depths of Nature everywhere, communication is not very clear at the lower levels, but there is constant unity and love at the deeper levels.

That communication is obstructed by our mental activities, the prejudices and conditionings which we allow to hold sway in our consciousness at this lower level. It seems as if, even through science, glimpses are made available of this system of intercommunication of everything that is in existence, but only small symptoms are known, for example, that trees communicate with each other in some mysterious way.

If a grove of trees is affected by a pest, the tree, of course, tries to shake it off, as it may otherwise be destroyed, etc. But the grove can apparently communicate with another grove somewhere else. A few years ago, great elm trees, which are very beautiful, were all affected by some kind of disease, but in a mysterious way they gave warning to other trees, so that the trees developed symptoms which could prevent the pests from being too successful. We know that in Adyar, neem trees were affected by some strange disease, leaves were drying up, and a few neems died. But somehow they managed to put off the affliction, perhaps by a system of communication. From a few scientific sources we hear that trees seem to be able to communicate with each other.

The researches of Rupert Sheldrake, and possibly some others, have demonstrated that there is communication at an

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unknown level between creatures. Human beings imagine that because other creatures do not speak our language, they cannot communicate; at best they have a primitive kind of communication. For example we have read that when rabbits become aware of danger they will tap the earth with their tails in a particular way, which makes other rabbits realize the danger there. Their 'primitive' methods of communication are clear through changes in their voice, and so on. But there seems to be something more important than that. In a complicated maze certain rats learnt to open and close a door, and rats in the next room understood. How they understood it is impossible to say. Sheldrake has also written about dogs and cats which know from a distance when their owner is coming back. One may say this is telepathy, but telepathy is also one of the means of communication.

By Socratic dialogue, the dialogues of the Buddha, and a number of others in the Upanishad-s, Chinese literature, Taoist thought, and so on, teachers were trying to stimulate the hidden capacity in their listeners, the people to whom they were talking, to communicate. Communication does not mean just speaking. We think if we say something, that is communication. It may not be, because the person to whom we are speaking may not be open to what we say; we shut off, create a barrier between our own being and the beings of others. But the power to communicate means to have a two-way flow of insights, understanding, and appreciation. All that can also be blocked. So these teachers

were very aware that they were not telling people things, but entering into a form of communication which would help others to see for themselves. This was the whole purpose of real dialogue. Communication is not always verbal. Verbal communication is necessary in this world to some extent, but many of us use wrong words, talk too much and go off the track, or feel a certain resistance. With resistance, communication is impossible because our internal condition nullifies what we intend to communicate. Therefore, it is important to examine what makes communication effective at the outer as well as the subtler and deeper levels of existence.

Communication at Varied Levels

It is needless to say that in Indian thought, speech means not only communication at the verbal level, but communication at different levels of our being. It has been said that people must be equals, at the same level, in order to communicate. The very simple fact that an adult can communicate something to a child shows that this idea is not entirely correct. A child is also able to communicate something to the adult, even though they are not equals in the sense of growth into maturity. Actually, the adult is not necessarily a superior person; the child may be more evolved than the adult, and sometimes it happens that from a very early physical age the maturity of the soul begins to reveal itself in communication. So it is not equality, in the sense of equal knowledge and so forth, that makes for communication. Then

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what makes communication possible?

Obviously people's brains are full of contradictory movements and so there are notions, images, prejudices, which block communication, and this makes the quality of the communication very poor. We may come to a sacred place and if the mind is quiet, not chattering or filled with mundane concepts and desires, etc., perhaps there may be communication with the holy and sacred. But suppose people are chattering in the anteroom of a sanctuary, the flow of obstructions continues to take place, and there is no communication. The Masters are all part of that sacred sphere, because their consciousness has merged with the vast ocean of life, but the communication they want is absent, because our own minds are not in a state which makes it possible.

There are various occasions when one may spend a few moments with Nature. Because everything is beautiful in Nature, including human nature, but also because there is hidden beauty in everything, there is communication all the time. We should also be able to keep that communication alive, not barricade against it. Take, for example, the blessings of the Masters. Indians are particularly fond of saying 'I want the blessings of the Masters.' This is unnecessary, because the Masters' blessings are always present everywhere, poured forth continually. Their very existence is a blessing. But we create barriers and prevent its entry into our hearts and minds to stimulate the spiritual side. So we have to make sure that our own being is ready for communication, not wait

for a guru or a new form of initiation. The Golden Stairs speak of 'a readiness to give and receive advice and instruction'. The words may suggest that verbal communication will take place or some paper will be issued, but it may not be thus. Nature herself, according to various sages, speaks; Nature is not silent, according to *Light on the Path*, but we do not hear. 'Waiting the word of the Master' — but what is the word of the Master? Is it spoken at a particular time when one has to be present to hear it? Not at all. Because when the heart is ready, pure, unobstructed by prejudice, by previous ideas, by desire, and all sorts of things, then the speech from the deeper, more spiritual level is heard at first not very clearly. But as we proceed it is heard deeply by the better part of ourselves, and then it starts to break down the resistance in the brain, in the very cells of our body.

The qualifications on the path have been well known through the ages. One of them is silence, at least at certain moments of the day, when Nature herself is able to communicate with us. Communication means that we are entirely receptive, and also that we are able to channel spiritual energies, to some extent at least, to pass through us to others. So communication calls for the qualities necessary both for receiving and radiating the right energies. As already stated, many sages and wise people have tried to stimulate in those who are receptive the capacity to communicate, to be able to interchange. And one of the important things, as has been pointed out, is silence.

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It is the ability to be silent, not just put a seal on one's lips, that is, to be silent verbally. The brain likes to chatter, to create conflicts, to resist according to what it likes and dislikes. And all that has to subside.

Life itself is a Teacher

We can speak about life itself as the teacher, because every human teacher is only an embodiment of what life is. We are told to approach the teacher with reverence. This means that we do not rush forward to tell him our views, we do not argue with him. We learn to listen and respond appropriately, so that whatever message is given becomes clearer and clearer. Therefore the student can question the teacher, in fact *must* question the teacher, respectfully, quietly, without proceeding from a loaded brain. Then the light which is always in the true teacher becomes brighter. The role of the student is thus to accept that his own capacity for communication is to become like a flame. Then perhaps a time will come when we feel that we can communicate with anybody.

Particularly in the dialogues which the Buddha had, we find that there were

Brāhman-s and other people who could not accept what he said, because it was too new for them. But he did not shake them off; he did not say that they were useless people; he tried to awaken them. Awakening can help the attitude of the student also. There is a kinship which is brought out through all communication with a sense of unity; when we have no relationship we cannot communicate. This does not mean that we must embrace each other or talk a lot; not at all. We may sit quietly with somebody and have a sense of deep relationship. In fact, with all people with whom we do have a deep relationship there is no need for demonstration or verbalizing. It seems that we must be more conscious of the empire of Nature at all levels, a network of mutual relationships, a network where currents are flowing from every side. Everyone is benefited by such communication. We strengthen our progress towards the more spiritual worlds, and begin to be less influenced by the ego-sense, which creates obstruction. Many of the statements that the Mahatmas made were beautiful, but perhaps we pass over them very quickly, because we do not realize all the implications and the beauty in them. ✧

The degree of success or failure are the landmarks we shall have to follow, as they will constitute the barriers placed with your own hands between yourselves and those whom you have asked to be your teachers. The nearer your approach to the goal contemplated, the shorter the distance between the student and the Master.

KH

Living in the Present

(Convention Symposium Talk, Adyar, 30 December 2007)

PERTTI SPETS

A MAN once asked the Greek philosopher Thales some questions: What is oldest in the world? Thales answered: God, because he has existed ever since the beginning. Then the man asked: What is most beautiful in the world? It is the universe, because it was created by God. What is biggest of all? It is the cosmos, because it contains everything that has been created. He then asked: What is the best of all? And Thales answered: It is freedom, because without it there is nothing good. What is the most lasting? It is hope, because it remains when you have lost everything else. What is the easiest of all? To give advice. What is the most difficult of all? And Thales answered: 'To know yourself, self-knowledge is the most difficult of all.' Socrates also said: 'Know yourself.'

What is it that we have to learn in order to know ourselves? Buddhism says that we all have a Buddha nature within us, a possibility of enlightenment. Christianity talks about the Christ in each one of us, the divine spark that exists in man. Hinduism says that *Ātman* is the

same as Brahman. This is what we have to get to know, what our real nature is. We have probably tried to find ways to self-knowledge. But only in the present can one know oneself, says Krishnamurti.

We have tried to follow different paths, studied different religions and ideologies, heard hundreds of lectures, and read numerous books. Many of us very likely know much about different religions and ideologies. But what has been the result of all this? Do we know ourselves? Which paths have we followed?

How do we seek? We read books, listen to lectures, attend courses and belong to study groups, meditate, and gather knowledge. But can knowledge change us, set us free at a deeper level? Knowledge belongs to the past; it does not help us to live in the present. Knowledge must be integrated with our consciousness and not with our memory, says Krishnamurti, so that it becomes one with our consciousness. Then knowledge transforms our mind and consciousness, and becomes part of all our actions.

Krishnamurti teaches us: seek without

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seeking. But what does this mean? How do we seek? We cannot seek in the same way as we do in the world of matter, when it is a question of getting to know ourselves and living in the present. In the spiritual and mental world we have to search in a different manner. In a way, we can say that we do not know what we are looking for. The unknown is always unknown.

Normally we look for what we think we can find. But we do not find what we are looking for. So seek without seeking. Seek within. Seek without preconceived ideas, without attitudes and values. Confucius said: 'Don't stop, continue walking.' But can we live in the present if the mind is not free to see in the present?

Freedom is to live in the present and to accept the unexpected, to take it in and process it, to open our mind and meet the unexpected, both pleasant and unpleasant. It is the capacity to adapt to different conditions without losing faith in the deeper connections between the inner and outer world. It is experiencing life without *clinging to any one of its aspects*.

In order to live in the present we must leave the known, our knowledge, our memory, our thoughts and conceptions. Life and reality can only be experienced with our inner being. When the mind is quiet and receptive, concentrated, open and disciplined, then we can live in the present. Living in the present is deepening our consciousness, so that it can function at different levels. We can look directly into reality and be present through forgetting ourselves and seeing the world as

it is. Sincerity, devotion, and discrimination are needed to be able to live in the present.

If we ask some people, 'Are you living in the present?', they will answer, yes, of course. Perhaps they do not understand what we mean. They will say: 'I see and I hear, of course I am living in the present!' We have contact with the outer world through our senses, but that is not the only world we are living in. We live through our thoughts and emotions, our ideas and memories coming from the past or the future. We live more in our thoughts than through the senses. I may see you in front of me, but my thoughts are elsewhere. The mind is absent. It is not fully present.

We live in the world we know through our thoughts and habits because they create a kind of security. But to be able to live in the present we need *inner security*, independent of any security outside. Our mind moves from conclusion to conclusion. A conclusion is a centre formed in the mind. All our thinking is moving round in a circle, and that is why we can never perceive anything entirely new and see the present.

Awareness is necessary to be able to live in the present. Krishnamurti speaks about choiceless awareness. Solutions to the problem of existence have to be found in action and not merely in an idea. Ideas and memories belong to the past; action is in the present.

In order to be able to live in the present, the mind or consciousness must be passive, aware and, at the same time, also

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choiceless, attentive, without any attitudes of comparison, judgement, condemnation, or justification. Being in the present is inclusiveness, in which there is no awareness of 'you and I'. *Being* is pure awareness, attention, effortless consciousness, and does not depend on anything outside itself.

Normally, life is a process of struggle, a continuous gathering of the dust of experience. Therefore we need self-knowledge, to be aware in the present of what is happening within and outside us. It is only through understanding the process of individual consciousness that there can be spontaneous and true action in the present.

Without self-knowledge it is not possible to act properly and harmoniously with others without creating problems. Right relationship proceeds from right

action, and right action proceeds from right thinking, which comes only with self-knowledge. If we do not understand our own self, we will not understand anything else. So we must know our own self in order to understand the present and, through the present, the past. From the known present the hidden layers of the past are discovered, and this discovery is liberating and creative.

Self-knowledge comes through the choiceless awareness of what is as it is, and *that is living in the present*. Self-knowledge leads to the silence of mind which makes choiceless awareness possible, and it is this that can transform the structure of consciousness by putting an end to the perpetuation of duality. Self-knowledge is the beginning of wisdom. Without it, we do not have any real knowledge, and self-knowledge has no end. ✧

Aim high, for the higher the arrow is aimed, the higher the mark it hits. Keep your own ideals lofty, while you keep your judgement of others charitable; and your ideals shall lift you, and your charity shall raise your fallen brother. For never yet did a man rise by being trampled on. Man only rises by being loved in the midst of his sins and follies, and as we deal with our brethren, so do Those who are above us deal with our outer selves. Such our final lesson, and I finish with the words of the Upanishad: 'The embodied Self, beholding his real nature, obtains his true end, and every pain ceaseth.'

Annie Besant, *The Wisdom of the Upanishads*

What is Real Brotherhood?

BREDA ZAGAR

THE Theosophical Society has three declared objects, the first being:

To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.

What is meant by 'without distinction of race'? This appears quite easy to comprehend, and we do not think much about these words. But do members of the Theosophical Society really grasp what is meant by this object? In this first Object we can see also the word 'nationality', which is hidden in the word 'race'.

What is nationality? The outer world is divided into many parts by the names of groups (nations), but the true member of any nation is only the soul without the label. When we see a dead body do we say: 'This is an Englishman, Indian, Italian?' No, we say only: 'Here is a dead body.' Has the dweller in this body left a name or a label of nationality? Is his or her name Western or Eastern?

If we really study and grasp the teaching of Theosophy and live it in our daily life, then we know that all inhabitants

of this marvellous earth are only souls or Egos dwelling in their houses (bodies — American, Indian . . .) — of which most of them are not yet masters, but slaves. The houses have their names or labels, which are not the same as the inhabitants. Houses belong to the material world, not to the spiritual. The houses are not eternal, therefore not real.

So the real members of the Theosophical Society should be aware that the membership consists not of Americans, Italians, Africans, Germans, Indians, Brazilians, Australians and so on (which are only names of houses) but of Egos (the real inhabitants) who were called to the Society for only one reason: to be a beneficial force for humanity as a whole, not only by spreading the teaching through books and the internet alone, but by living it!

To be united is our motto, and not to make divisions among ourselves, but to live in brotherliness, and disseminate true Theosophical teachings. Madame H. P. Blavatsky said: if we are not united as one, then the enemy can destroy us. The enemy is division. Unless we are a united force for the world, we are not practising the

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basic declared objects. There are no Westerners or Easterners; we are all brothers in the light, brought together to seek and find this light, to share it and bring it forth into the world.

Wake up, Theosophists! The Society does not depend on its President only, (on one ego in his house) but on all members who live the spiritual life. So each one of us is responsible for what is going on in the Society and in the

world. We should stop being childish and realize that we have the responsibility to bring light into the world by the example of unity.

Let all members work toward strengthening our ranks with the feelings of oneness and responsibility, and be as one crew on one ship, a real brotherhood for the benefit of humanity.

And, as we all know, the real captains are the Holy Ones. ✧

Men who join the Society with the one selfish object of reaching power, making occult science their only or even chief aim, may as well not join it — they are doomed to disappointment as much as those who commit the mistake of letting them believe that the Society is nothing else. It is just because they preach too much ‘the Brothers’ and too little if at all *Brotherhood* that they fail. How many times had we to repeat, that he who joins the Society with the sole object of coming in contact with us and if not of acquiring at least of assuring himself of the reality of such powers and of our objective existence — was pursuing a mirage? I say again then. It is he alone who has the love of humanity at heart, who is capable of grasping thoroughly the idea of a regenerating practical Brotherhood who is entitled to the possession of our secrets. He alone, such a man — will never misuse his powers, as there will be no fear that he should turn them to selfish ends. A man who places not the good of mankind above his own good is not worthy of becoming our *chela* — he is not worthy of becoming higher in knowledge than his neighbour.

M., Mahatma Letter No. 38/33

Unity Makes Peace

Theosophical pluralism as a framework for interfaith relations

SOFIE VON HAUCH

HOWEVER optimistic one might be about the prospects of interreligious cooperation, a case could be made that for most of secular, Western society, religion is regarded more as trouble than as good due to the endless conflicts instigated the world over in the name of one or another faith. Fundamentally, the problematic variety of relations between religions — ‘holy’ wars, for example — is based on the conviction that religions are isolated entities that challenge each other’s ideological and sometimes physical territory, which must be defended and maintained exclusively.

Pluralism is an attitude towards religious diversity that eliminates the direct ground of exclusivist contention by claiming at least that salvation or liberation is achievable through more than one religion, and that, to the extent that this is the case, adherents of one religion are not entitled to impose themselves ideologically or in any other fashion on people of a different religious conviction. However, this pluralistic attitude is by no

means necessary for success in interfaith relations generally speaking, as there are many levels of engagement and cooperation. For example, contemporary scholars of interreligious dialogue list three basic areas of engagement: one of trying to solve practical issues, one of spiritual issues where the participants try to put themselves in the place of the religious other, and a cognitive one in which truth and new meaning are sought in the interreligious encounter. It would seem that even an open-minded religious exclusivist could participate to some extent in all of these areas. However, in order to truly gain from the interreligious encounter, an inclusivist attitude at least is necessary, because exclusivism implies that one’s own religion is absolutely superior and that one can have nothing really significant to learn from the encounter with other faiths. It is difficult to say what motivation an exclusivist might have to engage in proper dialogue, since true dialogue demands an openness to be changed in the encounter with a

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religious other. If one already possesses the supreme expression of religious truth, there can be only secondary, and no very forceful, reasons to engage in dialogue unless it is to convert the other. Inclusivism is the middle way attitude that, while salvation or liberation may be achievable through other religions, one's own religion is nevertheless superior.

Pluralism, on the other hand, entails a necessary commitment to interfaith relations and interreligious dialogue in particular. According to the standard pluralism model of pioneering Christian philosopher of religion John Hick, the various great religions all embody different versions of a human response to the experience of the Ultimate Reality. Thus, religions are all 'true' to the extent that they communicate a genuine insight into the relation between the human and the Real (this is Hick's preferred term for 'God'), and followers of any religion may with relatively little effort learn to understand the terms in which this insight is expressed in the different religions and in this manner gain a deeper understanding of their own religion, of the other's religion, and hopefully also of the crucial human-divine relationship with which all the religions are ultimately concerned.

In this article I am going to present another pluralistic model, namely that of the Theosophical author Annie Besant (1847-1933). The Theosophical model of pluralism fundamentally agrees with Hick's model outlined above, but instead of his careful and minimal philosophic-

al basis, Besant's pluralism rests less on argumentation and more on firm Theosophical presuppositions about the nature of the universe, humanity, and the purpose of religion. It is surprising that Theosophy is still largely ignored by theologians and scholars of religion, because as a system of thought it contains many reasonable and useful ideas, which later on have been reinvented and are beginning to gain currency more widely both in academia and beyond. The topic of religious pluralism is one such example. As we shall see below, pluralism was the natural attitude to other religions among theosophists in the golden age after 1900, but it only gained a degree of scholarly respectability some seventy years later with the work of people like W. Cantwell Smith and John Hick; and today, after a full century, it is finally beginning to attract general attention through the work of these philosophers and their followers. With her background and authority in the Theosophical Society, Annie Besant speaks absolutely for the theosophical position, hence I may refer to her position as the Theosophical position as such, and vice versa.

The Theosophical Understanding of the Great Religions

The following two points are fundamental to the Theosophical understanding of religion: Firstly, when talking about religions as systems of belief and practice, they are always discussed on an equal level, none being preferred over another. Secondly, religions are seen essentially as

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sets of instruction in spiritual progress; in Besant's words the teachings of the different religions are 'given to the world by men wiser than the masses of the people on whom they are bestowed, and are intended to quicken human evolution.' Thus, in the following paragraphs I am presenting the theosophical view of the constitution of man and human evolution, how the religions came to be given to the world by these 'men wiser than the masses', and the interfaith relations model that follows from this understanding of religion.

Theosophical teachings tend to reflect the traditional Christian distinction of the human constitution into a threefold nature of spirit, soul, and body, while drawing on Vedāntic philosophy for details. The spirit is divine and as such transcends time and space to be immortal but capable of interacting with the lower realms of being when it is clothed in matter and takes on a human 'soul' (here used in the sense of the psychological aspects of humanity) and a physical body. The spiritual element is the most profound level of human existence; so a human being is essentially divine and the purpose of life is to encourage the rest of the person, as it were, to bring about the full flourishing of this divine inner essence. In terms of the Christian religion this means that 'every man is a potential Christ, and the work of evolution is to render this potential Christ an active one; . . . the light is there — his work is to render his lower nature translucent, and to let it shine.' This work progresses over many lifetimes of

consecutive incarnations of the spiritual element into suitable circumstances under the Law of Cause and Effect or Karma while the person gains experience from the consequences of his or her actions and ultimately grasps what the goal is and sets about to attain it.

Two other crucial points necessarily follow from this view, namely that people are responsible for their own progress (even if they may receive supernatural assistance through prayer and rituals), and, more importantly, that people will naturally be at different stages of progress in this process of evolution towards the realization of the human divine core. This point is controversial, as some people read into it a kind of spiritual elitism that disregards certain people over others and creates class boundaries on the way to and in heaven. In return, however, Besant regrets such a 'spurious sentimentality — which refuses to recognize the obvious inequalities of intelligence and morality, and thereby reduces the teaching of the highly developed to the level attainable by the least evolved, sacrificing the higher to the lower in a way that injures both'. If spiritual progress is indeed a fact, then teaching must by necessity be adapted to different stages for the benefit of all.

The spiritual evolution of man follows a particular pattern from the beginning, in which the person is self-absorbed and occupied with the pursuit of pleasure and material things, to the end, where the full expression of the One divine Life is exemplified in those well-beloved legends

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about the founders of religions and their saintly followers who are people of extraordinary gentleness, understanding, and generosity. Because human nature is the same, with the same goal and path of progress, the religions as the vessels of spiritual instruction essentially carry the same fundamental message about human nature, its divine essence, origin and goal, and the way of attainment. In the Theosophical view, this path of spiritual progress is marked by distinct stages contained in allegorical form in the esoteric mysteries of the different religions. The stages are called 'initiations', and in Esoteric Christianity they are cast in terms of the major incidents in the life of Jesus: Birth, Baptism, Transfiguration, Crucifixion, and Resurrection /Ascension. At the last stage the person is so completely illuminated and transformed by the divine light of the spirit that humanity as such is no longer an appropriate term; the person is said to have mastered all that pertains to human existence and is thus called a Master or Adept. These Masters play a significant role in Theosophy and they belong to a group called the Spiritual Hierarchy or the Brotherhood of Teachers. According to Theosophy, this group forms the spiritual guardians of humanity and they are organized under the office of the Bodhisattva or World Teacher, presently occupied by the being we know as the Christ of the gospels. The World Teacher, not surprisingly, has as his primary task to instruct humanity in the method of spiritual progress. He does so by appearing in person at the beginning and

end of his period of office (which may cover several thousand years) and the rest of the time he organizes the religious and social life on Earth by sending out other Masters and their disciples to the nations to teach the common human way to the divine reality and to inspire by living exemplary holy lives. The founders of the world religions are such 'apostles' of the World Teacher.

The concept of a World Teacher and a succession of apostle disciples has the important implication that the great world faiths in the Theosophical view are intimately related in several ways. Their founders are all enlightened, highly advanced human or sometimes superhuman beings who are sent out from the same source, i.e., the World Teacher and his Brotherhood, in order to instruct their younger sisters and brothers in the way of perfection. Because, as we saw above, humanity is not at the same stage of spiritual maturity, the teaching is conveyed in a symbolic form capable of being interpreted on many different levels, thus nourishing as many people on as many stages of progress as possible from the same material. The symbols of religious stories and parables are selected according to a set of 'fixed and accepted meanings' that the Brotherhood of Teachers all use. The original teachings are chosen by the Master teacher to suit the group and type of people he is to address, which accounts for variations in teaching between regions and ages. However, the teachings still originate in the same pool of wisdom under the supervision of the World Teacher.

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Theosophical Pluralism

The following elements of the theosophical model of pluralism will be clear from the above: All the great faiths are various expressions of the same truths regarding human nature and the way of the spiritual life in progress towards union with the divine source; this common core is assured by the fact that the great religious teachings are given by members of the same group of spiritual Masters and the religious myths are cast in terms of a common symbolism; no one religion is better than another, they are rather all different external expressions of their inner core of truths about the spiritual life and each religion is 'one of the guardians of man's spiritual heritage'.

This Theosophical pluralism is based on the recognition that, considering spiritual truths and religious experience, there exists a realm of being and experience which is inexpressible in terms of ordinary language. For Besant and the Theosophists, this carries the crucial implication that religious pluralism is the only reasonable approach to religious diversity; religious diversity is a natural, necessary fact due to the nature of reality and our means of perceiving it:

All religions are different with a purpose. If great truths are to express themselves fully, it cannot be through a single faith, nor by a single intellectual presentment; . . . every [great religion] gives out a different note. . . . Not in monotone but in chords and harmony comes out the great revelation of God to man.

The recognition of the equality and inner unity of the religions is the only way towards peace and agreement between people of different faiths. Besant traces the reason for religious warfare to exclusive religious claims and the logical consequence of an exclusivist conviction:

The antagonism between religions is a plant of modern growth, grown out of the seed of an essentially modern claim — the claim of a single religion to be unique and alone inspired. . . . For as long as your religion is yours, and mine is mine, and neither claims to impose his religion on the other, no question of persecution can arise. But if I say: 'Your conception of God is wrong and mine is right, I only have the truth, and I only can point out the way of salvation; if you do not accept my idea, you will be damned'; then, if I am logical and in the majority, I must be a persecutor, for it is kinder to roast misbelievers here than to allow them to spread their misbelief, and thus damn themselves and others for ever.

Theosophical pluralism, however, requires expressions of truth to be multiplex because the higher, divine reality is inexpressible in finite terms, and also because it recognizes that people are different and require truth presented in a variety of ways that at least one version may speak to them and they find it helpful on their path. The implicit hope is that in the future the religions will come to realize their common ground and build peace on this unity:

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So in the World-Religion, the great religions will still exist, each one appealing to a special type and a special temperament of mankind, existing as sects of a single Faith, existing as branches of a single tree, realizing their fundamental unity, but preserving their valuable diversity; for by construction and not by destruction will come the fulfilling of the great religious law. For surely diversity is the very condition of a universe and of all its beauty. One expression of truth could never exhaust the contents of a spiritual truth. The intellect divides, separates, classifies; it can never give the full rounded All of the sum which is Truth. A part of it, a fragment of it, an aspect of it — yes — that the intellectual presentment can give; but we need to have them all, in order that the many-faced truth may shine out for the helping and teaching of man.

So I look for a great World-Religion where each religion will have its place, where each great faith will present its own aspect of the truth; but where we all shall learn from every faith the special view it has to teach, and so widen our minds, enlarge our hearts, and deepen our reverence for the greatness of the truth.

This quotation sums up the Theosophical position on religious diversity and marks out the ground for interfaith relations. At the same time, what Besant calls 'the World-Religion' would seem to contradict her insistence that all the religions will remain to contribute in their own voice, but Theosophy is not out to impose another institutional religion or

church on the world: 'Today the religious field is a field of combat . . . and if Theosophy be but one more combatant, one more rival sect, the world could well enough do without it.' Rather, I understand 'the new World-Religion' as a matrix of those inner truths that the religions teach in their own different ways, and as such the new world religion *is* simply pluralism understood on a Theosophical basis and one's own traditional religion interpreted in the light of the common basis of all the religions. Thus Theosophy, as Besant says, only desires to open up people's eyes to the common elements in their respective faiths and to provide a framework for interaction and mutual growth and stimulation by learning from each other. She proposes the following example of connection:

First of all, I do not believe that the religions of the time will disappear as religions. I believe that they will be related to the World-Religion, as, say, the various Churches of Christendom are related to Christianity. It is just as you find many a Church, many a sect, just as you find many varieties of thought and teaching; but they all look up to the Christ as the supreme Teacher, and accept His gospel as the foundation of their message.

On this basis, it is clear that maintaining religious diversity is not only desirable in an antiquarian sense but, because of the nature of reality and the nature of our limited capacity for perceiving the Real, religious diversity as the presence of a wide range of different

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expressions of the higher reality is absolutely vital for bringing about spiritual growth and stimulation. And it is clear that individual and corporate interfaith efforts and interreligious dialogue, especially on points of dogma, are crucial since it is only through these efforts that a person will come to appreciate those other areas of religious experience which his or her own tradition does not address or emphasize. In the Theosophical view, then, religious diversity is a given, religious pluralism is a natural attitude to diversity, and religious interaction and open dialogue is the only reasonable approach to the religious other.

Conclusion

The Theosophical model of pluralism implies that interfaith relations must face the difficult task of attempting to engage on a doctrinal level and work to reassess traditional interpretations of problematic issues that stand in the way of religions seeing each other as relatives and partners

in a common undertaking and not as enemies at war. Theosophy suggests that the common language of religious symbolism is a tool that can help to open up this difficult area. These elements of successful, fruitful interfaith relations are not the exclusive property of a Theosophical world view. On the contrary, it is the emphatic point of Theosophy that these principles of unity and cooperation are present in all the religions and that a pluralistic attitude is a possible approach of any religion towards any religion. The future of interfaith engagement on this fundamental level requires the commitment of both individual believers and the religious establishments as such, and it is thus a micro and macro level process with the potential to transform the face of the earth from a place of strife and ideological competition to a garden of cooperation and mutual growth, building peace and prosperity on the basis of a deep appreciation of our essential spiritual unity. ✧

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Disintegration and Progress (Part II)

P. KRISHNA

IN the course of evolution, the human being is distinguished by improved memory, a greater ability to think and to learn language, and an enhanced capacity for imagination, which every child, as he learns language, acquires. But Nature does not dictate how we should use these gifts. Have we used these additional capacities to be more kind, gentle, protective of the earth, our environment, and even our own species? In the last ten years human beings have killed thirty million of their own species in wars. How horrendous this ego process is! It is the root cause of fighting within the family, between brothers, between husband and wife, and the dominating attitude. The cause of war is the same desire for domination which projects itself in a big way between nations. But war is only a manifestation on a larger scale, while the root of it, the cause, is the same.

We must examine the deeper causation. How does it begin? If we watch a child growing and slowly becoming egotistic, we will see that when the capacities for imagination, thinking, and

enhanced memory are combined with the instinct for pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain, it becomes pursuit of psychological pleasure and fear of psychological pain. The mind is calculating whether it can get more security and pleasure. The desire to accumulate and to protect oneself in the future from any kind of harm seems perfectly natural. It arises in every child.

Are we completely trapped in it, or can we free ourselves by learning about it? The biologist explains how violence has come into us from our biological past, and their explanation is not wrong. A human being can add to violence and become a Hitler, or eliminate it and become a Gandhi or a Krishnamurti. There is a certain amount of freedom which Nature has given to man, but not to animals. We cannot make a tiger a vegetarian, but a human being, though born in a non-vegetarian environment, may become a vegetarian, may come to know compassion. We have this capacity for change. The whole question about what is moral and right or the contrary arises only for man. If he is completely determined

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by his past and thus not responsible for what he does, how can he be blamed? But this is not completely the case. Therefore we must exercise these capacities to learn for ourselves, and thus through self-knowledge we can free ourselves of the disorder in consciousness.

That is what Krishnamurti says:

You have cultivated enquiry regarding the outer world, as science enquiring into Nature; you have cultivated enquiry into social problems in order to solve them; but you have not cultivated inquiry in order to understand yourself. You are so ignorant of yourself.

In his book *Education and the Significance of Life* he says:

The ignorant man is not the unlearned (meaning the uneducated), but the one who does not know himself. And the learned man is stupid when he relies on his knowledge to give him understanding.

Similar things were pointed out by the Buddha, Socrates, and several others. We have a high regard for them, but have we listened to them? No. Why not? Is it because we are not really convinced of the truth of what they say even after knowing all the arguments?

Logically it can be shown how destructive the ego is. Take any virtue, any quality, add the ego to it and see what it becomes. Take love, add the ego to it and it becomes attachment, possessiveness, jealousy, dependence. Take humility, add the ego to it and it becomes conscious-

ness of inferiority, being servile, feudal. Take power, the ability to do things, add the ego to it and it becomes domination, exploitation. Take sexuality, add the ego to it and it becomes lust, pornography. The problem is not with what is; the problem is the ego. It is the source of all problems, both in our personal life and in society, because 'we are the world'. If we understand, then whatever happens in society is a reflection or projection of what is happening inside us, in our consciousness.

Is it possible to free ourselves of this ego process? If it is something that Nature has created in us, like the kidneys or lungs — we cannot get rid of it, only cope with it. But if it is something which we create from our own thinking or the manner in which we approach life, then we can learn not to approach life that way. Can we perceive the danger of this, as we perceive the danger of fire? — not just intellectually, through argument, saying 'I agree because it is logically correct'. That does not work. But if we perceive the danger directly, then action follows. It is not *our* action. Then it is Nature's intelligence that acts. Nature has endowed every living organism with intelligence in order to protect itself. But when we make it into a virtue, saying 'I must not be egotistic', but do not see the danger of it directly, then it continues to create conflict between what we are and what we think we should be.

Now, why are we not aware of this danger, though we can logically create these equations, as we have just done:

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‘Yes, the ego is bad for man.’ This does not go away just because we have concluded this. It does not lie within our volition. Our decisions are very small things. You can decide which house to buy, which job to take, which car to drive and so on; but you cannot decide not to worry, to be happy, to love, even to make friends or to perceive beauty. The greatest things in life are those we cannot decide to have, but they can come to us. They are a by-product of understanding oneself and life, of finding sensitivity, right living. Thus we have to find out if this ego process can end, and if not, why not. It does not end because I want it to end, but only if I perceive the danger of it.

This is humanity’s great illusion. Man thinks that acting out of self-interest is in his own self-interest. This is what we have been doing for thousands of years — each one acting out of self-interest — and that has brought the world to its present state. Is it really in our interest? We are hurtling towards a catastrophe. The next world might eliminate all of us. Obviously, it is not in our self-interest. And yet, it appears to be, because if I can make some profit it appears that I will benefit from it. This is the outcome of a narrow vision. When I see only so far, I feel it is beneficial. If I could see very far, both in time and in space, then it would be clear that it is disastrous! So how does one expand vision, and why is it so confined?

Let us go back to the child. He grows up attached to his parents and family. He grows up in a certain society, and so on.

He calls it ‘my house, my religion, my family’, and feels secure. This is a natural process. But if it traps my thinking, then it is all the time concerned with securing profit, benefiting ‘me’ and what I call ‘mine’, which is the essence of the ego process. Can I see the danger of this trap? If I cannot, my thought process is no longer free to enquire, but it is all the time seeking to justify the ‘me’ and the ‘mine’. Each one of us has a personal lawyer in our head who is all the time arguing in favour of the ‘me’ and the ‘mine’. This means that as long as I am seeking profit, or seeking satisfaction for the ‘me’ and the ‘mine’, I am not seeking the truth. Therefore, though it is very easy to say ‘I am a seeker of truth’, we are only seeking satisfaction in one form or another.

Can the passion for learning be so strong that it can overcome this instinct of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain? Truth may hurt me. It often comes as a revelation, as disillusion. One was going along with an illusion which was comforting and pleasant, so the truth shocks. Unless we are willing to face psychological, and perhaps also physical, pain, we cannot say we are seriously in quest of truth. The mind says ‘All this is meant for the Buddha, I’m not the Buddha, I’m an ordinary man’, and so it continues. If we go on like that, we have no right to complain about the riots, wars, our children getting killed in war, because all that is a consequence of that kind of living. When we do complain, it is illogical, irrational. To see the truth of this is to see that all disorder and

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division arises out of illusion.

Krishnamurti went round the world pointing to our state, saying: 'For God's sake, enquire; see the importance of not continuing in illusion.' Illusion means taking something to be true when it is not true, or giving tremendous importance to something when it is not really so important in life. To discover for oneself the right place of everything in life is to discover order. Thus this is something one has to discover, something unknown. The truth is the unknown. That is why Krishnaji called it 'the art of living'. An art is something that cannot be prescribed. You cannot have guidelines on how to make a beautiful picture. When everything is in the right proportion it creates beauty. We may not know what the right proportion is, but we have a way of knowing when something creates disorder; it will create conflict within me.

We normally look for the external cause of conflict, but that is not important, though it may be necessary socially to deal with it. The important thing is to find out the inner cause of conflict and use it as a ground for learning about oneself. Then it becomes an instrument of self-knowledge. Without learning about ourselves, there is no foundation for our meditation and practices. In other words, we are confused human beings, choosing between what is pleasant and unpleasant. The choice of a confused mind only adds to the confusion. The pursuit of truth and finding clarity is more important than any choices. That is the only cure, and we are capable of it.

Truth is eternal. It is always there and has always been there, because it is the existential fact. I may blame television and propaganda, I may blame my parents for conditioning my mind, but if they had not conditioned it, something else would have. There is nothing between me and truth except myself.

I am seeking to perceive the truth and I am myself in the way! How do we get ourselves out of the way? We have to die to the 'me', to the ego process. We cannot decide to die, but by exploring and watching it, without condemning or justifying it, we can see how it arises, what it is doing to our life and relationships. Perhaps in so watching, it may dawn on consciousness that I am myself creating it and am myself responsible for creating misery in my life. And when we see the danger of that process, maybe it will end.

The problems of hatred, jealousy, attachment, desire, and frustration are like the many branches of a huge tree, the root of which is this ego process. When one of these problems manifests, we start enquiring in order to solve it, and when it is solved, we stop. Do not stop at that point. Continue with the enquiry although the pain has disappeared. Each branch has the potential, if you trace it far enough back, to come to the root, and be able to uproot the whole tree. There is no point in cutting just one branch because, when the root is still there, another branch will grow. Krishnamurti used to say: Keep watching, start with whatever is occupying your mind, but do not accept simple answers; do not escape; do not become

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satisfied with solving the immediate problem; ask why it arose and go deep into it. This gives one an opportunity to learn about oneself deeply.

It is possible that we have not devoted ourselves to this. We have to make it a passion. It is not a question of analysing and thinking, because thought is from memory, and all conditioning is stored in the memory. Therefore thought is not a free instrument; it is coloured, but has the value of communication, of creating the question. But thought cannot answer that question, unless as another intellectual conclusion. So is there another instrument in us which is uncorrupted by conditioning? The answer is 'yes'. It is awareness, without which we never have the freedom to come out of conditioning. That is why Krishnamurti talked about 'choiceless awareness'. Watch choicelessly; do not argue; take the argument only as a question. The answer comes from watching, not from concluding. Truth is not a logical conclusion. Logical

conclusions work in science, but they do not work in the religious quest!

To be able to watch choicelessly one has to come upon the enquiring, learning mind. Krishnamurti would say, 'You must plough the field with thought, analysis, questioning; then leave it fallow.' Leaving it fallow is important, because in that silence it regenerates. Thought is not the instrument of regeneration, but it has the value of creating the question. But we must explore that question in our own life, in our own consciousness, to receive from it the wisdom that it can give. Each one of us must grow in wisdom. This means that the enquiry, the learning mind — which is investigating what is true and what is false — must be anchored in every child, in every student. It is more important to create this spirit of enquiry in the mind than to foster scientific enquiry. We must educate ourselves and put equal emphasis on knowledge and self-knowledge, thereby creating a mind that is both scientific and religious. ✧

To an Occultist there is nothing surprising in the idea that the physical world should be developing and acquiring new faculties — a simple modification of matter, new as it now seems to science, as incomprehensible as were at first the powers of steam, sound, electricity. . . . But what does seem surprising is the spiritual stagnation in the world of intellect, and of the highest exoteric knowledge.

H. P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. VII, p. 90

Studies in *The Voice of the Silence*, 13

JOHN ALGEO

THE immediately preceding verses dealt with two paths: the Open (or exoteric) and the Secret (or esoteric). The Open Path leads the pilgrim out of this world to freedom from all worldly limitations and sorrows. The Secret Path leads the pilgrim to renounce the liberation that is the goal of the Open Path and to remain instead in this world to serve it and all the other evolving souls in it. Verses 182 to 195 summarize this theme and complete the second fragment of *The Voice of the Silence* on ‘The Two Paths’.

VERSES [182-195]:

[182] Thus, the first Path is Liberation.

[183] But Path the second is —Renunciation, and therefore called the ‘Path of Woe’.

[184] That Secret Path leads the Arhan to mental woe unspeakable; woe for the living dead,³⁶ and helpless pity for the men of karmic sorrow, the fruit of Karma Sages dare not still.

[185] For it is written: ‘Teach to eschew all causes; the ripple of effect, as the great tidal wave, thou shalt let run its course.’

[186] The Open Way, no sooner has thou reached its goal, will lead thee to reject the Bodhisattvic body and make thee enter the thrice glorious state of Dharma-kāya,³⁷ which is oblivion of the world and men for ever.

[187] The Secret Way leads also to Parānirvānic bliss — but at the close of *kalpas* without number; Nirvāna-s gained and lost from boundless pity and compassion for the world of deluded mortals.

[188] But it is said, ‘The last shall be the greatest’. Samyak Sambuddha, the Teacher of Perfection, gave up his Self for the salvation of the world, by stopping at the threshold of Nirvāna — the pure state.

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[189] Thou hast the knowledge now concerning the two Ways. Thy time will come for choice, O thou of eager soul, when thou hast reached the end and passed the seven Portals. Thy mind is clear. No more art thou entangled in delusive thoughts, for thou hast learned all. Unveiled stands truth and looks thee sternly in the face. She says:

[190] ‘Sweet are the fruits of rest and

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liberation for the sake of Self; but sweeter still the fruits of long and bitter duty. Aye, Renunciation for the sake of others, of suffering fellow men.’

[191] He, who becomes Pratyeka-Buddha,³⁸ makes his obeisance but to his Self. The Bodhisattva who has won the battle, who holds the prize within his palm, yet says in his divine compassion:

[192] ‘For others’ sake this great reward I yield’ — accomplishes the greater Renunciation.

[193] A Saviour of the World is he.

.

[194] Behold! The goal of bliss and the long Path of Woe are at the furthest end. Thou canst choose either, O aspirant to Sorrow, throughout the coming cycles! . . .

[195] OM VAJRAPĀNI HUM.

COMMENT. Verses 183–5 present a grim view of the esoteric path. Many of us are attracted to it because we want to know what the ‘secrets’ are. And even if we are told that it is a path of selfless service, of dedication to the welfare of the world rather than of personal comfort or ease, we are apt to think that service is a lovely thing, which will make us feel all warm and cozy, that it must be glorious to be part of the great team of servers. That way of thinking about the esoteric path is very apt to result in disillusionment. To be sure, the Path of Renunciation is lovely and glorious, but it is not a comfortable way. These verses try to make that clear.

The esoteric way is called the ‘Path of Woe’, not because of any physical suffering on it — physical suffering is characteristic of all life, as the Buddha told us — but rather because of ‘mental woe’. That woe is the result of working for the ‘living dead’, whom the gloss to verse 184 identifies:

Gloss 36. Men ignorant of the esoteric truths and wisdom are called ‘the living dead’.

The metaphor likening those who are spiritually unaware to the ‘dead’ was also used by Christ, for example when he said to a would-be disciple who wanted to bury his father before he joined Christ: ‘Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead’ (Matt., 8:22). Working for those who are unaware of their own condition is a frustrating experience. Before it is possible to do anything directly to help them, they have to realize the state they are in: the dead have to be brought back to life, as Christ in the gospels raised the ‘dead’, that is, vivified those in a state of spiritual torpor.

It is, however, as verses 184–5 make clear, not possible to step in and act for others. No one can do for us what only we can do for ourselves. The wise can only feel ‘helpless pity for the men of Karmic sorrow, the fruit of Karma [which] Sages dare not still’. No one can control what another does in generating the causes of karma, nor can anyone prevent those causes, once set in motion, from producing their inevitable results. Those who have passed the dividing of the Paths

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and elected to remain in the world to help others are ironically helpless to save others from acting wrongly and bearing the consequences of wrong action. All that those Wise Ones can do is to set an example for us and point out to us what we must do. They cannot act for us.

Verses 186–8 point out that both the ‘Open’ and ‘Secret’ Paths lead to the same ultimate goal, which is ‘the thrice glorious state of Dharmakāya’, a term that is identified by a cross reference that we considered earlier in connection with the same gloss in verse 177. That gloss (34 to verse 306) discusses the three ‘kāya-s’ or vestures that one can ‘put on’ after reaching the end of the Path on earth. They symbolize three alternative modes of existence between which the pilgrim chooses on reaching the end of the earthly path. Dharmakāya is conscious union with the one Reality of the universe and so freedom from all earthly limitations. The ‘Open’ Path goes directly to that state, while the ‘Secret’ Path leads the pilgrim there only after a very long period (‘kalpa-s’ or eons) spent in service to the world.

The ‘Secret’ or delayed path has, however, its own compensations, especially the knowledge that following it is living according to the ultimate principle of Reality, the unity of all life. As we are all one in our inmost essence, helping others is in fact helping ourselves, or rather helping the One Self, of which we are all expressions. The Buddha, the Christ, and all the great teachers have followed that path.

Verse 188 alludes to a saying of Christ with respect to the ‘delay’ experienced by those who take the longer way (Matt., 19:27–30). Peter asked Christ what he and the other disciples could expect from having given up everything to follow Christ. The latter responded, ‘the last shall be first’, That is, those who follow the example of the great teachers by remaining in the world and serving others will be the last to be liberated from the frustrations of life, but they will also be the first in having the fullest satisfaction of having not merely discovered the Truth, but lived it.

Between verses 188 and 189 there is a line of dots, suggesting that some part of the original has been omitted at this point. These are, after all, only ‘fragments’ or ‘extracts’ from *The Book of the Golden Precepts*.

Verses 189 to 194 point out that we will all at some point in our spiritual quest have to make a choice between the two paths. Those who choose immediately to enter nirvāna, that is, to ‘blow out’ (the etymological meaning of *nirvāna*) all the pain and suffering that come from a sense of false separateness, are called ‘pratyeka buddhas’. The word *pratyeka* means ‘private’, and the ‘pratyeka buddhas’ are (according to *The Perennial Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. Keith Crim [HarperSanFrancisco, 1989], 121) ‘private Buddhas who attained full enlightenment but did not proclaim it to others’. They are contrasted with the Buddhas of Compassion, who remain in the world as bodhisattva-s (one whose

being or 'sattva' is devoted to attaining enlightenment ('bodhi') in order to serve others.

The original 1889 edition of this book had the following gloss (38) to 'Pratyeka-Buddha' in verse 191:

Gloss 38. Pratyeka Buddhas are those Bodhisattvas who strive after and often reach the Dharmakāya robe after a series of lives. Caring nothing for the woes of mankind or to help it, but only for their own *bliss*, they enter Nirvāna and — disappear from the sight and the hearts of men. In Northern Buddhism a 'Pratyeka Buddha' is a synonym of spiritual selfishness.

Madame Blavatsky later explained that 'Pratyeka-Buddhas . . . are those who have attained the Bodhi (wisdom) of the Buddhas, but do not become Teachers' (*Collected Writings* 14:434-5). In that regard, Annie Besant wrote: 'The Pratyeka Buddha stands on the level of the Buddha, but his work for the world has nothing to do with its teaching, and his office has always been surrounded with mystery. The preposterous view that he, at such superhuman height of power, wisdom, and love, could be selfish, is found in the exoteric books, though it is hard to see how it can have arisen. HPB charged me to correct the mistake, as she had in a careless moment copied such a statement elsewhere' (*The Secret Doctrine*, Adyar ed., 1971, 5:399 fn).

However, those who choose to serve have clearly chosen the better path in

the view of *The Voice of the Silence*. They are saviours of the world.

Ellipsis points before and at the end of verse 194 suggest other omissions from the original.

The second fragment ends with a mantra: 'Om vajrapāni hum.' *Om* and *hum* are sacred words full of mystical associations but without any lexical translation into English. *Vajra* comes from a root meaning 'hard' or 'mighty' and means 'thunderbolt', a symbol of enlightenment, perhaps because enlightenment comes out of the blue and strikes us like a thunderbolt, or perhaps because of the power it conveys. *Pāni* means 'hand'. So *vajrapāni* means 'thunderbolt-handed' or 'wielding the thunderbolt' and is an epithet of gods and of bodhisattvas, who are often shown in the Tibetan tradition (with which *The Voice of the Silence* is especially associated) as holding a stylized thunderbolt in one hand.

MEDITATION:

1. Think about the difference between the two paths. Why are they called 'Open' and 'Secret'? Is it possible to be truly enlightened without a compassionate concern for the welfare of others that leads us to want to help them?

2. Imagine a thunderbolt. If you are familiar with Tibetan iconography, you might hold a picture of the Tibetan stylized thunderbolt-shape in your mind's eye. Do not try to explain it or interpret it. Just see it, and let it speak silently to your inner awareness. ✧

Wagner's *Parsifal* (Part III)

ALAN SENIOR

Act II

Klingsor's magic castle is situated on the opposite slope of the mountain of Monsalvat. The magician is no ordinary evildoer, but one whose inner selfishness prevented his desire for holiness from being attained.

Observing the approach of Parsifal, who he suspects may be the liberator of Amfortas, the magician plans to lure him to destruction and summons Kundry who, you will remember, stands for the principle of Matter, Form, and Separateness. She struggles against this but Klingsor suggests that the approaching knight may be the one to release her from her curse, so she goes to prepare herself. Parsifal now encounters Klingsor's Pleasure Garden and the lascivious 'flower-maidens' (lovelier than flowers) who endeavour to entice him. Here we may recall *The Voice of the Silence*: 'The Wise Ones tarry not in pleasure-grounds of senses. [They] heed not the sweet-tongued voices of illusion' (I:30-31). These flower-maidens do not occur in the original sources and are taken from *The Victors*. They stand for the subtle powers of deception, beckoning us away from self-

control and discrimination, clouding our judgment with the attractive veils of sense impressions and passionate desires (*māyā* and *kāma*) which can be mistaken for reality.

But Parsifal is able to resist their embraces, refusing to be entrapped by glamour. Kundry, who now appears as a bewitchingly lovely young woman, drives away the flower-maidens and tries to weave her own erotic spell. But such passions have no enduring or binding power over him, so Kundry tells him of his early years, using all her arts of seduction. She speaks of the death of his father, how his mother tried to protect him from suffering by sheltering him from the world (there is a link here with the story of the early life of Buddha), and how she died of a broken heart when he left her. She offers her love to redeem him of the guilt of his mother's death and kisses him passionately. But Parsifal starts up in horror, feeling the pain of Amfortas's spear-wound, and is not tempted. Instead, he has a vision of the Grail, experiences 'humanity's great pain' and is filled with immeasurable compassion. In the words of Śri Śankarāchārya:

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Wagner's *Parsifal* (Part III)

‘When all desires are completely exhausted, the realization of *ātman* is unobstructed.’

Once again we see the influence of both Schopenhauer and Eastern philosophy in the concept of ‘no separateness’ — that what we do to others we do to ourselves. The shock of Kundry’s kiss has destroyed the veil of *Māyā* (what Schopenhauer called the illusions hiding us from the world-as-will) and Parsifal now knows that he is one with Amfortas, experiencing pain, temptation, and the wound as if it were happening to himself.

Has our modern media helped us to likewise see ourselves in the context of a greater whole, on a planet becoming increasingly smaller? The pain and loss of wars being fought right now in different parts of the world are brought vividly and daily into our living rooms. We witness the agonies of conflict, torture, wounds, and often famine, which may anger us, but also allows us to feel deep within ourselves the great anguish and suffering of those people far away.

This surely gives rise to compassion, a shift in consciousness and a feeling of oneness, connectedness — an understanding that all being is interrelated. What affects one of us affects us all, a response so strong that an eagerness for justice is aroused and many are prompted to do something to help alleviate the suffering. We have said that the answer to the question ‘whom does the Grail serve?’ can be ‘those who serve’, taken up by individuals who, like Parsifal, pierce the veil of ignorance, separateness, greed,

and dogmas, choosing instead to be the instruments of healing — attuned to *one world, one heart, one mind*. So Parsifal no longer needs to ask the question, for he is now able to offer selfless service to heal not only the king, but an ailing Brotherhood of the Grail.

All attempts to hinder Parsifal’s mission have been repulsed. With clarity of vision he hears the call of the divine will to redemption.* Transformation has occurred, resulting from his vivid realization of universal suffering. Kundry, too, realizes that here at last is someone who is proof against her charms, so she summons Klingsor for help. He instantly appears and hurls the Spear at Parsifal. But it is forbidden to use this holy Spear — the Will — for self and, instead of finding its mark, it remains suspended above Parsifal’s head (a similar story is found in ancient Buddhist tales where *Māra*, the great tempter or Lord of Illusion, tries to do the same thing to prevent the Buddha’s enlightenment). Parsifal makes the sign of the cross, consecrating the Will to its holy purpose. Now there is no desire strengthening illusory objects, for Parsifal is fully awakened. Having reached the ultimate state of holiness he has become indifferent to pleasure and pain (termed *virāga* in Sanskrit). Truth alone is perceived, and Parsifal cannot be harmed by evil onslaughts. A violent earthquake occurs and Klingsor’s castle falls away, whilst the Garden of *Māyā* withers into the desert which it has always been. The ordeal is over; Kundry sinks to the ground and Parsifal is in command of

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the Spear *and* the situation, as Wagner's music portrays both the transitory nature of material things and the permanence of the spirit.

Act III

The Prelude to Act III recounts many of the motifs of the whole work, providing in musical terms the experiences of Parsifal from the beginning of his quest. We also hear a new motif called the Desolation theme, depicting the sadness of the knights due to Amfortas's failure to lead them in the Grail ceremony; accordingly, the Grail music becomes fragmented and distorted. But there is also a Promise theme, clear and triumphant, representing the unconquerable spirit of the hero who has the strength and courage to overcome all obstacles.

It is Good Friday some years later and a feeling of peace pervades the landscape. Now Parsifal is fully attuned 'to the great heart and mind of all mankind', having wandered forth alone to complete his self-imposed mission. Gurnemanz has become a hermit living in a hut by a sacred spring, whilst Amfortas has refused to uncover the Grail because of the pain it causes him. In other words the lower mind is conscious of its own impurity and unworthiness, shrinking from any attempt to bring forth the spiritual because the limited personal self is powerless.

Gurnemanz is lamenting the knights' leaderless condition and passivity when he discovers Kundry lying inert in the undergrowth in her penitent's attire, and slowly restores her to consciousness.

She cries out: 'Let me serve! Let me serve!' Each time she has changed her allegiance she has fallen into a cataleptic state, indicating Laya (dissolution) or, in *The Secret Doctrine*, Laya-Point or Laya-Centre, the state where substance (Prakṛti) is homogeneous, unable to act or discriminate. She has always needed to pass through this critical state in order to serve, but now that Klingsor's power over her is broken, she is a true penitent, reawakened to allegiance to the Grail.

Parsifal enters wearing armour (symbolizing, for Wagner, the active will) and he carries the sacred Spear. Gurnemanz reproaches him for bearing a weapon on Good Friday, but when Parsifal sheds the armour and kneels in silent prayer before the Spear, the old knight and Kundry recognize him *and* the Spear. Now Parsifal hears of the pitiful state of the Brotherhood and the death of Titurel, feeling intense grief and compassion for Amfortas's suffering. Kundry bathes and anoints his feet, drying them with her long flowing hair, which again reminds us of Mary Magdalene anointing Christ's feet. This is to purify the thinking and awaken him to full consciousness of the task that lies ahead. Everything that Parsifal is to do — to renew, regenerate, and change the situation in the Grail Castle — must be achieved beyond the sense-based level of the mind (symbolized by the feet which touch the earth). Mixing this level of thinking with that of the Higher Mind cannot lead to transcendence or an elevated level of truth — the physical man cannot identify with the

Wagner's *Parsifal* (Part III)

spiritual man. Parsifal asks Gurnemanz to do the same to his head (the Higher Manas) and now, as knight of the Grail and conscious redeemer — strong, compassionate, and self-illuminated — he pours spring water on the penitent Kundry's head, her final liberation and sanctification, so that her desire is attached to the Higher Self. Prakṛti, transcended, now truly exists only to serve.

Parsifal sees everything with new eyes, feeling oneness with Nature around them, which appears to be filled with magic, and he comments on this. Gurnemanz tells him that it is Good Friday's spell that is the cause. A feeling of perfect repose has entered Parsifal's soul and a blessed calm seems to have descended upon Nature as tranquillity reigns over forest and meadow. Wagner's music for this Good Friday Spell breathes forth 'the peace of God which passeth all understanding.' It typifies the great transforming process of Kundry's atonement (at-one-ment) with the spiritual (Parsifal), an alchemical process that has raised the aspirant to the Degree level of Masterhood. Now the vision of the *one life* prevails throughout — Buddhist consciousness blissfully revealing the Self, attained through long sacrifice — a voluntary and glad pouring forth of life so that others may share in it. A distant pealing of bells guides them to the Grail Temple where the knights are bearing the saintly Titurel's coffin, followed by the suffering Amfortas on his litter.

The knights implore Amfortas to unveil the Grail one last time but he cannot,

uncovering his wound and beseeching the knights to kill him. They fall back and Parsifal steps forward to touch Amfortas's side with the holy Spear, a more dramatic act on Wagner's part than the simple procedure of questioning. The Will, though it had been entangled with Desire, can now heal the lower consciousness when surrendered to spiritual consciousness. Only those who are entirely unselfish, coupled with the finest discrimination, are endowed with the spiritual power symbolized by the Spear; therefore Parsifal is able to heal. He ascends the steps of the sanctuary and takes the Grail from its shrine, unveiling it and kneeling before it in prayer. A beautiful light shimmers and spreads throughout the Hall as he restores the Spear to its rightful place; occult power is reunited to occult knowledge under the one who has attained liberation, spoken of in 'Revelation': 'Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the house of my God: he shall go out thence no more.' But, though Parsifal has reached 'the other shore', as Guardian of the Grail he has chosen to remain on earth as a bodhisattva or *nirmānakāya*, a buddha of Compassion by right, and a bodhisattva by choice, remaining in the world and able to serve all living beings. 'To don *Nirmānakāya*'s humble robe is to forego eternal bliss for Self, to help on man's salvation' (Frag. II: 145, *The Voice of the Silence*). Parsifal had reached Nirvāna's bliss and renounced it, the final step on the Path of Renunciation.

The Grail glows with ever-increasing

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radiance, and a white dove (the Ātmā) descends to hover over Parsifal's head. The Trinity is now in manifestation in the consciousness of the perfected man — Spear, Grail and Dove all united as Power, Wisdom, and Love. Kundry, gazing at Parsifal, falls lifeless to the ground — the material principle is metaphorically killed with the higher principles now in full manifestation. Parsifal holds the Grail in blessing over the knights whilst Amfortas (redeemed and united to the Higher Manas) and Gurnemanz, who has stood for the Antahkarana — the bridge between the lower Manas (Amfortas) and

the Higher or Buddhi-Manas (Parsifal) — both kneel in homage before him. The cycle of illumination is brought to a close with the haunting beauty of the Grail motif. Thus, Wagner's 'Parsifal' is the culmination of the composer's many expressions of esoteric truth, given for 'those who have ears to hear', throwing a flood of light into the consciousness of seekers. Wagner was working at the level of the Higher Self throughout, adding illuminating details to ancient myths and the esoteric traditions of the Middle Ages. As he said: 'I work for those who are awaking!' ✧

* Erlösung, when translated into English as 'redemption', is inexact, as it is often associated with 'buying back', as in a pawnshop. It literally means 'release' or 'deliverance'; in the case of Amfortas, release from his agony or separation from the higher, infinite Self (*attavāda*). With Kundry it means deliverance from the curse of endless rebirths as both seductress and penitent, and for the kingdom of the Grail it means restoring the land and its people to fertility and well-being. Finally, for Parsifal it means liberation from all illusions (*pratyāhāra*), which he has at this stage achieved.

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The Law of Sacrifice

ANNIE BESANT

‘THOSE who see differences pass from death to death’; thus speak the Śruti. The man who sees difference is really continually dying, for he is living in the form, which is decaying every moment and is therefore death, and not in the Spirit, which is life.

Just, then, in proportion as you and I, my brothers, do not recognize the difference between each and each, but feel the unity of life, and know that that life is common to all, and that none has a right to boast of his share of it, nor to be proud that his share is different from the share of another, only thus and in that proportion shall we live the Spiritual Life.

That is the last word, it seems, of the Wisdom that the Sages have taught us. Nothing less than this is spiritual, nothing less than this is wisdom, nothing less than this is real life.

Oh! if for one passing moment I could show to you, by any skill of tongue or passion of emotion, one gleam of the faint glimpse — that by the grace of the Masters I have caught — of the glory and the beauty of the Life that knows no difference and recognizes no separation, then the charm of that glory would so win

your hearts, that all earth’s beauty would seem but ugliness, all earth’s gold but dross, all earth’s treasures but dust on the roadside, beside the inexpressible joy of the life that knows itself as One.

Hard to keep it, even when once seen, amidst the separated lives of men, amidst the glamour of the senses, and the delusions of the mind. But once to have seen it, though but for a moment, changes the whole world, and having beheld the majesty of the Self, no life save that seems worth living.

How shall we make it real, how shall we make it our own, this wonderful recognition of the Life beyond all lives, of the Self beyond all selves? Only by daily acts of renunciation in the little things of life; only by learning in every thought, word, and action to live and love the Unity; and not only to speak it, but to practise it on every occasion, by putting ourselves last and others first, by always seeing the need of others and trying to supply it, by learning to be indifferent to the claim of our own lower nature and refusing to listen to it. I know of no road save this humble, patient, persevering endeavour, hour after hour, day after day, year after year

From the last chapter of *The Laws of the Higher Life*, containing lectures delivered at an Annual Convention of the Indian Section of the TS held in Varanasi, The Theosophical Publishing House, 1903.

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until at last the mountain tops are climbed.

We talk of the Great Renunciation. We speak of These, before whose Feet we bow, as Those who have 'made the Great Renunciation'. Do not dream that They made Their Renunciation when, standing on the threshold of Nirvāna, They heard the sobbing of the world in anguish, and turned back to help. It was not then that the real, the great, renunciation was made. They made it over and over again in the hundreds of lives that lie behind Them; They made it by the constant practice of the small renunciations of life, by continual pity, by daily sacrifices in common human life. They did not make it at the last hour, when on the threshold of Nirvāna, but through the course of lives of sacrifice; until, at last, the Law of Sacrifice became so much the law of Their being, that They could not do anything at the last moment, when the choice was Theirs, save register on the record of the universe the innumerable renunciations of the past.

You and I, my brothers, today, if we will, may begin to make the Great Renunciation; and if we do not begin it in the daily life, in our hourly dealings with our fellows, be assured we shall not be able to make it when we stand on the mountain crest. The habit of daily sacrifice, the habit of thinking, the habit of always giving and not taking, only thus shall we learn to

make that which the outer world calls the Great Renunciation. We dream of great deeds of heroism, we dream of mighty ordeals, we think that the life of discipleship consists in tremendous trials for which the disciple prepares himself, towards which he marches with open vision, and then by one supreme effort, by one brave struggle, gains his crown of victory.

Brothers, it is not so. The life of the disciple is one long series of petty renunciations, one long series of daily sacrifices, one continual dying in time in order that the higher may eternally live. It is not a single deed that strikes the world with wonder which makes true discipleship, else were the hero or the martyr greater than the disciple. The life of the disciple is lived in the home, is lived in the town, is lived in the office, is lived in the marketplace, yea, amid the common lives of men. The true life of sacrifice is that which utterly forgets itself, in which renunciation becomes so common that there is no effort, that it becomes a thing of course. If we lead that life of sacrifice, if we lead that life of renunciation, if daily, perseveringly, we pour out ourselves for others, we shall find ourselves one day on the summit of the mountain, and shall discover that we have made the Great Renunciation, without ever dreaming that any other act was possible.

PEACE TO ALL BEINGS ✧

If you have much, give of your wealth; if you have little, give of your heart.

Arabian Proverb

THE 133RD INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

The 133rd International Convention of the Theosophical Society will be held at the International Headquarters, Adyar, from 26 to 31 December 2008.

All members of the Society in good standing are welcome to attend as delegates. *Non-members may attend by obtaining permission from the President. Requests for such permission, together with a recommendation from an officer of the Federation, should be sent to the Convention Officer before 15 November 2008.*

REGISTRATION FEES	<i>India</i>	<i>Other Countries</i>	
Members	Rs 50	US\$ 30 *	
Members under 21	20	"	
Non-members	100	"	
Non-members under 21	60	"	

ACCOMMODATION CHARGES (SHARING) (From 24 December 2008 to 1 January 2009 inclusive)	<i>India (Members)</i>	<i>India (Non-members)</i>	<i>Other Countries (Members)</i>
Accommodation with mat	Rs 80	Rs 160	N.A.
Accommodation with cot	150	300	N.A.
Leadbeater Chambers (including service, furniture, and bedding, but no blankets)	2,000	3,000	US\$ 100 *

(Half rates will be charged for children under ten. No charge for children under three.)

* (or Euro or Pound Sterling equivalent)

ACCOMMODATION

Factors considered in allocating accommodation are active membership, health, age, priority of registration, size of family, etc. Rooms and bathrooms cannot be made available for anyone's exclusive use. Non-members and young persons should be prepared to stay in dormitories. No special facilities can be provided for members who are ill or for women with babies. Mosquito nets and bedding will not be available. No kitchens are available. Ordinary medical attention will be available for minor complaints but there will be no provision for serious or infectious illness. Such cases will have to be shifted from the compound.

Accommodation is available for delegates from 24 December 2008 to 1 January 2009, both days inclusive, but can be guaranteed only to those whose registration and accommodation payments are received *before 1 December 2008*. Delegates from India requiring accommodation should send *both the registration and accommodation charges together, but not before 1 September 2008*.

Please note that in the event of cancellation there will be no refund of registration fees, but other charges will be refunded if application is received *before 15 December 2008*.

Since railways have computerized reservations, we are unable to make return reservations as we used to do in the past.

All communications and remittances should be addressed to the Convention Officer, The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai 600 020. Remittance by bank drafts, duly crossed, should be made *payable to the Treasurer, The Theosophical Society, but sent to the Convention Officer*. Money Orders should be sent only to the Convention Officer. No cheques other than those drawn in Chennai will be accepted.

Miss MARY ANDERSON
International Secretary

Theosophical Work around the World

President Elected Again

On the occasion of the re-election of Mrs Radha Burnier as President of the Theosophical Society for a further seven-year period, a tea party and a meeting were held in the Headquarters Hall on the evening of 17 July 2008. It was a pleasant gathering, where people met informally and those who wished to were able to greet the President personally.

The celebration was attended by residents in the compound of the Society as well as by workers. Members from the Madras Federation and some friends also formed part of the invitees to the tea and the formal evening function.

The latter commenced with the Universal Prayer, written by Annie Besant, which brings people together mentally and is always meaningful. The international Secretary, Miss Mary Anderson, then officially announced the results of the election. Garlands were given on behalf of the residents present, and some special visitors substituted the customary shawl for the garland. Beautiful shawls were presented by different persons, including Honourable Justice Mr V. Raghupathi of Madras High Court and Honourable Justice Mr P. R. Gopalakrishnan, Chief Justice, retired from the Gujarat High Court, who came to take part in the celebration.

The President then gave a talk, pointing out that Universal Brotherhood,

which is proclaimed by the Theosophical Society, is supposed by various people to have been achieved already. But this is far from being the case, because modern methods have made it possible to destroy on an unprecedented scale. The environment is also continually being damaged, with plants, animals, insects, birds, and so on, disappearing at an alarming rate.

The solution lies in the human brain, as does the problem, which is created by the desires that throng the brain. Belief in the beauty and goodness of Nature has been reduced by a materialistic view of things. The solution lies first of all in quietly contemplating the actual position. There is no conflict in Nature, which is full of beauty. The evolutionary plan has endless developments and will touch regions which cannot be accessed now by the human mind, but man has to comprehend his own position in the vast plan, and only then will he become a part of that plan, which is God's will, and not man's.

The Divine Plan has qualities said to be indescribable, but can be realized by individuals who are eager to know what is in store, not only for man, but for all living creatures on this earth. People who know have described to some extent the indescribable by using such words as truth, wisdom, immortality, and so on. Even if we know only a little of the

Theosophical Work around the World

meaning of such words, it helps us to understand life. Unselfish service helps more than anything else. One does not always know whether what is planned and worked out is really unselfish, but when the intention is right, gradually action also becomes helpful to some people, or in exceptional cases, as in the lives of religious figures such as the Buddha or the Christ, affects vast numbers. The Theosophical Society works to bring about a complete change in the way man understands, acts, and carries out, as far as possible, the Divine Plan.

The Treasurer, Miss Keshwar Dastur, then thanked everyone present, after expressing her personal appreciation of the President's approach to life. The function closed with beautiful Sanskrit chanting by Miss Jaishree Kannan.

Norway

The TS in Norway held a seminar in Bergen on 22 and 23 May. The guest speaker, Professor P. Krishna, spoke on

'Annie Besant and Krishnamurti — Two Great Souls in Search of Truth', 'Krishnamurti and Gandhi', and 'Can there be Relationship without Conflict?'

In the first session Professor Krishna gave a short history of the Society and answered questions. In his lecture on 'Krishnamurti and Gandhi' he spoke with depth and clarity about their philosophy and work. The talk 'Can there be Relationship without Conflict?' was a guided tour of what it is to live the Truth and Reality of life. This was an experience out of time in deep realization of what it is to be a human being with these questions in mind.

There are few members in Norway, but four non-members came, as well as some students. Professor Krishna referred to Krishnamurti saying: 'He would rather talk to six people who were listening than to a million who were not.' The seminar was held in beautiful spring weather at the University of Bergen, while most students were taking examinations. ✧

In all the world there are only two kinds of people — those who know, and those who do not know; and this knowledge is the thing which matters. What religion a man holds, to what race he belongs — these things are not important; the really important thing is this knowledge — the knowledge of God's plan for men. For God has a plan, and that plan is evolution. When once a man has seen that and really knows it, he cannot help working for it and making himself one with it, because it is so glorious, so beautiful. So, because he knows, he is on God's side, standing for good and resisting evil, working for evolution and not for selfishness.

J. Krishnamurti
At the Feet of the Master