

Presidential Address

To the 132nd Annual Convention of the Theosophical Society
Adyar, 26 December 2007

Dear Brethren, I welcome all of you to this 132nd international Convention. The fact that so many members from different countries of the world gather here, shows that they find in the Convention at Adyar something worthwhile and inspiring. There are some who come year after year and this is, in my view, a great encouragement to having the annual Convention at Adyar, the place which the Founders chose, and where many of our most respected leaders spent their life irrespective of the climate and other conditions which may not have been what they were used to. Let us invoke the blessings of our Elder Brethren, who are always at work to encourage people to rise to the heights of human behaviour and living:

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

It is only natural for us to turn our attention this year to the President-Founder, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, and see in his life an example which is inspiring for us to follow. Many of our Lodges have been honouring his activities, and are no doubt planning to continue with vigour and enthusiasm the work that he began. We are surely aware that one of the leading characteristics of his life was his utter consecration and devotion to the high aims of our Society. Col. Olcott may have made mistakes, but was ever ready to correct them and to do the work of uplifting human consciousness to whatever extent possible. Perhaps we need to remember our

own powers to do the same, until one day humanity will have reached a state of unity.

The work we have to do is to awaken and energize the mind, ours as well as that of others, to the real purpose of our lives. To do this, it is needless to say, we ourselves must become relatively aware of the general condition of humanity. This is not so easy. We often get involved in our day-to-day work in such a way that we give little thought to the basic happenings in the world and the illusions which carry humanity in a direction which is not helpful.

If we look more carefully at the present generation, we see that there is a

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dangerous tendency to get lost in the enjoyments of the time, not knowing what else to do. The newspapers, which used to contain more serious matters, are now inclined to submit to pressure from people who are engaged in trivialities, and the world is being led astray by the ability to invent new pleasures. Are we, who claim to be interested in Theosophy, following suit? How many of us have the strength to search for light on the true purposes of human living and help others to do the same? This is an important question. Let us not forget that Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky set a new trend to free people from their absorption in superficialities.

Another thing that they tried to bring about was a wider attitude towards life. The minds of members of the Society was again and again drawn to human possibilities for living in a new way, and the mind was guided from purely personal concerns to the larger issues of mankind. If human beings become far less concerned with themselves and much more with humanity as a whole, the world will certainly become different. Conditions are slowly leading towards that: the world is getting closer in many ways. But does that help us to wake up to the totality of life, not only the life of human beings, but of all the inhabitants of this earth? There may be differences of form, of emotional and mental attractions, of interests in general, but the fact is that we have to learn to travel in amity and goodwill towards all to reach an end which is higher and nobler than what we have known.

The first Object of the Theosophical

Society tries to bring about this attitude. We have no doubt different interests and occupations, some of which have little to do with the aims of the evolutionary path. Leaving those alone, we can appreciate the fact that in spite of all our differences and interests, we still remain human, that is, we have something which we all share — our humanness — the qualities essentially belonging to all human beings. So, as we go along trying to reach higher levels, we can still, in spite of our difficulties, feel we are one. There are human beings who do feel this, and we can say that they are united because of it. Others of course have to learn to feel it. The first Object of the Society is thus of world importance to all of humanity.

The point made in the second Object is to turn attention away from just learning to live comfortably, towards what we may call higher values. The Theosophical Society does not say which particular religion is the best, but it does point to religion as a whole as something that can lead to human progress. That is why the study of religion is encouraged, and becomes part of the objects of the Society. The study of religion has to be non-personal and fundamental — religion itself. Thus human beings can rise to higher levels of knowing and understanding. This is a question which arises in the minds of all thinking or aspiring people. Similarly, the words ‘philosophy’ and ‘science’ convey a great deal to those who perceive philosophy not as a sectarian set of ideas, but a way of thinking which sees everything as part of a whole. The

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true member of the Theosophical Society realizes intuitively that there is a wholeness in all of life, and that there are ways of discovering it. Science aids in this quest, as can be seen more and more through its descriptions, telling us that all the different forms are interdependent. Science at first seemed to be based on separation, but has now come to that point where it sees the unity in the whole process of manifestation.

So Religion, Philosophy and Science together, in a broad sense, not in a formal way, can carry us to our natural destination — that is, towards higher planes of understanding. Today most people are engaged in finding out better ways of physical living, but this is not fundamental. What is important is to make the mind rise from the material to higher levels of perception, and therefore the mind must be used to delve into the nature of non-physical relationship.

When we come to the third Object, of which we know so little, we can still see the importance of it if we can only perceive that the Universe itself works according to certain laws. There are powers latent in us, on turning seriously towards which we will be able to come closer to the heart of Nature. This Object can be practised only by people who try to live according to the other two aims we very briefly referred to. The more we live in accordance with the first two Objects — one being the ability to be in harmony with all, and the other to leave aside the minor preoccupations which life imposes on us and turn to

the major issues, namely Religion, Philosophy and Science — the more we can begin to understand fully the third.

The third Object of the Society is one that can take a person beyond himself, when he reaches a universal level in every way, and is not concerned with small things of interest to the average human being. Up to now we have tried to make our lives fulfilling, and sometimes feel that we have succeeded to a certain extent in achieving our desire, but it does not take us very far, because we continue to cling to the various actions which help to bind us to the pre-human level. When we become capable of reading poetry or solving some of the great riddles posed by life, and so on, we feel we have got somewhere. But universal life needs no fulfilling of itself, and the word fulfilment has no meaning at that level.

So if we really investigate Nature and go beyond what we feel can be known, it will bring out all the powers latent in ourselves and make us rise above our present stature. Knowledge which is unlimited, and universal love, which can surmount all the normal difficulties, have the capacity to see what is actually in front of our eyes but remains hidden because our vision is limited. To put it simply, we come into contact with the Eternal — the most important transformation that will take place — carrying the person from the animalistic ego-consciousness to the universal non-egoistic consciousness. When this freedom is realized, that unit of life knows that uniqueness belongs to life

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itself and not to any person in particular.

When a person thinks, 'I am virtuous, generous, etc.', there is no longer any merit in him. Virtue is what it is, because of the wonderful qualities which we know belong to life and not to any person. Therefore the Greeks said that virtue belongs to that whole, to the supreme consciousness, and not to oneself. All the ideas we have are about 'myself', and therefore, from a higher point of view, are false.

There are those exceptional persons who out of deep reflection abandon every trace of attachment to the ego-concept — they are the holy people. Such people are sometimes very simple, not even interested in philosophy, but they have been able to drop the ego. They are holy, because they are free and uniqueness is flowering in them. All the faculties develop in a person who is holy and

'simple', and wisdom shines from him. Such a person takes birth in the world for helping others, and if he does so he makes a great difference to the people whom he speaks to and contacts. There is only pure action: this is a kind of mystic statement which we have to reflect on, and the meaning has to be discovered for ourselves. Pure action is one in which there is no reaction to anything.

So any point in human life where there is the strong and clear realization that the whole side of the ego which makes a person think he is virtuous, intelligent, etc., is not real, is of value. Virtue is really that movement from within, just like the sun when it rises and casts its light upon the world and brings out the shape and colours of everything that is lovely and true. It is love, and lights up the beauty, truth, harmony, and everything glorious in others. Love is real action.

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Not all countries have sent statistical information, but statistics from 43 of the 49 countries where there are Theosophical Lodges and Study Centres had been received when this report went to the press, totalling 28,142 members.

India continues to have the largest membership even though that membership has now fallen to 12,444. This is probably the result of more careful scrutiny of the figures and not an alarming situation.

The 116th Indian Section Convention was held on 27 December 2006 at Adyar. Prof. P. Krishna inaugurated it and Miss

Mary Anderson presided. Two days later, a symposium on 'How Theosophy Leads to Perfection' was held. The Section had a number of meetings during the year at its headquarters with some eminent people participating, some of whom dealt with the work of Col. Olcott. In this way, a few people who had not known the Society became acquainted with its activities.

The well-attended North Indian study camp was held at the Section headquarters with HPB's *The Key to Theosophy* as the main text. The camp had 106 participants from thirteen Federations, who studied with Mrs Radha Burnier.

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There were other study camps at which the former General Secretary, Mr P. K. Jayaswal, Dr A. Kannan, Prof. R. C. Tampi and others presided.

The South Indian Conference, under the leadership of Prof. C. A. Shinde, was centred around the work of Col. Olcott. The General Secretary visited a number of places and was the chief guest at the Federation Conferences in Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. The Theosophical Order of Service, under the new National Director for India, Mr B. L. Bhattacharyya, has supervised the good work done in many places.

The financial year that ended in March 2007 showed a surplus which helped to cover losses in previous years. Investments increased by Rs. 8 lakhs. The General Secretary made an appeal for donations from members so as to be able to repair the buildings and do other important work at the Section headquarters.

Among those who passed away were some well known in the Section, particularly Mr S. Krishnamurthy from the Karnataka Federation, and Mr G. Parmanand of Blavatsky Lodge, Mumbai, who had been a member for 56 years. The General Secretary has made a list of tasks ahead, and expects help and cooperation from members to fulfil these tasks.

The report of Mr S. M. Jayatilleke, Presidential Representative in Sri Lanka, mentions the number of members as 160, but since the area does not have the minimum requirement of Lodges, it has

not been certified as a Section. A quarterly newsletter named *The Theosophist* is being distributed to members. Apart from this, various books have been printed in Sinhala, including *At the Feet of the Master* and *The Buddhist Catechism*. The centenary of Col. Olcott's death has particular relevance to this region, since Olcott spent so much energy and time to give it a new impetus. A number of functions were organized in leading Buddhist schools, and other events took place to create awareness.

In Pakistan, we had the misfortune of losing our much-valued Presidential Representative, Mr Dara Mirza. The situation is very difficult there, except for the work done by the TOS. When it is clearer what needs to be done, we will, of course, take appropriate action.

Communication with Bangladesh, says Dr C. V. Agarwal, Presidential Representative, has become less dependable. Mr B. L. Bhattacharyya visited all the 5 Lodges and the Study Centre, and gave talks both for the public and for members. Several meetings were held in Dhaka. Comilla Lodge, founded in 1889, has paid dues up to 2010 and has 42 members. The large Lodge building, which is more than one hundred years old, is being renovated, and the library is kept open once a week.

Efforts are being made to step up activities in Chittagong, Kusum, and Besant Lodges, which have faced various natural disasters. Members in the area subscribe to 37 copies of *The Theosophist*. The Lodges which were in Seremban and Penang in neighbour-

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ing Malaysia have sent no report, and probably have no activities, but some members from there attended the School of the Wisdom in Adyar.

The Australian General Secretary reports on a number of activities, including the certification of two new groups. A few members are constantly assisting the General Secretary in her work, which cannot be enlarged upon in a short summary. In August 2007 there were 1,328 members, an increase of 41 over the previous year. The Section spends at least three times the amount that all the members pay, and all new members receive a copy of the Section's guidelines, which contain a brief account of the nature of Theosophical work, and the responsibility of each member in connection with it.

The General Secretary visited many of the centres of work in the Section. Complimentary copies of Olcott's work were sent to the members, while two of his books, *The Buddhist Catechism* and *Reminiscences*, were featured at the annual Convention in January and on other occasions. Selected books were sold to the members at subsidized prices. Philip Harris, who was mainly responsible for bringing out the *Theosophical Encyclopaedia* and other valuable publications, passed away during the year. The Lodges are being constantly stimulated in one way or another, particularly by Mrs Dara Tatray, Mr Pedro Oliveira, and Mr Brian Parry.

In New Zealand the School of Theosophy was held for ten days at the Tauhara

Centre, with Dr Ravi Ravindra exploring the Aphorisms of Patañjali. Several Branches have started or continued to teach yoga and meditation. Much effort has gone into seeing that Branches become more independent, but the General Secretary says that there is little opportunity through the studies in the Lodges to gain a depth of understanding in Theosophy. The format of *Theosophy in New Zealand* has been changed, and the General Secretary thinks that the new format helps to convey the message of Theosophy to the public. Membership this year has decreased by eleven, however, and gone down to 982. Among those who passed away during the year were Mrs Rose Pollard and Mr Gavin Laurie.

The American Section has much support from the Kern Foundation and the Sellon Charitable Trust, and feels greatly indebted to the founders, Mr Herbert Kern and Mr John Sellon, who gave much care to the Section's investments and activities.

The 121st National Gathering coincided with Olcott's death centenary and an international TOS Conference, making this occasion a special one. The theme, 'Foundations of Theosophy: Study, Service, and Sangha', reflected Olcott's vision for the Society's contribution to the world. The Department of Education continues to develop its services and we are told that e-learning is growing in popularity. Many new books, articles, etc., have been made available. Similarly, the sales performance has increased. Membership has gone up to 4,072 because of increased activities in the centre and various regions. Three

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groups have been certified officially as Study Centres, the total strength consisting of 47 Branches and 64 official Study Centres. Theosophical groups studied various courses by Dr John Algeo and others. The Library and Archives expanded their outreach in various ways, and the list of publications translated into other languages is quite impressive.

The English General Secretary, Mr Colin Price, reports that England has 37 Lodges, of which the largest and most active are in Bristol and Camberley. Two Branches, including Blavatsky Lodge, functioned from Headquarters. Many of them have focused on Eric McGough's study courses, and he has travelled around the country in order to help them. Lodges and Centres are clustered in three Federations, each having its own special quality and characteristic. The bulk of the public events held at Headquarters was arranged by the Foundation for Theosophical Studies, the Section's educational charity. Sometimes about seventy per cent of the members in a locality attended the programmes organized by this body. The Foundation held meetings in some places in addition to the summer school in Leicester. Mr McGough was appointed to be in charge of the scheme for national lecturers. The three national officers and the Executive Committee have worked unstintingly, we are told, and the growth in membership was maintained, bringing the total to 998 at the end of September.

In Wales, Cardiff Lodge has seen an increase in activities, with better attendance at lectures. Talks and workshops have

been given on a wide range of subjects. In Bangor, Conwy, and Swansea the new Lodges cannot afford many experienced speakers, but the English Section has been helping them. All the members in the new Lodges study Eric McGough's courses on Theosophy. An increasing number of new Welsh members attend the English summer school and find it inspiring and productive.

Miss Mary Anderson was the guest speaker at the second All-Ireland Convention held in Dublin and her talk produced much interest. Belfast Lodge had regular weekly meetings, including a special display of pictures about the President-Founder and a talk by the Organizing Secretary, Mrs Marie Harkness, emphasizing his vast and unstinting service to Theosophy and Buddhism. We are told that many members appreciate the bimonthly Study Notes and accompanying letter by Mrs Harkness. The study groups in Coleraine and Dublin are meeting regularly and flourishing, and a new study group is beginning in Newry.

The European Federation held its triennial conference in Finland in the outskirts of Helsinki from 14 to 18 July, along with the celebration of the centenary of the Finnish Section. The theme was 'Compassion — Basis for Peace and Understanding'. The guests of honour were the Ven. Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche and the President of the TS, Mrs Radha Burnier. The number of participants was encouragingly high, with 250 attending the Conference and another 130 non-Finns

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also participating. Col. Olcott's memory was cherished by many Lodges which celebrated his death centenary, and as in other countries, one issue of *Teosofi*, the Section's magazine, was dedicated to HSO. The Chairman of the Federation and workers of the Lodges met this year in September to discuss 'Challenges of the Century — From Ideas to Actions'. The Finnish Section has, as we know, close contact with two Lodges in Estonia, which are also active, arranging public lectures in a few places in the country. A jubilee book entitled *TS in Finland — 100 Years*, as also other publications, were brought out. The membership is 458.

In Sweden, work goes on and open discussion of the fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy takes place in Stockholm, where public lectures are also featured. Study went on during the year, but a Convention was not held, as members were encouraged to go to Finland, says Pertti Spets, the General Secretary.

In Iceland, at the headquarters, several meetings take place every week, with an attendance of 40-60 people. Tea or coffee is served to those who come, which encourages them in this cold country. Although most of the lecturers are members of the TS, they also invite others — scholars, writers, artists, etc. — all making some contribution to Theosophical thinking. Meditations are held regularly from October to May. Various books were published by the Section and made available and the book service has selections for sale. The General Secretary attended the Congress and

Convention in Finland. There are seven Lodges in Reikjavik, the capital, and two outside.

In Norway we have two new members, one in Oslo and another in Bergen, which does not seem like a lot, but is in fact a cause for satisfaction, as the Section had collapsed to just a few members. The library has been stored in a safe place, and they hope that fairly soon it will be open to members. Mrs Agnes Gaasemyr, Organizing Secretary, is writing monthly to members.

As mentioned in previous years, the biggest Section in Europe is the Italian, with a membership of 1,103. One of the many ways in which it has been active is by making available online a list of library books. A website of the Section, totally devoted to its own publications, has been created so that one can order books directly. The circulation of their magazine totals 1,300 copies, of which more than eleven hundred go to members. Italian collaboration with the European Federation at Pescia brought about 60 members together in a seminar, while at a meeting near Venice there were about 90 participants. We are informed that a lecture by Prof. P. Krishna at Perugia University, in collaboration with the Chair of Pedagogy, aroused great interest. The Italian Section has been interested for some time in helping the Eastern countries, the Olcott School at Adyar, educational activities in Pakistan, etc.

Among the books studied by the Spanish Lodges were *The Secret Doctrine*, *Self-Realization* by I. K. Taimni, the

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three Theosophical classics, and other works. The Iberian Gathering took place near Madrid, with 75 people taking part, including 14 Portuguese members. Another gathering was the summer school of the Section, with the theme 'Unity in Diversity', which attracted about 135 people. H. S. Olcott's death centenary was honoured in a variety of ways — by the journal *Sophia* presenting a monograph on his life, by various books published on their website, by lectures during the summer school, etc.

We are told that in Portugal Lodges are working with enthusiasm and commitment, and studying various Theosophical books. The year saw the passing of one of the early members of the Society in this country: Mrs Maria Beatriz Serpa Branco, who attended all of J. Krishnamurti's talks in Europe and devoted her life to Theosophy. All the Theosophical festivities were celebrated, but special emphasis was given to the work of H. S. Olcott.

The French-speaking Branches are active except for Brazzaville in Africa, which was dissolved because of lack of members. The theme of the Convention was a homage to Olcott, and the subject was 'Devotion and Perseverance on the Spiritual Path'. *Le Lotus Bleu* appeared regularly and has been sent to Belgium, Switzerland, Togo, and the Ivory Coast.

In Slovenia, where they have four Lodges and 71 members, they are expecting some additions of people who are seriously interested in the work. All the Lodges had regular weekly meetings and

were happy to welcome the Chairman of the European Federation, Miss Kim-Dieu. Their winter school at Soncek was wholly dedicated to Olcott and a special meeting was held in Celje. The international Secretary, Miss Mary Anderson, gave inspiring public lectures and visited Croatia accompanied by some members. A commemorative issue of their magazine, *Theosophical Thought*, came out in an improved form. The visit of Mrs Radha Burnier in July was welcomed.

We are told by the Presidential Representative in Hungary, Mr Thomas Martinovich, that the two Lodges have been active, and a public lecture was arranged every month with 25-50 participants. Some 'open meetings' were held monthly to meet new interested people who have questions to ask. Mr Szabari helped with the publications, which included Powell's *The Astral Body* and a booklet about the hundred-year old TS in Hungary. The international President visited them and they had a public meeting in Budapest and again in Debrecen. The President answered questions put to her during her stay. The TS in Hungary publishes a periodical which helps to disseminate Theosophy.

Lodge programmes continued in Austria, and they tried to deal with 'burning' questions within the framework of Theosophy. The Swiss group is led by the Presidential Agent, Mrs Eliane Gaillard, assisted by Pierre Berner, Raynald Fovini, and eighteen other members. This is a great success according to Miss Gaillard. As in other years, Miss Kim-Dieu

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conducted a seminar in Geneva and Miss Heidi Burch continues the meetings in the German-speaking areas. Two-thousand francs are given every year to the European Federation for the benefit of people in Eastern Europe. Four new members have been welcomed into the national organization this year, which has given a fillip to the work.

The number of members in Belgium is 97, three more than last year. There are three Lodges in Brussels and five in provincial towns. The Section lost Mrs Ariane Hespel, President of the Lodge in Charleroi. Other Lodges are continuing as well as possible. They are trying to sell the house in Brussels, but cannot do so because of an old tenant, who has opposed every move to renovate the building. They hope to obtain a building licence, and to construct a new place elsewhere, which will hopefully begin next autumn.

In the Netherlands they deeply regret the passing of Johan van der Poll and also of Mr Paul Zwollo, who was a member of the General Council and active in the international field. They are also sorry that their membership has been decreasing. In addition, they have a financial shortcoming. To remedy this, they have appealed to members for donations. At the same time, their Library has an increased membership and people coming for research are growing in numbers, as the Librarian has good contacts with universities and high schools. The Bookshop has been taken over by O & O, a group linked to the Adyar TS.

The East and Central African Section

had as the highlight of the year a guest speaker from India, Mr H. K. Sharan, who toured and made an impact on all the regions of the Section. Bro. Navin B. Shah, who succeeded as General Secretary, has to deal with the decreasing membership of the Section, with only 230 members in four countries, which is a big drop from what used to exist when many Indians who are now abroad were members in East Africa. The Section bookstall, housed in Nairobi, has a rich collection of titles, including books in Gujarati and the Section magazine. The members in Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia have to send their dues directly to Adyar. They are looking at ways of renewing inactive Lodges and generally revamping the Section. Three centenaries — commemorating Olcott, the international TOS, and Nairobi Lodge — are being observed.

The West African Section has study centres in four countries, namely Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Liberia. The membership has dropped from 251 in 2006 to 240 in 2007. Among those who died during the year were Mr R. K. Ahedor, President of the Lodge in Denu, Ghana; and Mr Godfrey Olubi, Regional Secretary in Nigeria and President of Lagos Lodge. We are told that an average of ten enquirers per week in the headquarters office in Accra, Ghana, is normal. The Section arranges every possible programme to attract people to Theosophical ideals.

The General Secretary of the South African Section, Mrs Susan Kaschula,

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has visited and lectured at all the Lodges and is in regular contact with all of them. They are trying to prevent Durban Lodge from closing down. It seems as if this effort will pay off and that there is a growing interest in Theosophy. The situation of Pretoria Lodge has improved as the surrounding building development has been completed. They plan to have the biennial Convention in Cape Town and attract people there. It was a joy to the members to find that eighteen people had joined the new Centre in Germiston. It is more difficult to visit the other two centres because of the distance.

The TS in Colombia has only the minimum number of Lodges to be called a Section. It is active in Bogotá, but its existence is precarious elsewhere. A number of courses and public lectures are being held and young Theosophists' and children's activities are being encouraged. The *Selección Teosófica* is received by about 80 persons. Dr Isaac Jauli has been lecturing there and in other places in South and Central America. There are two Lodges in Venezuela as well as a study group on the island of Margarita. A basic course in Theosophy goes on in Blavatsky Lodge, and although they are a small group, they are carrying on. In Peru, some changes have been made with the hope that the membership will increase. Dr Jauli also visited them and tried to help to improve the situation. They are photocopying articles and sending them to their 25 members. The TOS has been active in carrying out charities.

In Bolivia they have had three national gatherings with different subjects and a certain number of joint meetings. Their studies and programmes have continued as usual. In Chile they report an increase in the number of new members, most of them young. The Branches are said to be very active and articles taken from Theosophical journals are brought out in Spanish. In Uruguay *The Secret Doctrine* and various works by I. K. Taimni and Krishnamurti have been studied during the year. Col. Olcott's death centenary was commemorated. The Section received the visit of Mr Isaac Jauli.

In Argentina, young people are given an opportunity to contact Theosophy and practise yoga, meditation, etc. In May, Prof. P. Krishna gave public lectures attended by up to 300 mostly young people. In the San Rafael Centre, he gave talks on 'Education, Science, and Spirituality' with about 90 persons participating. In the same Centre, a training workshop took place. Two books were published especially to honour Olcott's memory, and the national magazine dedicated three issues to his work and speeches. There are fifteen Lodges and a publishing house whose works are widely distributed.

The General Secretary of the Brazilian Section reports a small increase of membership as well as an increase in the work of dissemination, which spreads Theosophy through 62 television channels to 49 cities. The 25th summer school of the Brazilian Section was held in Salvador, Bahia, and focused on the

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Portuguese version of articles by the international President, published under a single title, *Learning to Live Theosophy*. Mr Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, gave lectures which were published in Portuguese. The Brazilian TPH is publishing a translation of Col. Olcott's *The Buddhist Catechism*. The membership stands at 807, and is the biggest in South America.

In Central America, Costa Rica had varied activities and a new Centre was started outside the capital, situated beautifully in the middle of a forest and next to a stream. They had lecturers from other countries who included Mr Jauli and also Mrs Maria Parisen and Mrs Nelda Samarel from Krotona. The writings of well-known Theosophists were studied.

In Cuba the theme of the annual Convention was 'The Occult Hierarchy, HSO, and the TS'. Olcott's inaugural address and excerpts of his last article to Theosophists were made available to all attendees. The Section's main library has been reorganized, and the hours changed to suit the public. There are programmes every Sunday and non-members are welcomed.

The Mexican Section had four Theosophical meetings with speakers from other Sections, namely Mr Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, from the Philippines, Mrs Ali Ritsema from Holland, Mrs Nelda Samarel from the US, and Mrs Isis Resende from Brazil. Some members participated in the first Central American Convention which took place in San Salvador. The TS in Puerto Rico consists of three Lodges and two study groups,

all of which were well-attended and 24 new members joined. A new study group was formed in Río Piedras. They also created a web page. The Presidential Representative in the Dominican Republic, along with Mrs L. Howell and Maria Orlich from Costa Rica, conducted a study programme in a mountain location. The enthusiasm was great and it was decided to have similar workshops again. One of the Lodges showed a series of scientific and spiritual films, which attracted much attention. The Presidential Representative generally created vitality and enthusiasm.

In Indonesia several books have been translated by Mrs L. Michelle, who also prepared a website for the Section. Their Convention was held at Sala Lodge in Surakarta, the subject being 'Study, Meditation, Service'. The new Lodges were each supplied with fifteen titles in Indonesian. On White Lotus Day, pamphlets were distributed along with a manual of computer slides. The Philippines Section hosted the Indo-Pacific Conference early in November, with about 160 delegates attending. The theme was 'Live to Benefit Humanity'. After more than fifteen years of preparation, *The Theosophical Encyclopedia* was finally published by the Publishing House in Manila. Two new study groups have been formed and the TOS is active.

Singapore Lodge continues to focus on courses in Theosophy; not all the participants remain as members, but they get a feel of Theosophy. Two meditation courses were conducted

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and informal meetings were held to answer the questions of students. Mr Matius Ali, from the Indonesian Section, visited the Lodge and gave a talk.

Lotus Lodge in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, is made up of members from different places, some of whom travel a long distance in order to reach Zagreb, and therefore meetings are not held often. The Lodge was constituted in Krizevci in October 2007. The largest study group numbers seven and meets in Zagreb. Miss Kim-Dieu and Miss Mary Anderson, accompanied by Mr Dusan and Mrs Breda Zagar, were among the visitors to the Lodge. Other groups meet and study Theosophy. Mr Milan Loncar is making great efforts to translate Theosophical literature and has so far succeeded in publishing Mr S. S. Varma's booklet on *Yama and Niyama* as given in the Yoga Sutra-s. Some of the members participated in the summer school in Slovenia, near Koper.

The Lodge in the Ivory Coast consists mostly of young people who have concentrated on studying *The Key to Theosophy*. Their discussions usually turn on the internal state of peace which makes it possible to be peaceful externally. We have received reports also from Ankh Lodge in the Ukraine and Nippon Lodge in Japan, which are important, as they help to bring Theosophy to countries where otherwise we would have no contacts.

The Indo-Pacific Federation mentions Col. Olcott's activities, which have been publicized throughout the countries in the area. New information leaflets, and so

forth, have been issued. The Pan-African Federation continues to be involved in the activities of the countries in the African continent. The Inter-American Federation held the first Central American Convention in San Salvador, where Mrs Ali Ritsema was the guest speaker. The Federation organized the visit of several people to various places in the Federation, particularly that of Mr Isaac Jauli, who was able to travel to many places to create interest. The President of the Federation has encouraged and organized many of the programmes. The European Federation dedicated the whole year to the memory of our President-Founder, and it was very happy to have both the international President and Ven. Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche as guests of honour at its Congress in Helsinki.

Activities in Adyar are going on well. The Olcott Education Society carries on its work with a good deal of success. The Olcott Memorial High School has about 640 students. The children are engaged in extra-curricular activities like gardening, crafts, and gymnastics, in addition to the educational activities, which are going on well. The HPB Hostel is a kind of additional unit of the School, and has a total of 24 boys. The Social Welfare Centre reopened in June 2007 with about 100 children. They learned alphabets, numbers, songs, and so on. It tries to prepare them for higher education partly by hygienic habits which the mothers have to learn. The Animal Welfare Department treated about 11,000 animals, and did a few animal birth control

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operations and other major operations.

The Adyar Library and Research Centre is happy to welcome Prof. C. A. Shinde as Librarian to replace Mrs Gopalaratnam, her age no longer permitting her to serve as Librarian. This year the Library brought out a special journal, the *Colonel Henry Steel Olcott Death Centenary Commemoration* volume. Mr R. Lakshmanan was a dedicated staff member who passed away after 46 years of service. All the work of the Library — the acquisition and cataloguing, preservation, etc. — is going on satisfactorily.

After many decades, an Indian reprint of the classic *Isis Unveiled* was brought out in two volumes by the Theosophical Publishing House. The book is being received well. A revised edition of *Reminiscences of Colonel H. S. Olcott* by various writers was also published during the year to commemorate the centenary of Col. Olcott's passing. Many of the reprints were brought out with attractive new covers or jackets. Future plans include publishing a book of 'On the Watch-Tower' articles by Mrs Radha Burnier appearing in *The Theosophist* from 1980 to 2006, with the title *The World around Us*.

The Archives and Museum received many requests, and the card system makes it possible to have quick access. This year's Archives Exhibition, as you know, explores Annie Besant's life. A lot of work has to be done in the department, but at present we do not have the staff to do it.

The year 2007 is a special one for our Besant Scout Centre also, for the scouting movement completed 100 years of its existence. About 20 scout groups and 2,300 children used the place for their camping activities, remembering Dr Annie Besant's role in creating the movement in India.

The Theosophical Order of Service did a lot of work during the tsunami and its aftermath, and that work continues. The highlight of TOS activities this year was an international conference held at Wheaton, Illinois, and it mainly tried to develop an international perspective. Progress was made to expand the team of volunteers to support grass-root workers. The work of Mrs Jean Gallo, who has retired after serving as President of the TOS in the USA for more than forty years, is acknowledged with gratitude.

I was not able to travel much, but visited a few places in Europe in July. First, I was able to visit Slovenia, where I gave a series of talks in the morning, and my companion, Mr G. Gautama, gave afternoon talks on the subject of education. From there I went to Hungary, where they were celebrating the centenary of the Section with the few people they have. This included all the members in Budapest and those in Debrecen. My main object in going to Europe was to attend the triennial Congress of the European Federation, held in Helsinki along with the centenary of the Finnish Section. From there, I went to our international centre in Naarden and then to England before returning to Adyar.

Presidential Address

Some of the international Vice-President's varied activities included speaking at the summer schools of the American and German Sections and, on 17 February, at the Olcott death centennial anniversary in New York City. Dr John Algeo also gave the keynote address at a regional conference on social service, and speaks frequently in Atlanta and the American national headquarters in Wheaton, Illinois. His numerous articles are published widely in Theosophical magazines internationally. Miss Mary Anderson, the international Secretary, travelled to many places, including England, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Israel, Holland, Slovenia, Croatia, and Ireland, where she either had discussions with members or gave lectures and seminars to members as well as public lectures. All this helped to keep up the momentum in Europe. In India she travelled to Juhu (near Mumbai) and Bhavnagar, where she gave lectures at the Gujarat Federation Convention. She also lectured for the Madras Federation.

The School of the Wisdom held two sessions this year as usual. The first was on 'New Insights into the Yoga Sutra-s' with Dr Ravi Ravindra in January and February. The second comprised three two-week sessions in November and December on 'Fundamental Theosophical

Principles' with the Secretary of the School, Mrs Dolores Gago, 'Basic Theosophy and the Future of Man' with Prof. C. A. Shinde, and 'Ancient Wisdom and Modern Insight' with Prof. R. C. Tampi.

We have an insufficient number of workers at Adyar. However, during the year, Mr M. Dharmalingam, who is an experienced engineer, joined the small staff in the Maintenance Department and has done a great deal of work to improve buildings and other facilities. Recently, Mr Shailendra Agrawal has kindly undertaken the work of supervising the Garden Department. The spruceness of the whole estate is largely due to the interest he has taken. Mr J. Suresh, who was the Garden Superintendent, has been transferred to the Security Department.

I might say on this occasion that all is well at Adyar and with the Society as a whole. It would be nice, though, to have a greater presence in many centres where we have a small membership. But in spite of the small numbers, they are noticeably successful in keeping the ideals of the Society before the public. I take this opportunity to convey my best wishes to the members here and to those who could not attend the Convention.

I declare this 132nd Convention open.

RADHA BURNIER

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.

Annie Besant, *The Laws of the Higher Life*

From Within Outwards: The Way of the Universe

(Convention Lecture, Adyar, 27 December 2007)

JOHN ALGEO

THE theme of this convention is taken from *Light on the Path*, where these words are written: ‘To hear the Voice of the Silence is to understand that from within comes the only true guidance.’ That statement is echoed in *The Secret Doctrine* (1:274): ‘The Universe is worked and guided from *within outwards*.’

These two statements are intimately connected; they say the same thing on two different levels. The first makes a general statement, a truth about the universe as a whole. The second makes an applied statement, a directive about our individual practice. The two statements are about the macrocosm and the microcosm, the universe and our own consciousness. *The Secret Doctrine* continues by pointing out this correspondence:

As above so it is below, as in heaven so on earth; and man — the microcosm and miniature copy of the macrocosm — is the living witness to this Universal Law and to the mode of its action.

So, according to *The Secret Doctrine*, each of us is a ‘living witness’ to the truth

of inner guidance. But every candle casts a shadow, and every great truth can be misunderstood and misapplied. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, after revealing the ultimate truth of life to Arjuna, adds these words of caution: ‘You must never pass on what I have told you to anyone who lacks self-control and dedication, or who will not listen, or who speaks evil.’ (paraphrased from 18.67)

We need to understand the general truth correctly and apply it to ourselves carefully.

The general truth: ‘The Universe is worked and guided from *within outwards*’

Annie Besant said Theosophy is like a body of water with shallow pools in which a child may safely wade and depths in which even a giant must swim. A single Theosophical concept can be understood both simply, as shallows for wading, or complexly, as a depth for swimming.

We can begin in the shallows, with scripture and folk wisdom. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7.16), Christ says,

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‘Ye shall know them by their fruits’. And he goes on to ask rhetorically: ‘Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?’ Thorn plants produce prickly spines, not grapes; and thistle plants produce spiky flowers, not figs. An old folk proverb says, Great oaks from little acorns grow. Oak trees are no more like acorns in appearance than grapes are like thorn bushes, or figs like thistles. But the inner nature of an acorn has an oak tree potentially within it. And so the oak works from within the acorn outwards to become a great tree. It is the dharma of an acorn to become an oak. Thorns have no grape nature in them, nor do thistles have any fig nature. That is simple enough, is it not? It is a shallow pool in which a child may safely wade.

But the truth of dharma has profound depths. According to Monier-Williams’s *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, ‘dharma’ can mean many things, including ‘nature, character, peculiar condition or essential quality’. It is a word with depths in which even a giant must swim.

The great general truth ‘The Universe is worked and *guided* from *within outwards*’ is talking about dharma. The Universe has a dharma, and so do all in it — including you and me. ‘Dharma’ as our ‘nature, character, peculiar condition or essential quality’ means both what we really are in the core of our being and what we should do or become during our lives.

In the West, it is usual to suppose that every human being is the product of just two forces: nature and nurture, that is, genetic inheritance and social environ-

ment. And those are two very important factors, but they are not the only factors that define us.

For example, environment is more than the society and culture in which we grow up. The physical environment and psychic environment of the land in which we live are also very important factors. To grow up on the coast of the Bay of Bengal in Tamil Nadu is quite different from growing up in a Himalayan valley of Tibet. To grow up in a world imbued with the spirit of King Arthur of Celtic England is quite different from growing up in a world imbued with the spirit of the Sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami and the forty-nine Ronin, or lordless knights, of Japan.

Likewise, inheritance is more than the genes we get from our parents. It includes *skandha-s* and dharma. Our *skandha-s* are the karmic fruits of our actions in former incarnations that mould our present forms, feelings, perceptions, predispositions, and consciousness. They are forces from the past that push us from behind. But there is also a force from the future, our vocation or calling that pulls us ahead — our dharma. Just as the oak’s dharma pulls a tree out of an acorn, so also within each of us there is a dharma pulling a perfect human out of the imperfect semi-human we still are. It is our dharma to become fully human.

The great general truth ‘The Universe is worked and *guided* from *within outwards*’ is a statement of the fact that everything in the universe has a dharma working within it and guiding its

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development towards a final outward realization of its dharmic goal. The future is ours. It needs only that we realize it. This is a great depth indeed.

Mme Blavatsky also points out that the universe 'is guided, controlled, and animated by almost endless series of hierarchies of sentient beings' (*SD* 1:274). That statement is applicable to a controversy currently raging in parts of the Western world, where, ever since the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, two worldviews have contended for dominance. The older of those two is Christian theism, which imagines the universe as having been created from the outside by a transcendent personal God. The newer is scientific materialism, which dismisses all talk of creation and God as irrelevant and maintains that the universe just happened, without intention or plan. These two worldviews are clearly at loggerheads; neither has room for the other. But there is a third, more ancient, worldview — that of the Ancient Wisdom, the Perennial Philosophy, the *Prisca Theologia*, the *Sanātana Dharma*, or — as we call it — Theosophy.

Theosophy holds that the universe consists of matter endowed with consciousness acting energetically. It agrees with science that the hypothesis of an outside personal creator God is unnecessary and that there is nothing whatever of that sort *outside* the universe — but it also holds that there is a very great deal *inside* the universe that science has no techniques for recognizing. The divine is

inherent in the mundane, not apart from it. Theosophy agrees with religion that the universe is intelligent and purposeful, and is by no means limited to the matter that science can study.

Theosophy holds that order and purpose are inherent in the very nature of the universe — its dharma — and that universal order is mediated by conscious beings, including humans like us, but also by both pre-human and superhuman beings. The universe is inwardly alive. And its inward life works and guides its outward forms. The dharma of the universe is to develop from denser to subtler forms, from limited to expanded consciousness, and from fragmentation to unity of spiritual awareness. Theosophy's worldview is as grandly profound as the depths of the ocean, but as simple as the assurance that great oaks from little acorns grow.

The applied truth: 'From within comes the only true guidance'

A recognition of the dharma of the universe brings us to the other great truth, the applied truth, concerning how we can realize our own dharma, how we can 'understand that from within comes the only true guidance'. *Light on the Path* refers to the Voice of the Silence three times, finally connecting it with 'the only true guidance', which comes from within. In the first reference we are assured that, once we have experienced 'the peace', the Voice of the Silence will be always with us:

Once having passed through the storm and attained the peace, it is then always

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possible to learn, even though the disciple waver, hesitate, and turn aside. The Voice of the Silence remains within him, and though he leaves the Path utterly, yet one day it will resound, and rend him asunder and separate his passions from his divine possibilities.

This is the same promise of ultimate achievement that the following statement gives us. It says:

There is a road, steep and thorny, beset with perils of every kind, but yet a road, and it leads to the very heart of the Universe: I can tell you how to find those who will show you the secret gateway that opens inward only, and closes fast [that is, firmly] behind the neophyte for evermore.

Once we have ‘passed through the storm and attained the peace’, once we have passed through the secret gateway that opens in but not out and closes firmly behind us, there is no going back. We may linger along the way, but we have committed ourselves to a one-way trip. Eventually the Voice of the Silence will speak to us, and it speaks with a sound that cannot be ignored. The world in which we live seems often to be a confusing maze. But the Path is a monocursal labyrinth: it provides only one way to go, so as long as we continue walking, we will reach the goal.

The second reference in *Light on the Path* to the Voice of the Silence links it with the Hall of Learning:

Thou who art now a disciple, able to stand, able to hear, able to see, able to

speak, who hast conquered desire and attained to self-knowledge, who hast seen thy soul in its bloom and recognized it, and heard the Voice of the Silence — go thou to the Hall of Learning and read what is written there for thee.

The third and final reference is the one which has provided the theme of this Convention:

To hear the Voice of the Silence is to understand that from within comes the only true guidance; to go to the Hall of Learning is to enter the state in which learning becomes possible. Then will many words be written there for thee, and written in fiery letters for thee easily to read. For when the disciple is ready the Master is ready also.

Hearing the Voice of the Silence, learning fiery words of wisdom, and experiencing the ready presence of the Master — these are three metaphors talking about the same thing, which is being guided from within.

Because to ‘hear the Voice of the Silence is to understand that from within comes the only true guidance’, we must know what the Voice of the Silence is and how we can hear it. For that knowledge, the best source is undoubtedly that great spiritual guidebook, *The Voice of the Silence*. But before plunging into the very deep water of that magnificent book, let us dabble our feet in a shallow pool.

Most people would like to have some knowledgeable person tell them what is right and what they should do. They want simple answers to complex problems. Religious fundamentalists believe that

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what scripture says is absolutely right and absolutely clear. But it is neither. Many aspirants want a guru to tell them exactly what they can do to attain *moksha* — ten easy steps to enlightenment. But there are no such set steps, so no guru can give them. People do not want complications or options. They just want to know what is right, always with the assumption that there is a single right way. But life is complex, and rightness is relative. That is the muddy shallows.

Now let us dip into the depths of *The Voice of the Silence*. That book talks a good deal about the guru, teacher, or master. And often it seems to be referring to some authority outside of oneself — a wise person, an embodiment of the archetype of the Wise Old Man. To be sure, all of us have had teachers who have pointed the way for us to follow. And, whether we know it or not, all of us have also served as teachers for others. However, the master we are searching for, the master whose voice is the Voice of the Silence, is not someone outside of ourselves; as *The Voice* says: ‘Of teachers there are many; the MASTER-SOUL is one, Ālaya, the Universal Soul. Live in that MASTER as ITS ray in thee.’ (verse 221)

The true master, the great master, is not any other human being, or even any superhuman being. A gloss to verse 14 of *The Voice* makes that quite clear. It reads: ‘The “great Master” is the term used by *lanoos* or *chelas* to indicate one’s “Higher Self”.’

And the last verse of the first fragment is fully explicit:

Behold! thou hast become the light, thou hast become the Sound, thou art thy Master and thy God. Thou art Thyself the object of thy search: the VOICE unbroken, that resounds throughout eternities, . . . (verse 99).

Therefore, as *Light on the Path* says: ‘To hear the Voice of the Silence is to understand that from within comes the only true guidance.’

However, now let us return to the caution Śri Kṛṣṇa gave to Arjuna: We must be very careful to understand these fiery wise words, for all words — even wise words — are capable of being misunderstood. Remember, the first qualification for the Path is *viveka*, discrimination, an ability to distinguish the true from the false. Words may be true, but our understanding of them may still be false. How do we recognize the Voice of the Silence? It would be nice to have a clear, easy, and reliable test for that recognition. But nothing in life is clear, easy, and reliable.

Within us are many voices. Jungian psychology talks about an archetype of the persona. ‘Persona’ is a Latin word (from which English gets the word ‘person’). That Latin word means primarily a ‘mask’, such as actors wore in the Greek and Roman theatres; hence it means also a ‘role’ that actors played in a drama, or a role that anyone plays in life, and thus a ‘personality’. Each of us has, not just one, but many personas or masks. We are different persons as we interact with our children or our parents, with our friends or with strangers, with those we

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trust or those we distrust, with our supervisors and our subordinates, and so on. We also have several different personas or masks that we present to ourselves — we think of ourselves in various ways.

Each of the many personas within us has a voice. And those voices chatter to us as soon as we fall into a role pertaining to a particular personal mask. None of those, however, are the Voice of the Silence. The Voice of the Silence comes from a much deeper place within. It comes from what Mme Blavatsky has called our own special archetype, our individuality, the *mānasaputra* or ‘child of Wisdom’, within us. And that source of the Voice of the Silence is our one true Master.

How do we recognize that Voice? If we have to ask, we have not heard it. It is unmistakable, like the Voice of the Thunder in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, which T. S. Eliot refers to in the last part of his poem *The Waste Land*. The Upanishadic story goes like this:

The divine father, Prajāpati, had three sorts of children: the gods, humans, and demons. When they had all completed their studies with their father, they each came to him to receive the special instruction appropriate for them.

First, the gods came and said, ‘Tell us what we need to know.’ Prajāpati thundered the syllable *DA!* And he asked, ‘Have you understood?’ The gods answered, ‘We have understood that you said to us *Damyata*’, which means ‘Control yourself’, the gods being naturally unruly and self-indulgent.

Then the humans came to him and said,

‘Tell us what we need to know.’ Prajāpati thundered the syllable *DA!* And he asked, ‘Have you understood?’ The humans answered, ‘We have understood that you said to us *Datta*’, which means ‘Give’, humans being naturally selfish and avaricious.

Last the demons came to him and said, ‘Tell us what we need to know.’ Prajāpati thundered the syllable *DA!* And he asked, ‘Have you understood?’ The demons answered, ‘We have understood that you said to us *Dayadhvam*’, which means ‘Be compassionate’, the demons being naturally cruel and insensitive.

The heavenly Voice of the Thunder repeats to all: *DA! DA! DA!* Control yourselves, give, be compassionate.

When we hear the Voice of the Silence, it is like that thunder clap, unmistakable and irresistible, and it tells us what we need to know. What it tells us is so self-evident that we cannot doubt it or be uncertain about it. No one can give us a list of criteria by which to recognize it. But no such list is needed to know the Voice of the Thundering Silence. It is overpowering.

Every great book is unique, yet all great books are alike. All great texts have the same basic message for us, but every great text says that message in its own unique way. The great texts we have been considering have one basic message encompassing two great truths:

The Universe is worked and *guided* from *within outwards*.

To hear the Voice of the Silence is to understand that from within comes the only true guidance. ✧

Foundation Day

A. P. SHAH

I AM happy to be with all of you on the occasion of the Theosophical Society's celebration of the 132nd anniversary of its Foundation Day. This is also a significant year for the Society, as it marks the hundredth death anniversary of its Founder-President, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott.

In his address, while inaugurating the newly founded organization on 17 November 1875, Col. Olcott said:

If I understand the spirit of this Society, it consecrates itself to the intrepid and conscientious study of truth. . . . We are . . . simply investigators, of earnest purpose and unbiassed mind, who study all things, prove all things and hold fast to that, which is good. . . . We seek, inquire, reject nothing without cause, accept nothing without proof: we are students, not teachers.

Col. Olcott called the Theosophical Society a 'non-committal society of investigation', and successive Presidents have emphasized and re-emphasized the ideal of freedom of thought upholding the distinguishing characteristic of the Society — the right of every member to

pursue his own investigations, to reach his own views, to enjoy full freedom of thought on whatever subject may be of personal interest in the search for truth.

Col. Olcott led an extraordinary life and dedicated the final three decades of his life to compassionately helping humanity. Mrs Radha Burnier described Col. Olcott as a person who stood head and shoulders above most people. He made his mark in many fields, because wherever he lived and worked, he manifested the qualities of heart and mind which made him worthy to be called 'a superior man', a term that Confucius used. We, in India, owe gratitude to this man for the compassion he showered on our poor and underprivileged and the change he brought about in their lives.

One of the main objectives of the Theosophical Society is to promote universal brotherhood and harmony among the various religious traditions in the world. In Col. Olcott's last message, signed by him on 2 February 1907, he reiterated that 'There is no Religion Higher than Truth', and that in the brotherhood of religions lies the peace and progress of humanity.

Hon. Justice Mr A. P. Shah is Chief Justice of the Madras High Court. This article is based on the Foundation Day Address delivered on 17 November 2007 at Adyar.

Foundation Day

There are many definitions of religion, and most have struggled to avoid an overly short definition on the one hand, and a meaningless general one on the other. Lucretius, the first-century BC Latin poet and philosopher said:

Religion does not consist in turning unceasingly towards the veiled stone, nor in approaching all the altars, nor in throwing oneself prostrate on the ground, nor in raising the hands before the habitations of gods, nor in deluging the temples with the blood of beasts, nor in heaping vows upon vows; but in beholding all with a peaceful soul.

Swami Vivekananda said:

Religion is realization, not talk, not doctrine, not theories, however beautiful they may be; it is being and becoming, not hearing and acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes, that is, religion.

Each major religious tradition has tried to show the path of the ultimate Truth, answering the question about the purpose of man's existence. Religion, in a sense, is that vehicle or medium which facilitates realization of the ultimate Truth — the ability to see things in their true nature, without any distortion. Therefore, religion should provide tranquillity and peace rather than terror.

Charles Kimball, in his book *When Religion becomes Evil*, says:

Religion is arguably the most powerful and pervasive force on earth. Throughout history, religious ideas and commitments

have inspired individuals and communities of faith to transcend narrow self-interest to pursuit of higher values and truths. The record of history shows that noble acts of love, self-sacrifice, and service to others are frequently rooted in deeply held religious worldviews. At the same time, history clearly shows that religion has often been linked directly to the worst examples of human behaviour. It is somewhat trite, but nevertheless sadly true, to say that more wars have been waged, more people killed, and these days more evil perpetrated in the name of religion than by any other institutional force in human history.

In the early literature of the Theosophical Society, reference is made to the evil that has arisen out of the imaginings and illusions of man, which go by the name of religion:

The chief cause of nearly two-thirds of the evils that pursue humanity . . . is religion under whatever form and in whatsoever nation. It is the sacerdotal caste, the priesthood, and the churches; it is in those illusions that man looks upon as sacred, that he has to search out the source of that multitude of evils which is the great curse of humanity and that almost overwhelms mankind. Ignorance created God and cunning took advantage of the opportunity. It is priestly imposture that rendered these gods so terrible to man; it is religion that makes of him the selfish bigot, the fanatic that hates all mankind out of his own sect without rendering him any better or more moral for it. It is belief in God and gods that

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makes two-thirds of humanity the slaves of a handful of those who deceive them under the false pretence of saving them. Is not man ever ready to commit any kind of evil if told that his god or gods demand the crime . . . ? For two thousand years India groaned under the weight of caste, Brāhmins alone feeding on the fat of the land, and today the followers of Christ and those of Muhammad are cutting each other's throats in the name of and for the greater glory of their respective myths. Remember, the sum of human misery will never be diminished until the day when the better portion of humanity destroys in the name of Truth, morality and universal charity, the altars of their false gods. (Mahatma Letter No. 10)

There is no religious canon or creed that preaches violence, recommends hatred or attempts to cause disharmony among people. I do not know of any scriptures that preach violence; they preach love and compassion. Every student of religion agrees almost unanimously that all religions have a common base, and the evidence that emerges from the far past as also the recent present clearly shows the common links that bind together all religions, their doctrines, founders, and symbolism.

Dr Annie Besant said that 'All religions have one basis and that basis is the Divine Wisdom and not human ignorance; it is the knowledge given by the sages who are the spiritual guardians of mankind.' She adds:

Take the Classic of Purity from China, which, they say, came from far-off

Atlantis and ask if modern China can produce a gem of spiritual and philosophical thought fit to place side by side with it? Take the teachings of India, the glorious Upanishad-s, and say what modern writer can write with that sublimity, with that depth of philosophic thought, of the Supreme and Universal Self? Take the Gathas of Zoroastrianism, mangled and fragmentary as they are; can you read them without finding there a knowledge which no modern can match? Take the Book of the Dead of Egypt, and read its sublime utterances, its deep philosophy, its mystic yearnings, and say whether in your modern writings you will find such thought as that. Can the loftiest flights of morality in the literature of today be put beside the ethical teachings of the Lord Buddha, and does the world find in it the same inspiration to noble living that his words have exercised for more than two thousand years?

The evidence is overwhelming that every religion looks back to its Founder for its highest teachings. Can an archbishop of today rival the teachings of Christ? Can today's Muslim Moulvi rival the teachings of the Prophet? Can the Zoroastrian Mobed speak such words as are found in his own ancient literature? Where is the modern Brāhmana who can speak as Śri Kṛṣhna and Rāmachandra spoke, or give us the noble morality that we find in the ancient literature?

The proof is clear that Divine Wisdom underlies all religions.

Foundation Day

Dr T. S. Ramasamy, in *Your God My God — Journey of the Quivering Heart*, has attempted to find the essence of each religion bearing in mind certain principles. According to him, the most significant principles in the context of the modern world are:

1. Every scripture has two sides: one, temporary and perishable, belonging to the ideas of the people of the period and the country in which it is produced: and the other, eternal and imperishable, applicable to all ages and countries. No doctrine of religion is intelligible save in the context of the times. What is contextual and what is universal in the teachings of religions should be remembered.
2. . . . the diversity that exists among various religions is enormously enriching.
3. Let us be sure on one premise — that no single tradition monopolizes the truth and no religion is an island.
4. Identifying common characteristics among religions is not the same as saying all religions are the same. Clearly, they are not.
5. We must not forget that focusing on the underlying essence of the great traditions should not mean erasing the differences between them, or creating a homogenized philosophy. There are meaningful differences between the great faiths of mankind about the precise nature of God, the relationship between man and God, the nature of the soul, and what happens to us after death. These differences

in the doctrines, rituals, and histories give each tradition its own unique identity and are of great importance to believers in these faiths.

He concludes that the essence of every religion is compassion. He quotes Basaveśvara, a Śaiva saint: ‘Compassion is the essence of religion, is there any religion without compassion — tell me?’

Ven. Samdhong Rinpoche, in a recent lecture given in Helsinki for the TS in Finland, pointed out that our basic problem is the tendency of thinking about one’s religion as superior to others. Many a time, due to ignorance and utter arrogance, conflict is fuelled when believers from different faiths come into contact with each other, each thinking that he alone has the complete Truth, that there is something missing or wrong in all others, while their group represents the true ‘reality’ on earth. He suggested certain actions that could be taken to reverse current trends, concluding that ‘above all, there should be a solidarity among genuine religious practitioners in order to safeguard their faith and conviction’.

There is yet another very significant area where religion can play a major role, and that is to save humanity from the environmental crisis which the world is facing today. In the name of development and progress, we have destroyed the forests, eroded the top soil, changed the composition of the atmosphere, depleted the protective ozone layer, tampered with the climate, poisoned the air and the waters, and made the poorest people

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suffer most from the deteriorating environment. The world is facing today some grave challenges like global warming. Religion can play an important role in combating these issues.

In April 1988 an extraordinary gathering took place in Oxford. The leaders of the planet's religions met with scientists and legislators from many nations to try to deal with the rapidly worsening world environmental crisis. Representatives of nearly one hundred nations were present at the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders conference. Thereafter, in January 1990, at their Moscow conference, an appeal signed by a number of distinguished scientists was presented to the world's religious leaders. Excerpts of the said appeal follow:

The Earth is the birthplace of our species and, so far as we know, our only home. When our numbers were small and our technology feeble, we were powerless to influence the environment of our world. But today, suddenly, almost without anyone noticing, our numbers have become immense and our technology has achieved vast, even awesome, powers. Intentionally or inadvertently, we are now able to make devastating changes in the global environment — an environment to which we and all the other beings with whom we share the Earth are meticulously and exquisitely adapted.

We are now threatened by self-inflicted, swiftly moving environmental alterations about whose long-term biological and ecological consequences we are still painfully ignorant — depletion of the protect-

ive ozone layer; a global warming unprecedented in the last 150 millennia; the obliteration of an acre of forest every second; the rapid-fire extinction of species; and the prospect of a global nuclear war that would put at risk most of the population of the Earth. There may well be other such dangers of which, in our ignorance, we are still unaware. Individually and cumulatively they represent a trap being set for the human species, a trap we are setting for ourselves. However principled and lofty (or naïve and short-sighted) the justifications may have been for the activities that brought forth these dangers, separately and together they now imperil our species and many others. We are close to committing — many would argue we are already committing — what in religious language is sometimes called Crimes against Creation.

Problems of such magnitude, and solutions demanding so broad a perspective, must be recognized from the outset as having a religious as well as a scientific dimension. Mindful of our common responsibility, we scientists — many of us long engaged in combating the environmental crisis — urgently appeal to the world religious community to commit, in word and deed, and as boldly as is required, to preserve the environment of the Earth.

The environmental crisis requires radical changes not only in public policy, but also in individual behaviour. The historical record makes it clear that religious teaching, example, and leadership are powerfully able to influence personal conduct and commitment.

Foundation Day

The response of the religious leaders was overwhelmingly positive and signed by hundreds of spiritual leaders from 83 countries:

We are moved by the Appeal's spirit and challenged by its substance. We share its sense of urgency. This invitation to collaboration marks a unique moment and opportunity in the relationship of science and religion.

Many in the religious community have followed with growing alarm reports of threats to the well-being of our planet's environment such as those set forth in the Appeal. The scientific community has done humankind a great service by bringing forth evidence of these perils. We encourage continued scrupulous investigation and must take account of its results in all our deliberations and declarations regarding the human condition.

We believe the environmental crisis is

intrinsicly religious. All faith traditions and teachings firmly instruct us to revere and care for the natural world. Yet sacred creation is being violated and is in ultimate jeopardy as a result of long-standing human behaviour. A religious response is essential to reverse such long-standing patterns of neglect and exploitation.

For these reasons, we welcome the Scientists' Appeal and are eager to explore as soon as possible concrete, specific forms of collaboration and action. The Earth itself calls us to new levels of joint commitment.

The present world environment crisis is not yet a disaster, but, as in other crises, it has the potential to draw forth previously untapped and even unimagined powers of cooperation and commitment. Science and religion may differ about how the Earth was made, but they agree that its protection merits our profound attention and loving care. ✧

Evil has no existence *per se* and is but the absence of good and exists but for him who is made its victim. It proceeds from two causes, and no more than good is it an independent cause in Nature. Nature is destitute of goodness or malice; she follows only immutable laws when she either gives life and joy, or sends suffering [and] death, and destroys what she has created. Nature has an antidote for every poison and her laws a reward for every suffering. The butterfly devoured by a bird becomes that bird, and the little bird killed by an animal goes into a higher form. It is the blind law of necessity and the eternal fitness of things, and hence cannot be called Evil in Nature. The real evil proceeds from human intelligence, and its origin rests entirely with reasoning man who dissociates himself from Nature.

A Master of the Wisdom

Understanding, Sharing, Loving

PERTTI SPETS

WHEN we say that we understand another, what do we mean? Perhaps we mean that we understand how the other thinks and what he says. But how deeply do we understand? Most of our human problems arise through our relationship with our fellow beings, when we do not understand them. We may understand what the other person is saying, but not what he means, what his motives are, and why he says what he is saying. We may understand intellectually, but do we really understand *him*?

When we meet other people we know, we often already have a finished picture of them. We react and understand according to our earlier experiences and the picture we have formed. We carry the past with us and understand them through it. Our opinions and experiences influence our relationships and our understanding. But when we live in the present, and the past is not part of our vision, then we can really understand each other. The mind must be attentive, without prejudices and attitudes, without earlier pictures.

Intellectual understanding has deprived us of a comprehensive view of life, and thus a deeper understanding of other people. Real understanding of others

means understanding the whole person: not only what he is saying, but also his thoughts, values, motives, wishes, and character. We often say we understand when we do not really do so. Real understanding demands that we love each other. When we listen with our hearts, we understand better than when we listen with the intellect.

Prejudices and fear prevent us from seeing clearly. We are often afraid of facts and reality. Courage is necessary in order to see a person in a new light, without previous conceptions.

We expect our friends to act in a certain way. We do not want them to change. We do not recognize them if they change too much. It makes us uncertain. Thoughts, previous conceptions and ideas obstruct our vision. We trust too much our own understanding of what the other person is saying. That is the foundation of our education and our culture. No emphasis is put on other forms of understanding.

What is sharing?

Is it giving away things that we no longer need, giving of our affluence? Kahlil Gibran says in *The Prophet*:

Mr Pertti Spets is General Secretary of the TS in Sweden. Talk given in Helsinki, July 2007.

You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give. For what are your possessions but things you keep and guard for fear you may need them tomorrow? . . . And what is fear of need but need itself?

We cannot give and share our understanding, and we cannot understand another if we do not first understand ourselves. We can give others knowledge, but not wisdom; self-knowledge is something that we must learn from ourselves.

Magazines give advice about how to become a better lover. Is it a question of love or something else? I love you as long as you can satisfy my needs and you can give me what I want. When I have grown tired of you I will look for a new love. It is popularly thought that jealousy is a sign of love. If we loved our partner more, we would not require sole rights, and we would not find it difficult to grant freedom of thought and action. We use the word 'love' also in other connections when it is not a question of love, but of something else. We expect the other person to fulfil our desires, and when he does not, we grow tired and say that we do not love him or her any more. We also think that it is love when we are dependent on each other.

We are all the same. Everybody is looking for love. We want to be happy and we want to avoid suffering. But if I look at the other person as 'me', then it is easier to understand and love him or her. When I see myself in the other, then

I can start feeling love and compassion.

A quiet and calm mind can make us more sensitive, as we are not disturbed by thoughts. Then there can be understanding, sharing, and loving. Deep inside us there are roots of love and understanding. It is not so easy to awaken them. We need to experience deeply, to be open and sensitive, to put the other person first. This is not easy, as we expect so much from others.

Love is wisdom, and wisdom is love. But real wisdom and compassion are not possible unless we understand a person's whole situation, problems, suffering, and so on. We can love only when we forget ourselves and go beyond the self. 'Charity seeketh not her own', said Paul the Apostle. Love and compassion is an active, not a passive, feeling. Love and compassion mean assuming and bearing the suffering of others, helping to bear their sorrow. We often seek what is advantageous for us, what we think can give us happiness. As we are looking for our own advantage, we will not find love. Clinging to the self stops us from experiencing love.

The self must die to the past and live in the present for our hearts to be filled with love. There is love when there is no need, when we do not seek satisfaction. Only the mind that is free from the past, from preconceptions, prejudices and wishes, can love — and understand and share life with others. Without love and compassion we cannot wholly fulfil our most important duties — we cannot be a complete person. ✧

The Work of the Branches

DAMODAR K. MAVALANKAR

NOTWITHSTANDING the repeated protest of the Parent Theosophical Society, there does yet seem to linger in the minds of individual members and of some Branches a tendency to look upon the whole movement as a school where Yoga Vidyā and Occultism may be learnt in a much more expeditious and easy way than heretofore. This arises out of an ignorance of the laws of Occult Institutions and those governing psychological development. Since the commencement, the Theosophical Society has tried to impress the fact that the Laws of Nature are immutable; and no living being, however high and powerful, can ever alter them to suit the convenience of students. The attempt, therefore, which is now being made is not to carry on the vain and profitless task of finding a shortcut to Brahma-vidyā, since this is an impossibility, but to revive once more its knowledge, and thus to stimulate a true aspirant to adapt his life and thoughts to that standard which will better him and lead him gradually to such ways as run their courses to the Divine Wisdom.

It will thus be seen that the Theosophical Society promises no Teachers,

no Gurus, to take every member, upon joining, under their special charge. Mr Sinnett was distinctly warned on this point when he asked for the assistance of some adept as the guiding genius of the Simla Eclectic TS, as will be seen on reference to his *Occult World*. No doubt there are individual members who have been fortunate enough to be accepted as *chela-s*, but their acceptance was due not to the fact of their being Fellows, but because they had been living the life and have voluntarily passed through the training and tests enjoined upon aspirants for occult knowledge of every age and nationality. In their case the Theosophical Society was only the means of giving them the conviction of their intuitive beliefs, and thus urging them to follow the promptings of their inner consciousness. For the comparatively easy mode they thus had of gaining the conviction, they have to make up by helping the building-up of the Theosophical Society and putting it on a secure basis.

This explanation ought to make it clear that what the Society expects from all its Branches and individual members, is cooperation and help in its grand task of

From Supplements to *The Theosophist* of January 1884 and March 1884, written as Joint Recording Secretary of the TS.

The Work of the Branches

uniting the East and the West, the North and the South, in a Scientific Brotherhood armed against dissension and consequent failure by the principle of mutual Toleration and mutual Intellectual Sympathy. It is an unthinkable proposition that any man with average intelligence cannot contribute his quota towards the realization of this noble scheme. If each man were but to do his duty to search, investigate, study, digest, and join with his fellow men, actuated by the same noble aspirations, in giving to mankind the benefits of their labour, the day would not be very far off when the Masters of Occultism might find the necessary conditions to enable them to once more live in the world as openly and freely as did their predecessors of times long, long gone by, and give to such a prepared people the benefits of Their knowledge.

Until that blessed day comes, a duty is before us: we have to hasten its approach. And this cannot be done by merely joining the Theosophical Society and without preparation, training, or qualifications, expecting the Adepts to place within our reach tremendous weapons of Power, for *Knowledge is Power*, which in the hands of the ignorant and the wicked is fraught with dangers to their holders and to humanity at large. Enough has already been given out to bring home to any one, endowed with ordinary intelligence, fairness, and desire for knowledge — conviction of the truth of this Science and the Powers it confers upon its devotees.

When once all this is clearly understood, the only question for solution is how best to promote the Cause, and thus by an unselfish effort for the good of our fellow men and their regeneration, to fit ourselves for the higher life of a true co-worker with those who have devoted themselves to the amelioration of the moral and spiritual condition of humanity. There are various ways of accomplishing this result, but as one man's meat is another man's poison, the Parent Theosophical Society has always endeavoured to leave the practical working of its Branches to their members, who are, or should be, the best judges of the circumstances they have to work under, and the material that can be utilized.

Psychology is a vast field wherein many workers may employ themselves with advantage. The tastes of individuals must differ, but surely there can be found two or three in every Branch interested in the same subject. If a Branch divides itself into various Committees for the investigation of various subjects of Science, and communicates its results at general meetings, much good will ensue. Various articles in *The Theosophist* and other publications of the like nature might be taken up by different members, and the Society given the benefit of every individual exertion. Knotty questions arising out of such studies might be referred to the Headquarters in the form of an article, or in any other shape which may be found best under the circumstances. Every legitimate demand for help and assistance has been, and will

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always be, granted by the Founders to their coworkers in this cause of humanity. Several other matters of Reform might be undertaken by other Committees, without, of course, infringing upon any individual's or people's religious or social right. For those who are capable of an unselfish impulse to work for the moral and spiritual regeneration of humanity, there is plenty to do. And it is men of this stamp that are the pillars of such a grand movement, which must necessarily depend upon their cooperation and zeal for its success.

These are the lines upon which Branches are expected to be organized and worked.

* * * * *

It is admitted that the Theosophical Society has been engaged in doing good, with unparalleled success, to humanity; that, had it not been for its exertions, people would have gone on in their own ways as heretofore, would have paid no attention to the writings of the ancient sages and would have remained in entire ignorance of the glorious truths contained therein, not because they could not have been found if properly searched into, but because the earnest spirit of enquiry which has now been raised could never have asserted itself. It is therefore a duty we owe to the Theosophical Society to encourage and support it by all possible means, if we have the least sense of gratitude within us. Moreover, it is within almost every one's mouth that more and more important facts of the

Esoteric Philosophy are being gradually given out through the instrumentality of the Theosophical Society.

Have the critics reflected to what causes this fact is due? It is because the leaders and promoters of the Association find that their labour is not being thrown entirely upon barren ground, but that their work is being more and more appreciated, as is proved by important additions to its ranks; they thus feel encouraged to continue their arduous task more and more cheerfully. But let it be once proven that the work has created no interest, and that those for whom exertions are being made prefer to stubbornly remain blind to all higher considerations, and the Theosophical leaders will be compelled to drop the work in spite of themselves.

Is not the fact that the moral if not the active support given by people to the Society by joining it acts as a stimulant for renewed work — is not this fact a sufficient inducement for right thinking men not to keep aloof from the movement? Again, the Theosophical Society being a Universal Brotherhood embraces all humanity: as such it may very well be recognized as one complete organism. All its doings are its karma. And just as the different organs derive nourishment from the joint work of the whole body; so also each member of this huge organism has a part of its nourishment from the accumulated store of the karma of the Theosophical Society as a whole. And who will dispute the fact that that Association has been acquiring an immense

The Work of the Branches

amount of good karma by its beneficent work of increasing human happiness by promoting knowledge and by uniting together different people into one bond of an Intellectual Brotherhood?

Still further: it is a well-recognized principle that Union is Strength; and therefore if any Association could afford large opportunities for doing good, it is the Theosophical Society. Selfishness having sealed the eyes of the critics to the fact that they form but a part of the *Integral Whole*, they fail to perceive that the good of their Fellow men is their own good. The cloud of self-benefit darkens their mental horizon, through which their sight cannot pierce to have a glance at the future results of their attitude. They see no superior advantage within the narrow range of their vision, and therefore they conclude no such advantage exists. They cannot understand that of all the Asso-

ciations now existing in the world, the Theosophical Society is the only one that can be employed to the best advantage for promoting human happiness by bringing people to realize the common foundation of all Religions. And that the Illuminated have therefore adopted it as the channel of communication between themselves and the outer world.

As such, it forms the centre of light, and he who steps into its sphere from the outer darkness, comes within the radius of vision of the *Blessed Ones*. To advance further depends upon his active goodness and work. By joining, he has got his reward of giving an expression to his sympathy and thus affording moral support — and that reward is that he puts himself in a prominent position whence he can be more easily perceived than those who prefer to remain in the outer darkness. ✧

It is the motive, and the motive alone, which makes any exercise of power become black, malignant, or white, beneficent Magic. It is impossible to employ *spiritual* forces if there is the slightest tinge of selfishness remaining in the operator. . . . The powers and forces of animal nature can equally be used by the selfish and revengeful, as by the unselfish and the all-forgiving; the powers and forces of spirit lend themselves only to the perfectly pure in heart — and this is DIVINE MAGIC.

H. P. Blavatsky, *Practical Occultism*

Theosophical Work around the World

Centenary of *Occult Chemistry*

The results of the clairvoyant investigations into the sub-atomic structure of atoms and molecules carried out by Dr Annie Besant and Bishop C. W. Leadbeater over a century ago have now been found to be in remarkable agreement with the particle-physics findings of modern physics, although when *Occult Chemistry* was published in 1908, it was totally rejected by the scientific community.

Credit must be given to Dr Stephen Phillips, theoretical 'particle' physicist of the UK for placing these occult findings on a firm footing by making a detailed analysis of the 'occult chemistry' results and pointing out how it agrees with the present knowledge of the structure of nuclei in terms of the quark (and even sub-quark) constituents of atomic nuclei. Dr Phillips published his studies in *Extra-Sensory Perception of Quarks* in 1980 (Quest Books) and in an updated version of the same, *ESP of Quarks and Superstrings* (New Age Publishers, New Delhi, India) in 1999. The clinching evidence for the veracity of the Besant-Leadbeater findings is their discovery of the phenomenon known to science as 'isotopes' and publishing the atomic weights of several isotopes correct to the second decimal place, five years before science even learnt of the existence of isotopes.

There is much that science can learn from this body of work. Both the methodology of 'micro-psi' as well as the results

of their careful observations deserve to be given wider publicity, especially amongst the younger generation of scientists.

It is therefore suggested that during the year 2008, Theosophy-Science groups and other scientifically minded members in various national sections may like to give some thought to how this centenary event may be observed appropriately in different countries/regions, attracting the participation of young students and researchers from various universities in the vicinity. Dr Phillips has consented to make himself available for conducting schools/workshops.

Dr M. Srinivasan has volunteered to follow up any correspondence in this regard, mainly to coordinate the travel programme of Dr Phillips. (You may contact Dr Srinivasan at <chino37@gmail.com>.)

The Theosophical Order of Service in India

The south zone conference of the Theosophical Order of Service (TOS) in India was held in Guntur on 22 and 23 September 2007, with 77 delegates from different regions participating. It was hosted by Sri Krishna Theosophical Lodge and the TOS in Guntur.

Mrs Radha Burnier was the chief guest and gave the inaugural address, after Dr S. Venkata Rao, President of Sri Krishna Lodge and TOS Guntur, and Mr G.V.L.N. Sanjeeva Rao, Regional

Theosophical Work around the World

Secretary, TOS Rayalaseema Region, welcomed the gathering. Mrs Burnier stressed that the TOS has its roots in Theosophy, promoting spiritual upliftment. Mr B. L. Bhattacharya, National Director, then spoke on how service is the only way to better a human being, and Mr P. S. Mittal, National Secretary, explained the administration of the TOS in India.

In the evening, delegates visited a centre for manufacturing artificial limbs. Later, Mrs Burnier addressed the public, explaining the relationship between the TS and the TOS, and Mr C.V.K. Maithreya traced the life-history of the President-Founder of the TS, Col. H. S. Olcott. A discussion ensued on future activities of the TOS in the South.

On the following day, donations were made to a number of worthy projects, followed by short talks on 'How to Serve Individually and Collectively'.

Inter-American Conference

The President of the Inter-American Federation, Mrs Terezinha Kind, reports that this gathering, held in El Salvador from 10 to 14 October 2007, with the theme 'Expanding the Theosophical Family', was the first Central American Convention. About 40 members from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, the United States, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil participated.

Mrs Ali Ritsema, former General Secretary of the Dutch Section, was the guest speaker and gave two talks: one on

the Conference theme and another on 'Interaction on Karma', and delivered a public talk, 'Seeing through Our Heart'. Mrs Nelda Samarel, Director of the Krotona School of Theosophy, conducted a workshop on 'Training for Theosophical Workers' and gave a public talk on 'The One Most Important Thing'.

The gathering was organized to revitalize the Theosophical movement in this region. In El Salvador, as in most of the Central American countries, there is only one Lodge, yet despite difficulties, and thanks to the devoted work of TS members, the flame of Theosophy keeps on burning.

An Aid Fund was created to help needy TS members to attend future IATF events, and a Books Aid Fund was created to purchase books in Spanish. Private donations were received for these Funds.

The USA

A Southeast Regional Conference was held in Atlanta, Georgia, from 9 to 11 November, 2007, on the theme 'Social Action as Spiritual Practice', with about 90 attending. The National President of the American Section, Mrs Betty Bland, welcomed participants from around the country. The international Vice-President, Dr John Algeo, gave the keynote address on 'Spiritual Practice as Social Action/Social Action as Spiritual Action', and the President of the American TOS, Mr Tim Boyd, spoke on 'An Experiment in Openness: The Life and Work of Bill Lawrence'. The conference ended with reports from four discussion groups. ✧

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Theosophical Work around the World

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Indo-Pacific Federation

The Chairman of the Federation, Mr Pedro Oliveria, reports that he visited Sri Lanka from 28 to 31 October 2007 in order to meet with the Presidential Representative, Mr S. M. Jayathilleke, and a number of other members about how to strengthen the TS work in that country. There is a need to establish regular study of Theosophy at the headquarters in Colombo. Public meetings are held once a month and the premises have been improved. They would also like to revive Besant Lodge in the same city. Mr Jayathilleke reports that the two Lodges in Badulla are working regularly.

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

What India teaches us is that in a state advancing towards civilization, there must be always two castes or two classes of men, a caste of Brahmans or of thinkers, and a caste of Kshatriyas, who are to fight; possibly other castes also of those who are to work and those who are to serve. Great wars went on in India, but they were left to be fought by the warriors by profession. The peasants in their villages remained quiet, accepting the consequences, whatever they might be, and the Brahmans lived on, thinking and dreaming in their forests, satisfied to rule after the battle was over.

And what applies to military struggles seems to me to apply to all struggles — political, religious, social, commercial, and even literary. Let those who love to fight, fight; but let those who are fond of quiet work go on undisturbed in their own special callings. That was, as far as we can see, the old Indian idea, or at all events the ideal which the Brahmans wished to see realized. I do not stand up for utter idleness or sloth, not even for drones, though Nature does not seem to condemn even *hoc genus* altogether. All I plead for, as a scholar and a thinker, is freedom from canvassing, from letter-reading and letter-writing, from committees, deputations, meetings, public dinners, and all the rest. That will sound very selfish to the ears of practical men, and I understand why they should look upon men like myself as hardly worth their salt. But what would they say to one of the greatest fighters in the history of the world? What would they say to Julius Caesar, when he declares that the triumphs and the laurel wreaths of Cicero are as far nobler than those of warriors, as it is a greater achievement to extend the boundaries of the Roman intellect than the domains of the Roman people!

F. Max Mueller

From *My Autobiography: A Fragment*

The Power of Sangha in Theosophical Work

(Talk given at the Annual Gathering of the TS in America in Wheaton, Illinois)

VICENTE HAO CHIN, JR

ONE encounters the ageless wisdom mainly through two avenues: books and people. It is the second that I believe has the greater impact in influencing someone to walk the spiritual path. I may read a book on karma, and after reading it, nod my head and say, 'Oh, yes, this is true. I believe in karma', and end there. It is rare that reading a book alone will trigger a basic redirection of one's life path, although this does happen. But when we meet someone whose life strikes a chord of truth within us, and when we constantly get exposed to such persons, then we realize the power of such association in creating turning points in our lives.

There are four facets of this power of long-term association with spiritually-inclined people, in our case, the Theosophical sangha. First is the chance to begin. We are introduced to a new way of life and worldview when we meet people who embody them. We notice in them a different kind of inner power, of equanimity, of wisdom that goes beyond the smartness and cunningness that we normally see all around us.

My first encounter with the ageless wisdom was through an orange-robed yogi who spoke in our college. After the lecture I approached him and asked to be taught how to meditate. He did teach me the following Sunday, and such was my introduction to raja yoga. It was through this that I was introduced to the Theosophical Society, and there I met a lady who was to have an enduring impact in my young life. I have been with the Theosophical Society since then, and my life has never been the same.

The first power of Sangha then is the chance to begin in this life our initial steps towards the spiritual path. The right community can kindle the spiritual fire within.

But kindling the spiritual fire is but the first step. This flame must be sustained, and here we encounter the second power of the sangha, the power to nurture. Being with a spiritual group like the TS, not just an intellectual debating society but a living spiritual community, enables us to sustain our initial effort to tread the higher life.

It is not easy to try to live according to

Mr Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, is General Secretary of the TS in the Philippines, is active in the Theosophical Order of Service, and conducts self-transformation workshops.

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one's principles. The worldly life has its own smart rules that sneer at integrity and truthfulness, at spirituality and selflessness, at meditation and non-acquisitiveness. It offers so many tantalizing experiences and sights that it is easy for one to just get carried away. The Sangha enables us to sustain our sight of the distant light ahead of us, or, to put it another way, to constantly be aware of this inner vision of the truer life. The spiritual community sustains and energizes this inner insight, which at the beginning is but a series of intermittent sparks, and becomes a tiny unsteady flame, and needs to be gently fanned for it not to be blown off.

My parents were businesspeople. Being the eldest in the family I was expected to pursue the life of a businessman after graduation. The immediate surrounding culture, my uncles and relatives, were of similar business minds. It is hard to say what I would be doing today if I had not encountered yoga and the Theosophical Society. The weekly association with Theosophists had a sustaining impact in my young life, such that despite the fact that I was involved in the business world, I was never fully immersed in or carried away by it. One becomes like the double-headed eagle, capable of seeing in two directions: the life in the outer world, and the life in the inner. This dual vision is effort to live the higher life. It keeps one's feet on the ground, cognizing one's duties and humanity, but at the same time not losing sight of the reality of our transcendent nature.

The third power of the Sangha is the power to inspire. This of course depends a lot upon the type of organization or group one is associated with. Speaking of my own exposure to the Theosophical Society, I may say that encountering certain individuals in the Society has pivotally uplifted my own small efforts, giving strength to my young wings. This is possible because we see embodied in certain individuals the fruits of the wisdom and the worthiness of such a life. We also realize that one day we too can reach such heights, such levels of integration.

The power of example is indeed a very potent one. People are the highest embodiments of truth outside of ourselves. They give us conviction and certainty about the validity of the spiritual or theosophic way of life. The deep, balanced and exemplary lives of spiritual people are the proof that the wisdom is ultimately sound and that the higher life is worth spending our lives on.

Finally, the fourth power of the Sangha is the power to teach how to truly serve. Again this depends upon the particular group that one associates with. When there is at least one person in the group who exhibits the quality of cheerful and spontaneous service, then we may be blessed with the discovery of perhaps the most important activity that a human being can engage in — the life of service.

Most people are not naturally endowed with a service-oriented nature. On the contrary, we almost always start with selfishness. The budding spirituality that inclines towards selfless service needs

to be nurtured in an environment that is not cynical about compassion and the giving of oneself.

It is rather unfortunate that the practical man or woman is often subconsciously nurtured to think that one should do certain things only when there is a resultant personal gain from it. In a world of competition, the aim is to get ahead, to acquire more, to gain. One even learns that it is smart to use Machiavellian ways to surge ahead. I was not lacking in such exposure. It was the timeless principles of the ageless wisdom that constantly reminded me to look the other way — to be willing to lose, to give way, or to assist, if such would mean lightening the burden of someone. These principles taught me that there is no such thing as an enemy. We are all travelers or pilgrims in quest of a distant paradise. Let us not quarrel about stones or jewels that we may have picked up along the way. We will have to divest ourselves of them eventually, and enter the sacred land holding each other's hands, not jewels and stones.

Our journey is not independent of each other. We are intertwined in such complex and mysterious ways that the joys and pains of others are really shared by us. The spiritual community teaches us how to serve, not in the way a merchant would give his goods in exchange for something in return, but to give and serve unconditionally. It is truly a difficult lesson to learn because the encrusted ego would like to continue to strengthen itself, and is not willing to let go of its imagined treasures without a corresponding gain.

The Sangha has the power to soften and melt such encrustations so that one day, in one life, the soul is ready to let go of that centre called the self and awaken to the Self Universal.

Thus the Theosophical community is indeed a blessing to those whose lives revolve around its sphere. It has, first, the power to allow a soul to begin the quest; second, it has the power to nurture the flame that sustains the quest; then it has the power to inspire and uplift the soul to transcending heights; and finally it has the power to teach how to truly serve without self.

The Theosophical sangha, while bestowing blessings and power on the pilgrim soul, does not demand for itself any allegiance to any doctrine or dogma. It points not to itself, but to something beyond it. This is the transcendent power of a truly spiritual sangha. One feels truly blessed to be under its motherly wings.

For our part, let us do our share in nurturing the spiritual quality of the Theosophical sangha for the sake of future pilgrims to come. Let our programmes, activities and gatherings always be imbued with a wisp of the eternal. And let this begin with our tiniest actions, with the casual words that flow from our lips, with the daily fleeting thoughts that cross our minds, until our own lives have become permeated with the soundless melody of the song of life, the song of the eternal. Then truly every new coming pilgrim will be in the midst of a genuinely transformative community, the Theosophical Society. ✧