

On the Watch-Tower

RADHA BURNIER

Seeing the Whole

It is well known that our idea of the spiritual path, at best, is only partial and therefore not true. Suppose we see only one arm of the physical body of another person, we have a wrong idea of what we see. Similarly, our view of life, whatever ideas we may have of this physical plane, is only a partial picture, and is therefore false. Those who have been able to see more fully may find it difficult to say what they know. Even if a Mahatma tells us what is on the other side of life, we will not be able to grasp it fully or whatever we grasp may not be true. So spiritually advanced men can only try to make others aware that there is much more to see; they cannot say what is to be seen as all the ideas which we get from books and people about other worlds, etc. cannot make us see what is true. We must keep in mind the fact that, however correct we may be compared to other people, what we think is not really what is.

For most people love means something which is not really very spiritual. It may be very good in its own way. A mother loves her child and this is better than not loving the child. She is able to give the child the sense of protection, of someone who cares, etc. But if we think that this love provides the full meaning of the term, then we would be wrong. Love in its

essence is something that we do not know of at all. But we have to try to know as much of it as possible, simply because it is so beautiful. This is true of certain other qualities. There is divine beauty which has nothing to do with a cause, which may embody itself in forms to a small extent, but does not show its full nature at all. Love, beauty, goodness, etc. are qualities which belong to the divine plane, of which we have only an impression down here, and not the reality. For instance, for most people, love in the family is important. Whether they love anyone outside a small circle which they know of or not, is not their concern at all. But they get satisfaction out of giving something to a few people, and expecting a return. To be able to love without asking for a return is very difficult.

A mother's love is often praised, because of this very quality; she can go on loving her child even when grown up, self-willed, or selfish. She feels a bond between the two of them. But for most people a small feeling of love, a little feeling of beauty, etc., is a great thing. It makes life worth living. We cannot imagine anyone who is able to perceive no beauty at all, or any of those qualities which we associate with life, the receiving of which he instinctively feels is important.

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But if the wife is very loving but does not provide comfort, a man is not very happy. So there is expectation where there is love. Of course we try to look at the whole question in a different way. It may be a question of learning to look at the thing carefully. We tend to come to conclusions even when we do not know a thing well, and which may take a long time to know truly. But meanwhile we need not have many ideas about it.

One of the ways in which we gather ideas is through looking at art objects. Some of the famous places where these art objects are gathered and kept are the museums and galleries that people visit. Why do they do it? Partly it is a question of keeping abreast; everybody talks about something, and you want to say, 'I have also been there.' They may be learning something, but they also hope to catch some fresh idea, a fresh way of looking, which the artist has. So we need the other person to stimulate us in some way.

In *Freedom from the Known*, a collection of Krishnamurti's talks, there is a story about a religious teacher who gave sermons. People appreciated them and flocked to hear them. One day, a little bird came and sat on the window-sill and sang with all his heart. They do not sing like human beings, who are thinking of other things. A bird has no such care. He sings because he feels like singing. The teacher was quiet, and at the end of the music, he said: 'The sermon is over.' This is an instance of the sermon coming from sources other than what we expect. When we see that same thing with

our prejudices, and all that goes on in our mind, we see only a part of it. It never has the same quality. Krishnaji points out that if we can give all our attention to something, not necessarily a little bird singing with innocence, then it opens a whole new view which is wonderful. And that happens because the observer is not there. The observed may be a wonderful piece of art, beautiful music, a lovely tree, and the observer may observe the beauty of it, but he is still there. So the beauty of it makes but a small impression. When there is no observer at all, the entire consciousness undergoes this experience.

Learning to Meditate

This is part of meditation: by watching, by listening, by giving one's heart and mind, meditation begins. But we do not begin that way. We think about some things, but that is not meditation, for the observer is there. Only when the observer is not there, one can see beauty. Perhaps some of us sometimes do see beauty in that way — not beauty in a form. As long as there is the feeling 'I am looking at it' perhaps because it is not real, it is not complete. Self-abandonment, letting go of the feeling of 'myself', of the feeling of being different from the object, has to go. This is the essence of meditation, when we can forget ourselves.

Whenever there is a strong emotion, when a person is very angry and does not know what he is doing, the consciousness of 'myself' does not seem to be there; and the anger takes over. The person is still there, but he is overcome by anger. But

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when there is observation without the observer, there is an experience which is not ordinary at all. Some of us may have had this experience. But when you remember that experience, it is no longer like that, because you are there to remember what has happened before. It is not happening, it has happened. It is therefore something which belongs to the past. So how can we gradually come to understand the difference between the person who has realized, or not realized?

The realized person does not expect some change to take place in the other. If that were so, then everybody would have to change according to the wish of the onlooker, which is impossible. That is not what is meant by self-abandonment, which is a state of silence inside. Silently watching whatever happens to be, or takes place around you, is very important. But this is precisely what we and our neighbours do not approve of. If someone is silently watching something, they think something is wrong with him.

Dr Besant made a statement that, generally speaking, she does not feel like saying anything at all. This was more or less accepted in the Indian situation; but in the West, if one wants to appear friendly, kindly, sociable, then one has to be talking. And if a person goes to many places as she did, they think that friendliness is absent if that person is not talking. So she had to talk a little. But she generally wanted to be silent. When a person is not image-making, but merely observing, then he can see many things which are not normally seen at all.

Those who spend some time apparently doing nothing, just watching, can also see what society expects of them and what they are taught from childhood. In Eastern literature this feeling comes, giving glimpses of a person who sees duty, order, goodness, truth and so on, even in the midst of this world. But there is the possibility for the world to change, when people learn to behave differently.

Perhaps we do not see the importance of bringing about a change of this kind in ourselves, which makes for greater awareness of the deeper side of life — of truth, goodness, and beauty — everywhere. If that were so — and it will become so even if it takes a long time — then the world would be changing much faster. But if we presume that order in this sense is not possible, it will take very long. If many of us feel that we must do what will make us instruments, or a little part of an instrument, through which the world itself changes, then it will make a great difference.

So how can we change the world? If the basis is to be different, then we have to act in a different way. We are concerned with the world and not only with ourselves. We have to make the necessary qualities part of our living and the small group will then become a slightly bigger group, and finally lead to the progress of humanity.

Work that anyone can do

Relationships are different from person to person, person to animal and so on. But in the midst of all that difference towards

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persons and other things, there has to be understanding and affection. This is very important if we are to know and understand life itself. Life does not exist for us to carry on some business, make money, have relationships with children, parents, wife, or a few people. This is only a very small part of it. Life is a whole, which includes not only human beings, but animals, plants, minerals, deva-s and whatever other beings exist on this earth or outside. When we have misunderstandings, when we order people around, and do many things which are contradictory to what we talk about, we are denying what we say is truth.

We are born in this world to understand what life is, but we do not seem to realize this. We think we are born to make money, to find the best comforts, to become a figure of importance, to be known in the world as someone special. Of course we must eat, but we are keen to taste many different things. Being an expert at cricket or hockey is very good, but life is not only for that. If you become an expert, it is in order that the mind might develop, become quick at seeing. But we are in a state of ignorance and do not know what to do.

One of the wicked aspects of life is that everybody is for himself, and not for the whole of humanity; seeking the good, working for that good. This results in the kind of world which we see; it does not basically change. We may think that today's world is very different from yesterday's, but it is different because we have aeroplanes, and we like machinery

to send e-mails, and all that. But are we different?

We are the same people, with the same aims. The result of all this is that we have created great disparities. Disparities exist in a certain way: disparity at the level of intelligence, some may be more kind and not so intelligent; some are generous, others are not. The basic sense of being different from other people comes about because of these small differences, which always bring conflict.

Has there been any time in the world when there has been no conflict? When there is no war, there is pride, and competition, all part of war-mindedness, or part of jealousy of people who can act better, who can get on better in life, and so on. It is rather strange because we do not fall into the habit of fighting, we think that fighting is wonderful. There are countries which are not exactly at war with Iran, but would like to get the oil in the Middle East, or be in charge there. The stress is on how to get the better of another.

People find that intelligence and other qualities have brought them to this condition. This has taken millennia to develop, and we presume that we are at the climax. But this may not be true at all. The human being has the chance to become a totally different human being — the awakened individual. Perhaps, looking back and seeing what has happened will enable us to move forward towards a wonderful future in which humanity can develop qualities which at present are lying fallow. ✧

A Bubble in a Stream

WAYNE GATFIELD

*Thus shall ye think of all this fleeting world:
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.*

THESE words from the ‘Diamond Sutra’ bring us face to face with a realization that dawns on every true aspirant to Spiritual Wisdom in time, that is, those who are intent on experiencing what they hitherto only heard or read about. There comes a time when we become aware that everything that we attach importance to in our lives consists in fact only in passing illusions in the final analysis. This is *māyā*, as it suggests something that can be measured and is therefore, when compared to the Eternity of the Spirit, just a fleeting shadow. Of course the idea of illusion must not be taken in the context in which illusions are generally accepted. The illusion lies in their transitoriness; they are real enough for the brief time they occupy us in their passage through time and space. But we can ultimately rely upon nothing in this manifested universe. Even the ‘gods’ are not totally reliable! The *Bhagavadgītā* states that whoever can see the imperishable in all that is perishable has true vision.

When first this awakening to our physical mortality arises in our hearts it can be a depressing experience and many of us fight against it. The thought that all that we have accumulated over the years in the way of material goods and emotional attachments must some day be no more is painful, and there are those who will endear themselves to or create for themselves ‘philosophies’ and ‘spiritual’ movements that glorify the personality and its needs, dressing them up in the gaudy attire of supposed ‘mysticism’. The truth is that they never get beyond the ‘astral’ realms that H. P. Blavatsky warns us against in *The Voice of the Silence* and other works. This is certainly a dangerous realm pregnant with the seeds of ultimate failure. The Wise Ones go beyond all such phantom realms and bathe in the undying light of pure Spirit. The key to living a truly spiritual life leads through the gateway of this cognition of impermanence in our lives and learning to centre ourselves in that

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which is permanent. Outmoded mindsets have to be demolished and removed before new ones can be constructed on the same base. It is of course still the same mind, but its orientation has changed and we start to build on solid rock instead of shifting sand.

For many of us the lives of celebrities and characters in films or on TV become more real than the lives of genuine people, and we may shed more tears for the imaginary death of an actor than we do for people who really suffer. But even in this there are lessons to be learned. An ancient Indian scripture says that just as we may dream of being beheaded, but on awakening find it not to be true; so is life. So just as an actor appears to die, but does not, so it is that all that appears to happen to 'us', only happens to the temporary self and not the Permanent Self, which remains our 'Silent Watcher' — 'the Lord, the Witness, the Asylum, the Resting Place, and the Friend', as the *Bhagavadgītā* tells us.

In time the experience of the transitory in our lives becomes a beautiful one because it is not viewed with the mind that slays the real but with the Higher Mind, the Original Mind, or the Unborn Buddha Mind. We begin to see that we do not lose all those things that are really important to us and for which we have a genuine love, but in fact our relationship with them deepens. In this physical frame, which is the sufferer of illimitable pain on all levels, we are severely limited in our ability to communicate with others. Many of us may at times feel like mute

poets, unable to express the more profound thoughts that outstrip our ability to express them. Then of course there are emotional dimensions to our being that can never be put into words and so we enjoy or suffer in silence. On a higher level the 'Mystic' in us may touch on spiritual experiences that thought and words can only belittle. Out of enthusiasm, or a desire to share, attempts are made to place the experience in the sensible realm whether in the form of words, spoken or written, music, or painting. Such attempts have varying degrees of success and we must thank the sharer for giving us essential signposts and lighting a lamp to guide us through the darkness. But the light that they give to us can only be a reflected one, and even the best is only like a lighthouse as compared to the sun of the original impetus. Hopefully we can be led to understand for ourselves and guided to 'knowing' by direct experience, which is the only thing that completely dispels our doubts in the end.

So this world through which we pass like 'flitting shadows' is a world of reflected light in which we are banished from our true home, and the people that we meet, only limitations of what we are inwardly. It is the 'great dire heresy of separateness' that makes us see ourselves as apart from others. The dissolving of this idea is the only sure foundation upon which to build a compassionate heart. Merely to talk or write about compassion cannot make us feel compassionate, just as to say or write the word 'water' cannot

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satisfy our thirst. Only by becoming aware of the 'Buddha Nature' or 'Christ Nature' or 'Kṛṣṇa Nature' in ourselves and in everyone else and coming to see that it is identical in all things, can we find natural compassion springing up in our hearts spontaneously. It is the only way to be sure that we do not delude ourselves or limit our actions to the personality alone. To help only other 'bubbles' in life's stream will do no permanent good if not balanced with a desire to assist them to understand their true nature and therefore find ways to see the situation in perspective. This does not mean that in places of great physical suffering we should ignore that pain and merely give them a few choice words from spiritual teaching. No, as we help them in their distress, we must at the same time give as much spiritual guidance as deemed necessary, and to do this we must consult our intuition or our common sense — whichever is the greater.

As stated, this realization of our physical mortality is something that we need to face up to, or else we go through life as if we were immortal in a material sense, shutting out anything that reminds us that we are just brief visitors to this planet in the bodies we now occupy. In fact, we are here for an average of only 1,000 months or 26,000 days! The Chinese Poet Wang Wei (701-61 AD) contemplates this transience when he writes:

If you want to elude the old age disease,
there's only one way: study unborn life.

This means that we must learn to focus on the unchanging essence which we in Theosophy call the Individuality — the trinity of Ātmā-Buddhi-Manas. This is the part that is never 'born', nor does it 'die'. It is the Sutrātmā, the Thread Soul, upon which our lives are strung like so many pearls.

Quite probably it is important that the vast majority of humanity remain blind to the fact that they are merely bubbles in a stream, as a precocious awareness of this fact would lead to many strange psychological disorders. Then again there are those who go through life calmer either because they have no particular belief and therefore just accept what comes, or because they are immersed in material luxury, or they have some religious idea of heaven and hell, or they have found the centre within and are focused on that. Kṛṣṇa is enshrined in their hearts and they care only for the sound of his flute calling them home.

The calmness of the first three classes is in danger of being ruined by a deepening understanding of life or some traumatic event that will knock them mentally off their 'feet'. The fourth class have reached a safe haven and have come to realize that so called 'death' is just entrance into a greater light and a state in which we are much more at home than on this earth, where we may always feel like temporary visitors. Death is always a friend and deliverer and brings us into a closer proximity with those we love, whether they are those we have met in this life or those we have not met

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in the flesh but to whom we are linked by deeper bonds. Do we imagine that meeting in the physical body and communicating by the grossest means possible is the only relationship we have with others? There are much more effective ways that are not limited by time and space and are accessible to those who have developed in the right way to make such communications intelligible. The guru and pupil relationship is one example of this deeper rapport.

So we have to fix our attention on that which is beyond rational thought but is an eternal presence within our hearts. If we can find this faithful friend within, we have a sure guide that will not desert us even though nations and continents should rise and fall. For it is this Higher Self that is the True Man or Woman, and it is what we are in this manifested universe and that dimension to our being that takes account of itself in this passing illusion that is our pilgrimage through time and space.

If in the end we become one with the ALL, during our period of unfoldment we have to occupy our own particular space, our own laboratory, where experiments and experiences slowly work the mystic alchemy on our hearts, so that all our illusions of separateness gradually dissolve and are used in the process of changing the base metal of our awareness in this transient universe into the pure Gold of Spiritual Enlightenment, which will bring the choice as to whether to go wholly into the Nirvānic state or to leave a remnant behind in the sensible world to

aid in the general welfare of Humanity; in other words, to insert our own 'brick' into the Guardian Wall.

Certainly we are just 'bubbles' in the Universal Stream of life or waves on the Cosmic Ocean, but this of course is only in a material sense. In reality we are Eternal Beings for whom the 'hour never strikes' and we can be sure that as we merge more and more into the ALL and therefore dissolve the barriers that hold us back from a soul-satisfying communion with our fellow Beings, we will feel more and more a sense of 'coming home' and less and less of the disease that plagues the lives of many of the more sensitive souls on this planet. Borne out of time, these tender souls are buffeted by the storms of a harsh and soulless society that prizes only material gain and sensual pleasure, and tramples on those whose values will not permit them to compromise the voice of the Spirit within and their better intuitions. These souls may at present feel lost and helpless at times, but as the years pass by, more and more of them will be born, until eventually they will be in the majority and the perpetrators of gross thoughts and emotions will be the declining race. This may take centuries to come to pass, but the process has already begun and will not be stopped by the efforts of puny man. Can a bubble stop the rushing of the stream to the river and then to the sea? Can even a million bubbles stop the onrush?

It has been proven time and time again that attempts to crush the natural spiritual feelings in Man are doomed to

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failure. Whether it be dogmatic religion or materialistic science that tries to do this, they are both man-made avenues of thought and therefore are bound to crumble in the end before the might of Mother Nature. The Zen Buddhists emphasize the fact that there is nothing weird about the Spiritual Path. We are just as much a product of Nature as a tree and are an integral part of Nature's 'plan'. We as humans have the capacity to proceed by self-induced and self-devised efforts and methods, as we are at that point in evolution when we have developed self-consciousness and become able to help Nature consciously or indeed work against her! The choice is always ours. The Path is not one of adding to what we have, but of shedding those things that prevent us from 'seeing' our True Selves. The Spirit is always One, but our vehicles block the view. Our minds need to become as clear as a newly polished mirror that reflects everything impersonally without judgement.

Let us take inspiration from Heshiro,

who was a rich and educated man in ancient Japan and was one of the town's most successful citizens. One day it was decided to place a statue of a Japanese God at the place where a waterfall fell into the pool below. When Heshiro saw the bubbles that formed in the pool he became aware of something. He saw that some went a few inches and then burst, others travelled several metres before disappearing. This made him aware of life's impermanence; some people are born and live a few years and some longer, but all are bound to die in the end. This changed his view of life, and through deep meditation he was able to get beyond the illusion of life and death to the Reality, and finally to live in the ETERNAL. Let our contemplation of ourselves and our fellow human beings as 'bubbles in a stream' lead us to a similar realization, if not quite so dramatic, and may we learn to love one another as children of a common Mother on the same journey, even if we may be at different stations on the Holy Pilgrimage. ✧

However deep your
Knowledge of the scriptures,
It is no more than a strand of hair
In the vastness of space;
However important appears
Your worldly experience,
It is but a drop of water in a deep ravine.

Tokusan

The Spirit of Wisdom in your Heart

PAUL ZWOLLO

THE Voice of the Silence differentiates between ‘the Doctrine of the Eye’ and ‘the Doctrine of the Heart’; the Doctrine or Dharma of the Heart is the embodiment of Divine Wisdom, the Permanent and Everlasting. A little further on, the disciple is asked: ‘Which wilt thou choose, O thou of dauntless heart?’ It is evident that the Teacher suggests that the disciple must choose the Doctrine of the Heart, the Path of Liberation.

The expression ‘thou of dauntless heart’ implies that the decision to tread the spiritual path is taken by the heart. It is not an act solely of the intellect; it could be the intention of both head and heart. ‘The Golden Stairs’ of Madame Blavatsky speaks of ‘a courageous endurance of personal injustice’. Such courage is based on insight, on spiritual discrimination or *viveka*; on a willingness to sacrifice personal comforts and satisfaction for the well-being of others. This kind of courage is inherent in the heart.

When the disciple asks what he should do to reach Wisdom and gain Perfection, the answer given in *The Voice of the Silence* is:

Be of clean heart before thou startest on thy journey. Learn to discern the real from

the false, the ever-fleeting from the everlasting. Learn above all to separate Head-learning from Soul-Wisdom.

Here we find in a nutshell the instructions necessary for those who are really earnest seekers after Truth and are willing to give up all worldly aspirations in order to tread the spiritual path. Sometimes people are inclined to ask for too many details about how to live and act to tread the Path successfully, questions like what to eat, how to breathe, how to sit for meditation, and what to read. But these things are left to the aspirant himself. J. Krishnamurti never went into these questions, for we have to discover the conditions which are the most practical and appropriate for ourselves.

As we are all unique, all Paths trodden will differ from one another. There are as many Paths as there are people in the world. But the Rules which have to be followed will differ only in detail; the basic rules will be more or less the same. There is great freedom left to us to make our own choice. But once the choice is made, we need, according to the Master, ‘courage, endurance, and presence of mind’ in order to achieve the goal.

We read in *The Mahatma Letters*:

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‘Man is the only free agent in Nature.’ This is probably the reason why freedom has always been of paramount importance in the Theosophical Society. No compulsion should ever be exercised on any member. If we lead the right kind of life, we may follow our heart’s desire.

In Saanen, Switzerland, during a series of talks by Krishnamurti, he said: ‘The fire of Wisdom burns away all ignorance.’ Wisdom, Divine Wisdom, or Theo-Sophia, is like a Fire, destroying all false conceptions and personal idiosyncrasies. It cleans the mind of all pettiness and creates room for ideas which really matter.

It is ignorance or *avidyā* which lies at the basis of the five pains and miseries of life (*klesā-s*), mentioned in the Yoga Sutra-s of Patañjali — the student of Yoga has to remove these one by one.

‘The heart represents the Higher Triad, the liver and spleen represent the Quaternary. . . . The psycho-intellectual man is all in the head with its seven gateways. The spiritual man is in the heart’, says HPB in the third volume of *The Secret Doctrine*. And she continues:

By reason of the extraordinary growth of human intellect and the development in our age of the fifth principle, Manas, in man, its rapid progress has paralysed spiritual perceptions. It is at the expense of wisdom that intellect generally lives, and mankind is quite unprepared in its present condition to comprehend the awful drama of human disobedience to the laws of Nature and the subsequent Fall as a result.

This warning of HPB was written many

years ago, at a time when hardly anybody had heard about pollution of the environment. The concept of ‘sustainable development’ was not yet known. But the first signs of the disasters that took place in the twentieth century were already manifest for people who were really alert in the preceding century.

Reading the Mahatma Letters, one gets the impression that in the 1880s the Mahatmas were seriously worried about certain developments. Did They foresee already the catastrophes and the Great Wars of the twentieth century? The Mahatmas sounded a note of warning and reminded Mr Sinnett of what had happened with the continent of Atlantis long ago — the continent on which the Fourth Root Race lived. Apparently HPB’s and the Masters’ voices were like ‘the voice of one crying in the wilderness’.

Perhaps we touch the heart of the matter when we say ‘the spiritual fire is in the heart’! Because of this plausible fact, every human being can evolve, develop himself, and come to Self-realization. Being in essence a Divine Spark, we are able through self-devised efforts to become a real flame, ‘a living plume of fire’. It is the Buddha Nature we all potentially have, coming to fruition. The occult axiom therefore is: ‘Become what you are.’

At the close of one of his talks Krishnamurti used the phrase: ‘When the house is burning you have to act.’ He used this phrase as a metaphor to draw our attention to the many problems of the world and the necessity to act. He made

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an appeal to our responsibility. The feeling of responsibility, says Madame Blavatsky, is the beginning of Wisdom; a proof that the egotistic principle (*ahamkāra*) in man, which due to our ignorance separates our 'I' from the Universal One Self, is beginning to fade out. Responsibility is the beginning of the loss of the sense of separateness, the giant weed, which has to be destroyed, root and branch. Let us put our heart into it. Let 'the spirit of fire in your heart' become a great flame, burning away all ignorance.

In general, exoterically speaking, the legend of St George and the dragon has attracted people. The dragon is the symbol of evil and of the human passions which have to be conquered by the good influences of our higher nature. St George is calm, fearless, resolute. He is determined, firm, self-confident. He defeats the dragon, symbol of the 'lunar body', as Madame Blavatsky called

it in *The Voice of the Silence*. The dragon symbolizes those lower instincts in man, which in the course of human evolution have to be conquered by the Higher Self, of which St George is the symbol.

But one can look at things from different perspectives. Instead of considering the dragon as a symbol of evil, we can look at it as a symbol of Wisdom, identical with the Egyptian Thoth-Hermes. The Egyptian Hierophants were called 'Sons of the Dragon'. So when according to the legend St George is slaying the dragon, the esoteric meaning could be that he is mastering and assimilating the Wisdom of which the dragon is the symbol. To accomplish this highest deed of self-sacrifice, we need 'the spirit of fire in our heart'. This esoteric meaning of the legend of St George slaying the dragon might be the reason why for many centuries this legend has fascinated and inspired generations of artists. ✧



In Egypt, the star of the Dragon (then the North Pole Star), was the origin of the connection of almost all the gods with the Dragon. Bel and the Dragon, Apollo and Pythom, Osiris and Typhon, Sigur and Fafnir, and finally St George and the Dragon, are the same. . . . 'I am a Serpent, I am a Druid', said the Druid of the Celto-Britannic regions As the serpent casts its old skin only to reappear in a new one, so does the immortal Ego cast off one personality but to assume another.

H. P. Blavatsky

The Round Table

MARY ANDERSON

THE Round Table was the table around which it is said that the Knights of King Arthur sat.

In Medieval Europe, a knight was a warrior, a soldier, a *kshatriya*. The true Knight had a code of conduct: to uphold justice, to defend the weak, to defeat oppressors, the unjust, and the wicked. But this may have a deeper meaning, which might remind us of the case of Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Arjuna also had to fight in order to defeat an oppressor and to restore justice. But a deeper meaning of Arjuna's duty was not merely to fight enemies who were in the wrong but to overcome his own weaknesses, his internal enemies. In the same way, Jihād in Islam does not really mean fighting against those of another faith, but fighting against weaknesses in oneself, one's own selfishness and cruelty. There is an example of this in the story of one of King Arthur's knights. It is said that Sir Galahad once fought two terrible knights, a red one and a black one, and that this means that he fought against cruelty (the red knight) and hatred (the black knight), these being perhaps tendencies in himself.

In order to learn to fight and to test their mettle, knights engaged in mock fights or

jousts, also during so-called tournaments, trying to throw each other from their horses. These were some of the duties of King Arthur's knights. Another duty or dharma of the knight was to seek for the Holy Grail, perhaps symbolizing divinity. We shall revert to this.

The table at which the knights of King Arthur sat was round because the Knights were all considered equal; none was more important than the others. Normally, the most important person sits at the head of the table and the least important at the bottom. But a Round Table does not have any seats around it which are higher or lower than others, so all the knights sat at the same distance from the centre of the table, which means that none was more important than another. We know that we are not all equal, all equally good, just, kind, and wise, as we are now, and as we know ourselves and each other, because we still have much to learn from life. But deep within we are equally good, just, kind, and wise, although we cannot express it in our thoughts and in our lives. We are still on a quest, perhaps in search of the Holy Grail, our true divine nature. Some people may be wiser or kinder than others but no

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one is ultimately more important than another. We share the same humanity.

A Round Table is circular. If a circle is reduced in size, it ends up as a single point, which is a symbol of unity. And if the point or the circle is extended, a larger circle or a sphere results, where all the points on the surface are equally near the centre, the One. If the circle is extended infinitely, it may embrace infinity, all there is. So everything — an infinite sphere — reflects unity: a single point. Thus the Round Table is also a symbol for the oneness, the equality, the brotherhood, and the brotherliness, which should exist in the Theosophical Society.

King Arthur actually lived in the fifth century CE. Little is known about him. He was a king of only part of what is now known as England or sometimes Britain. But he united his people against invaders: the Saxons, the Welsh, the Irish. His rule, at times at least, was an era of peace and



King Arthur holding his famous sword, Excalibur, as depicted on a French tapestry

prosperity. But, although little is known about him historically, many legends grew up around him and his knights. Sometimes these legends are contradictory.

How did King Arthur's life begin? His father was Utha Pendragon, a good and just king, beloved by his people, for they knew great peace and prosperity during his reign. He had an advisor: Merlin, a mysterious sage and magician. The queen died young and in his old age he married again. His wife, Igraine, bore him a son who was later to become King Arthur. Merlin prophesied that King Utha Pendragon would die soon and that his little son, the hope of the kingdom, would be in danger. Powerful princes and knights would try to kill him and take over the country. Merlin offered to take the baby Arthur to some place where he would be safe until he could look after himself. The King agreed and Merlin brought the baby Arthur to foster-parents in a secret place. We may be reminded of the story of Harry Potter, who was also taken away by a wise man after his parents had been murdered. He was brought to his uncle and aunt for safety. Harry Potter's foster parents were cruel to him, but Arthur's were noble and good, though, according to some traditions, his foster brother was jealous of him.

What Merlin had prophesied came to pass. King Utha Pendragon died and there was chaos: Rival nobles fought to gain power, whole villages were burnt down, many people were killed. After eighteen years of turmoil, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the Church in

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England, appealed to Merlin to choose a king under whom the people would at last live in peace. Merlin replied that soon the country would have a king who would be greater than Utha Pendragon. Moreover, this king was the son of Utha Pendragon. Everyone had thought that the boy was dead. The Archbishop asked how the people would recognize the boy who was to be king. In front of the cathedral, Merlin placed a block of marble, into which a sword was stuck, with the inscription: 'Whoever can pull the sword from this stone is the rightful king of Britain.'

All the nobles in the kingdom were summoned to London to a tournament. Many knights and nobles came and pitched their tents, some very splendid, some more modest. Among them was a certain Ector of Bonmaison, or Sir Egbert, who had two sons. The older one was his own son, Kay, who was already a knight, and his younger son, a foster son, was Arthur, who was Kay's squire.

On the three days before Christmas the tournament took place, during which the knights fought against each other in mock battles to prove who was bravest, strongest, and most skilled. Sir Kay also took part and was successful in throwing several knights from their horses, but the blade of his sword broke off from the hilt, and he asked his squire, Arthur, to fetch him another sword. Arthur could not find a sword in their tent, but he saw the sword in the stone before the cathedral and easily pulled it out without realizing what he had done and that this meant he was the

rightful king. He brought the sword to his brother. However, his father recognized the sword. Kay lied and said he had pulled it out from the stone. But Kay's father was suspicious and told him to put the sword back into the stone and to pull it out again. Kay thought he could do so easily, but it proved impossible for him. Arthur asked to be allowed to try. His father enquired what right he had to do so and he answered that he had pulled the sword out of the stone in the first place. He easily put it back and drew it out again.

To Arthur's horror, his foster father knelt down before him and explained that he must be the son of Utha Pendragon and that he was the rightful king. Arthur wept and said he had lost a father, as Sir Egbert was not after all his real father. He is said to have added: 'I would rather have you for father than be a king.' Merlin then appeared and confirmed that Arthur was Utha Pendragon's son and the rightful king.

The Archbishop summoned all the knights to the cathedral on Christmas morning and told them that he who could draw the sword from the stone would be crowned king. Many came to try, including twelve kings. They all failed. Then, in the presence of all, Arthur easily drew the sword from the stone and was recognized as High King. Most of the nobles paid homage to him, but some refused, including his own two step-brothers, sons of Utha Pendragon by his first wife, and they left in anger. Arthur's coronation took place at Easter. His first task was to overcome the nobles who

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had rebelled against him and who now threatened the kingdom.

Arthur was a true king in his bravery and his dedication but also in his modesty and his mercifulness. But he had human weaknesses, such as jealousy and the tendency to listen to advice from the wrong people, who took advantage of his weaknesses and made him fight against his best friends. This was in part what led to the end of the Round Table.

After Arthur's death, it was said that he only slept and that some day he would rise again to serve his people. There are similar legends about other great rulers, for example, the German Emperor Barbarossa. This may refer to some future incarnation of great rulers. It may remind us of avatāra-s such as Śrī Kṛṣṇa who said that, whenever unrighteousness prevailed, he would incarnate to help the world.

It had been prophesied that, when the Holy Grail was found, this would be the end of the Round Table: 'When the Holy Grail is found, then the end of the Round Table will be near, but its fame will not be forgotten until the end of the world.'

It was mentioned that another of the duties of the Knights of the Round Table was to seek for the Holy Grail. The Holy Grail was said to be a chalice or cup supposed to contain the blood of Christ when He was crucified and to possess spiritual healing power. In a deeper sense, the Grail may mean the vessel containing the Divine, the One Life, or the vessel of God.

Only three of the knights were chosen to seek for the Holy Grail. They were

knights who had proved themselves by fulfilling the first duties of the knight: defending the weak and fighting against injustice and cruelty. Only they were fit to seek the Holy Grail. The three knights involved were Sir Galahad, whose duty it was to find the Holy Grail, and who, in finding it, passed on to a higher life; Sir Percival (also known in German as Parsifal), who was destined to become the Grail King, the Keeper of the Grail; and Sir Bors, who was to return to the world in order to spread the message of the Holy Grail.

These three, with no idea of fame or personal honour, set out, sometimes together, sometimes separately, to seek the Holy Grail, not knowing if their search would ever end, if they would ever find the Grail, or where to seek it. Although they often strayed from the path due to their weaknesses — certain temptations being difficult to resist — they finally succeeded. Their attitude is clear from the following quotations:

They did not know whether they were chosen to find the Grail and it did not worry them . . . It was enough for them to know that they had been given that duty. They did not worry about how their search would end. (*King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*, translated from the German, p. 312)

(Sir Galahad to King Arthur:) My Lord, your court is wonderful, but I cannot stay. A horse is waiting for me outside. I do not know where it will take me and I do not ask to know. A duty awaits me and

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I must do that duty. I may not think of my own wishes. (idem, p. 289)

He (Sir Galahad) helped those who were oppressed and persecuted and went on his way before they could thank him. (idem, p. 300)

The story of Percival is very interesting and can perhaps be treated in a separate article (see p. 343 of the present issue). When his father was killed, his mother, Queen Herzeloide, sick of bloodshed, retired to a lonely spot in the forest to bring up her son, who was still a baby, in ignorance of the outside world and above all of fighting and knighthood. But Percival had *kshatriya* blood in his veins and finally found his way to the court of King Arthur and, having proved his valour, was knighted. However, he was still ignorant of many things and made many mistakes, losing the first opportunity given him to fulfil his dharma

and earn the right to become the Keeper of the Holy Grail — an opportunity which recurred only much later, after numerous adventures.

Many lessons can be learned from the tales of King Arthur and his knights. None of us is perfect. King Arthur made mistakes, Percival made mistakes and lost opportunities. We all make mistakes and lose opportunities. But it is through them that we learn. We also see from the saga of the Round Table how times of suffering sometimes alternate with times of relative peace and prosperity.

The duties of a knight also contain lessons for us: to fight against injustice and lack of compassion, also in our own hearts, and to defend those who are weaker than others and who are oppressed. Only when we learn those lessons and live to benefit all can we go in search of the Holy Grail and find it — in our own hearts. ✧

The clouds are broken in the sky,
And thro' the mountain-walls
A rolling organ-harmony
Swells up, and shakes and falls.
Then move the trees, the copses nod,
Wings flutter, voices hover clear:
'O just and faithful knight of God!
Ride on! the prize is near.'
So pass I hostel, hall, and grange;
By bridge and ford, by park and pale,
All-arm'd I ride, whate'er betide,
Until I find the holy Grail.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Blavatsky at Adyar — From her Letters

ADELE ALGEO

ON 23 April 1882, the Founders arrived by ship at Madras, where they met T. Subba Row and a number of other persons prominent in the area. They included Sir T. Madhava Rao, in whose Mylapore bungalow the Founders were housed, and Judge G. Muthuswamy Chetty and his sons, G. Soobiah Chetty and G. Narasimhulu Chetty. Three days later, Colonel Olcott lectured to a large crowd on ‘The Common Foundation of Religions’, with Madame Blavatsky on the platform beside him. The following evening, 27 April, the Madras Lodge of the Theosophical Society was formed, and Theosophy became a formal part of the Madras scene.

After travelling here and there in the area during most of May, the Founders returned to Madras, where on 31 May Soobiah Chetty and his brother took them to see a piece of property they recommended as a new headquarters site for the Theosophical Society: Huddleston’s Gardens. The Hudleston family (the name had various spellings) had lived in India for three generations, serving in various governmental capacities. The first of the line in India, John Hudleston (1749-1835), had been granted property south of the

Adyar River in the late 1780s, on which he built a country or ‘garden’ house. His grandson, Colonel Josiah Hudleston, decided to return to England, so arranged to sell the twenty-seven-acre property, containing a large house, two cottages, and other facilities.

Soobiah had earlier suggested that the Society locate its headquarters somewhere in Madras. At first, Colonel Olcott was not enthusiastic, but at HPB’s suggestion, they proposed a Madras site to the local Lodge, which supported the idea. When they saw the Huddleston’s Gardens property, HPB declared, ‘Master wants this purchased’ (*Adyar Notes and News*, 9 August 1928, pp. 5-6). Olcott (*Old Diary Leaves* 2:360) writes that ‘at the first glance [we] knew that our future home was found’. The price of Rs 8,500, or about £600, even allowing for the inflation since that time, was reasonable, so the Founders agreed to the purchase, which was arranged by Iyaloo Naidu and Judge Muthuswamy Chetty.

On 17 November (exactly seven years after the founding of the Theosophical Society in New York City), the sale was completed when Judge Muthuswamy Chetty paid the outstanding funds due,

Mrs Adele Algeo is a long-standing active member of the Theosophical Society in America.

Blavatsky at Adyar — From her Letters

and the title to the property passed to the Theosophical Society. After the annual Convention, held at Bombay in early December, the Founders left for Madras, arriving there on 19 December. And so the transfer of the Society's headquarters was effected. Adyar was HPB's primary home from that date until she left India on 31 March 1885, although she travelled around India a good deal during that time and spent most of 1884 (ten months from 20 February to 21 December) outside of India on a trip to Europe.

HPB's correspondence, especially during her early residence at Adyar, contains a number of references to the new site. Shortly after arriving from Bombay, she wrote her aunt Nadyezhda (who was only a few years older than she):

It is just wonderful here! what air! What nights! And what marvellous quiet! There is none of the city bustle and street yells. I am sitting down and writing, and gaze over the ocean, sparkling and shoreless, as if alive, truly. It often seems to me that it breathes, or becomes angry, roaring and writhing about in wrath But when it is quiet and gentle, there is no more enchanting beauty in the world, especially on a moonlit night. Against the deep dark-blue sky, the moon appears here to be twice its size and ten times brighter than your European little mother-of-pearl ball. (ca. 20 Dec. 1882)

Shortly thereafter she wrote to a friend in the Russian military and government, Prince Alexander M. Dondukov-Korsakov. The opening sentence refers

to the just-completed move, while the rest of the letter is full of light-hearted banter and personal chat:

My Prince,

As you see, I am writing from the new castle where we, i.e., the Theosophical Society (27 people), have become domiciled. I nearly went mad, after celebrating for 3 weeks our *Anniversary* and moving the whole household 1,000 miles to here. (25 Dec. 1882)

In mid-January of the following year, Olcott and Blavatsky wrote a letter to some unnamed Westerners, probably Englishmen, who had sent a donation. The letter was probably written by Olcott, but as both signed it and it gives some information about early days at Adyar, the first three paragraphs are given here:

Dear Sirs and Brothers,

We have received with joyful feelings your joint letter of St Nicholas' eve, enclosing a gift of 12 odd shillings towards the promotion of our cause. We hope you will approve of the disposition that will be made of it, viz., the making of it the nest egg of a Fund for the purchase of a permanent headquarters for the Society. For your gift will be thus made the cornerstone of a monument that we hope may outlast us all.

Our Society has now been in existence seven years and more, yet has never owned a home of its own. It has been paying rent to landlords, enough to have bought and paid for a permanent abiding place. We

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have now taken this property a purchase; two good Hindu brothers have advanced the entire cost, and we are just going to invite a few friends who have the money to spare to subscribe the sum of Rs 20,000 (a little more than \$8,000) to pay off the debt, make necessary repairs and improvements, etc. We shall head it with a little subscription of Rs 500 by ourselves. We hope to secure an endowment fund such as other Societies have — from the income of which the work can be maintained without so heavy a drain on our purses. (Since December 1, 1878, we two have given over Rs 30,000 towards the expenses of the TS).

So you see our progress is highly satisfactory, and the results we looked forward to at the beginning are now showing themselves in a rapid extension of the Society and acceptance of its ideas. We have stirred the Asiatic mind and heart beyond a doubt, and were we two to die tomorrow we should be able to do so in the full assurance that we had not laboured in vain. (14 Jan. 1883)

As HPB settled into life at Adyar, she naturally wrote less about the new venue and turned her attention to more general matters. However, in midsummer of her first year there, she wrote again to Prince Dondukov-Korsakov, this time complaining about the heat at Adyar, which was even then, more than a century ago, a trial to be endured:

I have just received two letters from you, my dear Prince, and I am only able to answer you today, for I have been twice submitted to the torments of Job, so to speak, thanks to a heat that is enough to kill one and because of what by us is called 'heat boils' but what, in the more elegant terms used here, is called 'prickly heat', during which one can neither sit, write, move nor sleep. (7 Aug. 1883)

Writing again to Prince Dondukov-Korsakov in early 1884, HPB gives a glimpse into the economy practised at Adyar:

Perhaps you will find it strange that I have not a single penny. At the headquarters of our Society no one is allowed to regard the money as his own — it is placed in a common fund. We are 37 people who are working together night and day; both the expenses and the incomes are in common, and no one is allowed to spend a penny on himself. (15 Jan. 1884)

The few extracts cited above give some impression of HPB's view of life at Adyar. Of course during this period, she wrote much else in the letters from which these extracts come, as well as many other letters, but they are concerned with Theosophical teachings, international problems, and personal matters, rather than with the headquarters compound at Adyar. These other letters are intensely interesting, but their general dissemination will have to await the publication of succeeding volumes of *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*. ✧

Wagner's *Parsifal* (Part I)

ALAN SENIOR

Introduction

Richard Wagner's *Parsifal* has, since it was first produced in July 1882, been subjected to a great deal of criticism, even ridicule, though the composer regarded it as his finest conception next to *The Ring*, referring to it as a 'Sacred Drama'. Friedrich Nietzsche termed it 'Christianity arranged for Wagnerians' (but he showed his appreciation elsewhere, as we will see). H. P. Blavatsky, who would never see it performed, was very scathing in her comments, calling it 'childish in the extreme'. (*H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, IV, p. 328)

Recently, a judge in Miami came up with a novel way to punish offenders who play their car stereos too loudly — he sentences them to a night at the opera! Judge Swartz never chooses the opera specifically to fit the crime, in which case, he says, he would prescribe rigorous Wagnerian doses of retributive discomfort, misery, and boredom such as *Parsifal*. Unfortunately, that is the view of countless numbers of people who have never given Wagner a fair hearing, such as Mark Twain who once remarked: 'I've been told that Wagner's music is better than it sounds.'

Others have picked up on the composer's notorious racism, seeing *Parsifal* and its theme of purity as 'a tract about Aryan purity with the Grail Knights as forerunners of Hitler's stormtroopers', even though they are monks, not soldiers; and there certainly are not any hints of militarism in the music (no 'Horst Wessel Song' is to be found in the score). Again, some feminists perceive the female character Kundry as half crazy, half seductress — sadly, many men's idea of the perfect woman. However, in this series of articles I hope to show that these critics have all 'missed the mark' and that the music-drama — Wagner's grandest, most radiant composition — provides us with a wealth of esoteric teaching. It has been said, and I do not know how true it is, that more books have been written about Wagner than any other human being in history, with the exception of Jesus Christ and Napoleon Bonaparte. Amongst those scholarly works, only a few explore in detail the esoteric content of his music-dramas, and even fewer mention his plans for a six-year esoteric musical training school or attempt to explain the deeper, occult meanings to be found in *Parsifal*.

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We will begin by looking at Wagner's sources. The major Grail romances were written during the late 12th and 13th centuries. No cohesive Holy Grail 'story' has emerged but here is a basic outline:

A mysterious vessel that sustains life is guarded in a castle that is difficult to find. The owner of the castle is either lame or sick and often the surrounding land is barren. The owner can be cured only if a knight finds the castle and, after seeing a mysterious procession, asks a certain question. If he fails in this task, everything will remain as before and the search must begin again. After wanderings and adventures (many of which relate to events which the young hero fails to understand the first time), the knight returns to the castle and asks the question which cures the king and restores the land. The hero knight succeeds the wounded king as guardian of the castle and its contents.

Wolfram von Eschenbach wrote his famous *Parzival* epic poem in about 1205 — perhaps for a crusader patron, perhaps for some noble lady — and he depicts the Grail as a precious stone fallen from Heaven, which can be thought of as the ego-consciousness or the awakening of the mind-principle in humanity's evolution. Wolfram believed that the Grail and most symbols function best if remaining largely undefined, with different people identifying with them in different ways; so in this work there is no mention of the Grail being the chalice used to collect Christ's blood. The Grail may also be associated with the Philosopher's Stone in alchemical writings. The Scottish

Stone of Destiny is likewise one of many kinds of special stones with associated beliefs; Scotland's legendary Brahan Seer, for example, was able to view the future through a hole in one such stone supposedly given to him by the fairies.

So there is considerable variety in the different versions of the legend but in all of them the Grail is a mystical, magical object — whether a golden platter, a cauldron (which in Celtic tales provided endless bounty), a jewelled chalice, or a sacred stone. The cauldron of plenty is also similar to the vessel of the ancient Eleusinian mysteries celebrated near Athens, when whoever drank from it easily reached Bradhna, or the place of splendour (Heaven). Another cup of transcendence is associated with the Vedic Soma, an initiatory drink which led to divine gnosis or illumination. Others believe that the land itself is a kind of Grail, involving sacred sites such as Iona and Glastonbury in Britain.

When the Grail became the cup taken by Joseph of Arimathea to catch the blood of Christ at the Crucifixion, the whole meaning changed, in Wagner's words, into 'Grail consciousness' — the divine Self or *ātmā-buddhi*, purified and redeemed. Now the chalice became the most powerful symbol of purity, the final goal for those on the spiritual path. Von Eschenbach brought in the Knights Templar as the only ones worthy to be guardians of the Grail, and later versions, influenced by the Cistercian Abbot St Bernard of Clairvaux (a founder of the Templars), presented the Grail Quest as a

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search for a mystical union with God. Knowledge, pure love, and sacrifice are the attributes inherent in the soul, finding their objective counterpart in the Grail legend. So the Grail dispenses bodily strength and gnosis on its guardians — inner knowing leading to dedication, devotion, humility, and self-sacrifice. The story becomes nothing less than an initiatory quest for the inner Self, to make us complete, integrated, and able to restore the balance sorely needed in today's fragmented world. The realm of the Grail is not a location in time or space, and the Grail itself is not an earthly object but something spiritual within every human being, the fountain of life. To attain this ever-changing Grail is to search deep within and so reach out on a personal path to the Godhead.

Meanwhile, psychologists and some poets often think of the wounded King and the desolate wasteland around him as a metaphor of the lack of balance in our civilization between the masculine and the feminine — a symbol of the missing or neglected Divine Feminine in Western culture. Women are definitely portrayed as Grail bearers in the legends, so the restoration of the feminine in our collective unconscious is an important goal for everyone in Western civilization today. Again, are our wars and increasing environmental damage, climate change, etc., analogous to a spiritual wasteland? Can we restore our polluted and desecrated earth or is it too late? The world's leading politicians are asking that very question right now and it can only be

done with a concerted effort by every nation on earth. Have we the collective will to do so? If we succeed, it could lead to a truly united planet and the raising of consciousness in a divided humanity.

The Music-Drama

Richard Wagner was planning to write two music-dramas early in his career: *Jesus of Nazareth* in the 1840s and *The Victors*, finally sketched in 1856 and set in India at the time of the last journey of the Buddha before his final enlightenment. Neither work was completed but elements of the two appear in *Parsifal*, with the pure Ānanda (hero of *The Victors*) becoming 'the guileless fool' Parsifal. Ānanda is said to be the name of Gautama's favourite disciple (if, indeed, favouritism was possible in someone approaching enlightenment) and the name means 'bliss', 'joy', or 'happiness'. The heroine was to have been called Prakriti — in Indian philosophy the originating matter, the source and basis of the substance-side of the manifested universe. She and Mary Magdalene in the unrealized *Jesus of Nazareth* were blended together in the character of Kundry in *Parsifal*, signifying this occult principle of matter. There is also a reference to her previous incarnations when the leading knight Gurnemanz says: 'She lives here now, perhaps reincarnated to expiate some sin from an earlier life. . . . Now she makes atonement by such deeds as benefit our Order. . . serving us and thereby helping herself.'

Wagner believed that conventional

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opera had become degraded and facile — ‘shallow entertainment, mere theatrical spectacle’ as he put it. He also felt that Art — poetry, painting and, above all, music — was a truer interpreter of the soul than the church or state could ever be, penetrating far beyond any dogmas. With these beliefs in mind he was determined to turn things around, to re-invent opera as a serious art-form. He looked back to the time of the ancient Greek dramas, sensing that through his new concept of the music-drama he would be able to point the way to the music of the future and even bring society to an understanding of itself.

We can see from the projected music-drama *The Victors* that Wagner was an earnest student of Buddhism, as outlined in his letters which show that he had the idea of Nirvāna in mind when composing *Tristan und Isolde*, which is also a drama of initiation and awakening to full self-consciousness. Wagner even drafted a Buddhist ending for *The Ring*, with Brunnhilde attaining Nirvāna, but he eventually replaced it. To his close friend and probably one-time mistress, Mathilde Wesendonck, he wrote, ‘I have involuntarily become a Buddhist’, and on another occasion he says:

Only the profoundly conceived idea of Reincarnation could give me any consolation since that belief shows how all at last can reach complete redemption. According to this beautiful Buddhist belief, the spotless purity of Lohengrin finds a simple explanation in the fact that he is the continuation of Parsifal, who had to fight for his purity. Even

so, Elsa in her rebirth would reach to the height of Lohengrin. . . . Thus all the terrible tragedy of life is seen to be nothing but the sense of Separateness in Time and Space.’

Wagner had first become acquainted with Buddhism in his twenties, whilst staying with his brother-in-law, a Sanskrit scholar and teacher. We know that he was also familiar with the Freemasons, with whom he entered into fierce debate, and knew some Rosicrucians. In his Bayreuth library there are translations of the Upanishad-s and the *Mahābhārata*, both published in his lifetime, together with Adolf Holtzmann’s *Indische Sagen* (Stuttgart, 1854) and Eugène Burnouf’s monumental *Introduction à l’Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien* (Paris, 1844). But it was Wagner’s discovery of the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer in 1854 that changed his life and his understanding of the universe, largely through the book, *The World as Will and Representation*. Schopenhauer also argues in a minor work that compassion is the only basis of morality, and he provided Wagner with a list of books on Oriental religions, one of which — the Burnouf — became the basis of his sketch for *The Victors*. But both Wagner and Schopenhauer seem to have had some difficulty in understanding the difference between metempsychosis (as taught by Pythagoras, Plato, and the Brāhmins) and palingenesis, the more subtle Buddhist doctrine.* But in *Parsifal* Wagner focuses on ‘insight through compassion’ (essential in Buddhism and Christianity) and references to Parsifal’s purity in his letters

Wagner's *Parsifal* (Part I)

show that he believed it can be achieved through karmic merit via countless past lives (spoken of when Parsifal in Act I talks of his many names, now forgotten).

Following the legend, Wagner consulted three sources: *Percival le Galois* or *Contes de Grail* by Chrétien de Troyes (1190); *Parsifal* by Wolfram von Eschenbach (already mentioned and derived from an older, pre-Christian tradition with Oriental connections); and a 14th century Welsh manuscript called the *Mabinogion*, in which Peredur (the Celtic Percival) 'pierces the Veil', becoming aware through second sight of unseen realms. But Wagner adopted the more Teutonic form of spelling and combined all three versions in his allegorical plot. He had felt the first impulse to write *Parsifal* at the age of thirty-one, when he read von Eschenbach's work. The first sketch dates from 1857, but it was not until 1877 that the text was completed and published in book form; the music took another five years to complete. He described it not only as a 'Sacred Drama' but as a 'Stage Festival' or 'Consecration' and refused to allow its performance outside the theatre at Bayreuth, his 'Grail Temple'.

Wagner had realized that the legend contains some of the deepest, most profound spiritual truths for the advancement of humanity. He kept all realistic elements to a minimum and, in keeping with the knowledge that all myths, legends, and allegories lie beyond time and space, he has the leading knight Gurnemanz say: 'Here, time becomes space.' In this

mythical time some of the characters are ageless and there is no need for a specific locale. Following Mystery Temple tradition, *Parsifal* is divided into three Degrees — Preparation, Purification, and Perfection — and it also has links with the three Masonic Degrees of Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master. Alas, a critic at the time described it as midway between mass and orgy, and the 'heady mix' of religious symbolism and myth has always made it the most difficult of his works to interpret. Yet few can fail to be uplifted by the final scene, with its enormous sense of completion, fulfilment, and optimism, whereby a new hope of redemption through compassion is held out to the world. And if ever compassion and spiritual illumination were needed, it is surely now in our strife-torn world.

Parsifal is a name familiar to those who have heard *Lohengrin*, for he is Parsifal's (Percival's) son and a knight of the Holy Grail in that work. The name comes from the Arabian 'Parseh-fal' meaning 'the guileless fool' and he is a young man with a background of seclusion and little learning, but displaying simplicity, bravery, and inner strength, responding like the Buddha to suffering in the outside world. We are also reminded of St Paul's teaching in First Corinthians that 'the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God' (1:20), and he adds: 'If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.' (3:18)

The Grail was also the subject of

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songs by the troubadours, preserved during the Dark Ages — an esoteric tradition telling of Joseph of Arimathea's safeguarding of the cup and the holy Spear that had pierced Christ's side as he hung on the cross. But this sacred Vessel, for Wagner, typified the fountain of spiritual life, the divine love that quickens and redeems the world, and is to be found as far back as the Vedic hymns. The quest for the Grail, then, is the striving to achieve purification and union with this source of one's life. As we indicated, the legend of a special cup, or cauldron, also goes back to Druidic times, such as the story told by the ancient Celtic poet, Taliesin, of the Mysteries of the Cauldron of Ceridwen, the Great Mother Goddess and Celtic equivalent of Demeter and Isis of the Greek and Egyptian Mysteries. This vessel gave poetic inspiration, wisdom, prophecy, and resurrection whereby those restored to life were sworn to secrecy and never permitted to divulge its mysteries.

The wine or blood in such containers, therefore, is the *Ātmā* (divine knowledge), and the cup, *Buddhi* (the intuition or discrimination principle) which serves as a vessel for *Ātmā*. Parsifal is himself *Buddhi* in its emerging aspect, and the whole story is concerned with individual spiritual experiences of initiation and the restoration of a Spiritual Brotherhood. At the time of composition Wagner said:

I am being used as the instrument for something higher than my own being warrants. . . . While working on the score, I have had many wonderful and ex-

hilarating experiences in that invisible realm. I believe that universal vibrating energy links us to the supreme force of the Universe, of which we are all a part.

The 'official' Church of clerics and bishops had little or no significance for both von Eschenbach and Wagner, and they seemed to favour instead the lofty ideals of genuine knighthood. It is noticeable that Wagner never wrote any church music — masses, passions, requiems, or cantatas. He felt that it was up to art to save the spirit of religion by revealing deeper, veiled truths that he found in Buddhist philosophy, the Upanishad-s and the *Mahābhārata*. Music, he wrote, would rescue the soul of religion, whilst mystical symbols found in myths, legends, and allegories, which lie beyond time and space, reveal profound truths and provide an evaluation of sanctity, compassion, holiness, and redemption without theological beliefs. With Wagner, every objective or subjective idea assumed a musical form, the origin of the leitmotif which is always short, simple and easily recognized, but used with infinite modifications, either in rhythm, harmonization, instrumentation, augmentation, or inversion.

The whole score of *Parsifal* is derived from the first sublime, ethereal motif of the Eucharist heard in the Prelude that begins the music-drama. Blocks of music suggest contrasts of feeling without specific application, combination, or interaction, and the Eucharist, Grail, Faith, and Elegiac motifs are all designed to induce in us calmness and perfect

Wagner's *Parsifal* (Part I)

repose — free from all exterior preoccupations but including a vague sense of mystery. I think, on hearing it, we can echo Friedrich Nietzsche (who, you will remember, was not without criticism of the work) when, deeply moved by it, he remarked:

Has Wagner ever written anything better?

Has any painter ever depicted so sorrowful a look of love as Wagner does in the final accents of this Prelude? God gave us music so that we, first and foremost, will be guided upward by it. . . . Its main purpose is to lead our thoughts upwards, so that it elevates us. Life without music is an error.

(To be continued)

* See 'Richard Wagner's Letter to Mathilde – Reincarnation and Karma' by Derrick Everett (Monsalvat: the Parsifal Home Page on the Internet).

Every human organ and each cell in the latter has a keyboard of its own, like that of a piano, only that it registers and emits sensations instead of sounds. Every key contains the potentiality of good or bad, of producing harmony or disharmony. . . ; but every Theosophist must understand when told that there are Mānasic as well as Kāmic organs in him, although the cells of his body answer to both physical and spiritual impulses.

Verily that body, so desecrated by Materialism and man himself, is the temple of the Holy Grail, the *Adytum* of the grandest, nay, of all, the mysteries of Nature in our solar universe. That body is an Aeolian harp, chorded with two sets of strings, one made of pure silver, the other of catgut. When the breath from the divine Fiat brushes softly over the former, man becomes like unto *his* God — but the other set feels it not. It needs the breeze of a strong terrestrial wind, impregnated with animal effluvia, to set its animal chords vibrating. It is the function of the physical, lower mind to act upon the physical organs and their cells; but it is the higher mind *alone* which can influence the atoms interacting in those cells, which interaction is alone capable of exciting the brain, *via the spinal 'centre' cord*, to a mental representation of spiritual ideas far beyond any objects on this material plane. The phenomena of divine consciousness have to be regarded as activities of our mind on another and a higher plane, working through something less substantial than the moving molecules of the brain. They cannot be explained as the simple resultant of the cerebral physiological process, as indeed the latter only condition them or give them a final form for purposes of concrete manifestation. Occultism teaches that the liver and the spleen cells are the most subservient to the action of our 'personal' mind, the heart being the organ *par excellence* through which the 'Higher' Ego acts — through the Lower Self.

H. P. Blavatsky

Seek Out the Way

(Convention Symposium Talk, Adyar, 27 December 2007)

DUSAN ZAGAR

EVERY human being wishes to be happy and safe, but sooner or later one realizes that there is no real happiness in this world of material wealth. Many seek happiness by making money and accumulating material things, by competing with one another, and so on. They might be happy for some time, but such so-called happiness never lasts long, and the struggle begins again and again.

How can we find the way out of this misery? What would be the first step? We need enthusiasm and *viveka*, or discernment.

H. P. Blavatsky told us that motive is all-important. So we should ask ourselves: Why are we seeking the way? Is it only for ourselves? Is it in order to escape from the misery of everyday life, or is it because of the Path itself and for all beings in sorrow and suffering?

In the beautiful booklet *Meditations on the path and its qualifications* compiled from the works of Annie Besant, we read:

In looking over the world sunk in ignorance, and on men struggling amidst its coils, then it is that the hearts of the

men who are to be the Saviours of mankind feel the misery of the world, and this inspires them to seek for the Path of liberation.

To relieve the suffering of humanity is the only right motive in the life of men who wish to tread the Path. The right motive will be the right first step. If the first step is wrong, then the last step will also be wrong. Going in the right direction is the most important thing.

As written in the same booklet: 'The first step of all, without which no approach is possible, . . . may be summed up in four brief words: the service of man.' We should not quickly pass over these words, because they are essential. They point in the right direction towards the goal, which is conscious union with the Divine. To be capable of real service we should cultivate sympathy and compassion, and learn to identify ourselves with the joys and sorrows of others and forget ourselves. But this is not an easy task.

Everyone can realize that constant practice in everyday life is necessary. The field of our practice is where we live — with our family, neighbours, colleagues,

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and so forth. The first thing is to do no violence (*ahimsā*) in thought, speech, and action. And, in order to do this, constant observation is necessary. All this is recommended to us by the great sages and teachers. To quote from the same booklet:

Everywhere let us be tender and patient, gentle and helpful with all. Do not let us in our daily path be harsh, so as to confuse, bewilder, and perplex others. There is enough sorrow in the world. Let the spiritual man be a source of comfort and of peace; let him be as a light in the world, so that all may walk more safely when they come within the circle of his influence.

These beautiful words speak for themselves. Our duty is only to comprehend them and then to put them into practice. But many times we only repeat these great truths, and that is all. This is a sign that we are not serious about seeking the way. If we do not grasp the teachings given, we cannot practise them, or we might go in the wrong direction.

The way is not outside us, it is within us. We are the way. It is our innermost divine Nature. And when we are serving spontaneously, unselfishly, our real divine light shines forth. If our motive is the right one, the right teachings will come to us, and if we are sincere, whole-hearted, we will comprehend them. Then right conduct and right living will follow, and the way will be found; in fact, we will be the way itself.

To summarize what has been said:

1st step: right motive

2nd step: to study the teaching given

3rd step: to grasp/to meditate upon the teaching

4th step: to live the teaching

Sometimes we think that we know a lot about the spiritual path if we have read many books about it, but how can we be sure that we have really grasped the teaching? In the Introduction to *Light on the Path*, it is said that only so far as a man lives the teaching, will he be really able to understand it. If he does not practise it, it will remain like a sealed book to him, and he will think of it as impractical and useless.

This is a very important instruction. It also means that we should stand on our own two feet, 'to be the disciples of the Truth and not to follow individuals', as Krishnamurti has said. 'Truth does not give hope,' he said, 'it gives understanding.' There are four qualifications for this pathway:

1. Discrimination (*viveka*);
2. Desirelessness (*vairāgya*);
3. Good Conduct (which includes self-control as to the mind and action, tolerance, cheerfulness, one-pointedness, and confidence); and
4. Love (the most important qualification)

We also need enthusiasm, which arises from a condition of deep interest.

If we would live the teaching, our hearts would slowly become full of love, which is the same as understanding

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others. To again quote the beautiful words of Annie Besant:

It is the heart of Love that is looked for by the Masters when They seek for pupils in the humanity of the time. . . so that in all the darkness of human selfishness, in the night of human struggle, that heart of Love glows out like a lamp in the darkness, and the Master sees it, and knows that a future disciple is there. . . .

There is no other way of turning towards the Path.

Let us end with an old prayer translated from the Sanskrit:

From the unreal
 Lead me to the Real.
From darkness
 Lead me to Light.
From death
 Lead me to Immortality. ✧

[There are] insurmountable difficulties in the way of attaining not only *Absolute* but even primary knowledge in Occult Science, for one situated as you are. How could you make yourself understood — *command* in fact, those semi-intelligent Forces, whose means of communicating with us are not through spoken words but through sounds and colours, in correlations between the vibrations of the two? For sound, light and colours are the main factors in forming these grades of Intelligences, these beings, of whose very existence you have no conception, nor *are you allowed* to believe in them — Atheists and Christians, materialists and Spiritualists, all bringing forward their respective arguments against such a belief — Science objecting stronger than either of these to such a ‘degrading superstition’!

Thus, because *they* cannot with one leap over the boundary walls attain to the pinnacles of Eternity; because *we* cannot take a savage from the centre of Africa and make him comprehend at once the *Principia* of Newton or the ‘Sociology’ of Herbert Spencer; or make an unlettered child write a new Iliad in old Achaian Greek; or an ordinary painter depict scenes in Saturn or sketch the inhabitants of Arcturus — *because of all this our very existence is denied!* Yes; for this reason are believers in us pronounced impostors and fools, and the very science which leads to the highest goal of the highest knowledge, to the real tasting of the Tree of Life and Wisdom — is scouted as a wild flight of Imagination!

KH

Theosophy as a Guide in Life

ANON

LET us see if the unfamiliar system known as 'Theosophy' possesses any qualities warranting its substitution for the religions around it. They have not reformed mankind; can It ?

Theosophy abolishes the cause of all of the sin, and most of the misery of life. That cause is selfishness. Every form of dishonesty, violence, outrage, fraud, even discourtesy, comes from the desire to promote one's own ends, even if the rights of others have to be sacrificed thereby. All aggression upon fellow-men, all attempts to appropriate their comfort, possessions, or plans, all efforts to belittle, outshine, or humiliate them, express the feeling that self-gratification is to be sought before all else. This is equally true of personal vices, as well as of that personal contempt for Divine authority which we may call 'impiety'. Hence the root of all evil conduct towards God, other men, or oneself is self-love, self-love so strong as to sacrifice everything rather than its own indulgence.

From this indulgence follow two things. First, the pains of envy, disappointment, jealousy, and all the mean and biting passions which attend the ever-present thought of self; and the utter

loss of all those finer, gentler joys which are the fruit of beneficence and altruism. Second, the restraining measures which society, for its own protection, is obliged to put upon aggression in its coarser forms — the workhouses, jails, and gibbets from which no land of civilization and churches is free. And if we wish to realize what would be the effect of a universal reign of unselfishness among men, we may picture a land without courts, prisons, and policemen, a society without speculation, chicanery, or deceit, a community whereof every heart was as vacant of envy and guile as it certainly would be of unhappiness and pain. The root of universal sorrow would be eradicated, the stream dried at its source.

Now this is what Theosophy enjoins. Its cardinal doctrine is the absolute equality of human rights and the universal obligation to respect them. If my neighbour's possessions — of feeling, property, happiness, what not — are as much to be regarded as are mine, and if I feel that, I shall not invade them. Still more. If I perceive the true fraternity of man, if I am in accord with the law of sympathy it evokes, if I realize that the richest pleasure comes from giving rather

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than receiving good, I shall not be passively unaggressive, I shall be actively beneficent. In other words, I shall be a true philanthropist. And in being this I shall have gained the highest reach of happiness to self, for 'he that loseth his life, the same shall save it'. You say that this is a Christian text? Very well; it is also the epitome of Theosophy.

Theosophy so tends ceaselessly the truth that every act of right or wrong shall receive its due reward. Most religious systems say otherwise. Usually they provide a 'vicarious' plan by which punishment is to be dodged and unearned bliss secured. But if awards may be transferred, so may duties, and thus chaos is introduced into the moral order of the universe. Moreover, the palpable injustices of human life, those injustices which grieve the loving heart and sting the bitter one, are unaccounted for. All the inequalities and paradoxes and uncertainties so thick around us are insoluble. Why evil flourishes and good withers may not be known. Night settles down on the most important of human questions.

Theosophy illuminates it at once. It insists that moral causes are no less effective than are physical, and that its due effect, in harm or benefit, is infallibly attached to every moral act. There is no escape, no loss, no uncertainty; the law is absolutely unflinching and irresistible. Every penny of debt must be paid, by or to the individual himself. Not by any means necessarily in one life, but somewhere and somehow along the great chain is rigorous justice done; for the

effect of causes generated on the moral plane may have to exhaust themselves in physical circumstances.

If unselfishness constitutes the method towards social regeneration, Karma — for such is the name of this doctrine of justice — must constitute its stimulus. Nothing fails — no good, no evil, can die without its fruit. The result of a deed is as certain as the deed. How can a system be unpractical when it abolishes every bar to the law of causation, and makes practice the key to its whole operation?

Theosophy holds that every man is the framer of his own destiny. All the theological apparatus of 'elections', and 'predestinations', and 'foreordinations' it breaks indignantly to bits. The semi-material theories of 'luck', and 'fate', and 'chance' fare no better. Every other theory which shifts responsibility or paralyses effort is swept away. Theosophy will have none of them. It insists that we can be only that which we have willed to be, that no power above or below will thwart or divert us, that our destiny is in our own hands. We may perceive the beauty of that conception of the future which embodies it in a restoration to the Divine fullness through continuous purgation of all that is sensuous and selfish and belittling, and, so perceiving, may struggle on towards that distant goal; or self-besotted, eager only for the transient and the material, we may hug closely our present joys, heedless alike of others and of Karmic law; but, whatever be the ideal, whatever the effort, whatever the result, it is ours alone.

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No Divinity will greet the conqueror as a favourite of Heaven; no Demon will seize the lost in a predestined clutch. What we are we have made ourselves; what we shall be is ours to make.

Here comes in the fact of Reincarnation. No one life is adequate to a man's development. Again and again must he come to earth, to taste its quality, to lay up its experience and its discipline, each career on earth determining the nature of its successor. Two things follow: first, our present state discloses what we have accomplished in past lives; second, our present habits decide what the next life shall be. The formative power is lodged in us; our aspiration prompting, our will effecting, the aim desired. Surely it is the perfection of fairness that every man shall be what he wishes to be!

Of all the many schemes for human melioration which history has recorded and humanity tried, is there one so rational, so just, so impartial, so elevating, so motived, as that presented by Theosophy? Artificial distinctions and conceptions are wholly expunged. Fanciful ambitions have absolutely no place. Mechanical devices are completely absent. The root of all separations and enmities — selfishness — is exposed and denounced. The inflexibility of moral law is vigorously declaimed. The realization of individual aim is made entirely individual. Thus sweeping away every artifice and annulling every check devised by theo-

logians, opening the path to the highest ideal of religious fervour, ensuring that not an item is lost in the long account each man runs up in his many lives, handing over to each the determination and the acquirement of his chosen aim, Theosophy does what no rival system has done or can do — affirms the moral consciousness, vindicates the moral sense, spurs the moral motive. And thus it is both practical and practicable.

Thus, too, it becomes a guide in life. Once given the aim before a man and the certainty that every act affects that aim, the question of the expediency of any act is at once determined. Is an act selfish, unfraternal, aggressive? It is then untheosophical. Is it conducive to unselfishness, spirituality, progress? Then Theosophy affirms it. The test is simple and uncomplicated, and, because so, feasible. He who would be guided through the intricacies of life need seek no priest or intercessor, but, illuminated with the Divine Spirit ever present in his inner man, stimulated by the vision of ultimate reunion with the Supreme, assured that each effort has its inseparately-joined result, conscious that in himself is the responsibility for its adoption, may go on in harmony, hope, and happiness, free from misgivings as to justice or success, and strong in the faith that he who has conformed to Nature and her laws shall be conformed to the destiny which she predicts for Man. ✧

A man is best when he is most himself.

Henry David Thoreau

Theosophical Work around the World

Marathi Federation — India

The Marathi Federation held a Study Camp in Pune from 10–13 May. The subject was *Freedom from the Known* by J. Krishnamurti. The international President, Mrs Radha Burnier, gave talks followed by discussion. Not all chapters were studied because of the limited time available, but particularly relevant ones were chosen. Important aspects were taken up, including the chapter on ‘The Observer and the Observed’, which is challenging for many students. About thirty-five participants, including members from Akot, Nagpur, and Malegaom, and of course members from the Pune Lodge attended.

Meals were served in a little tent at the premises of the Lodge itself, and this gave participants an opportunity to discuss and find the relevance of what was studied, and how to apply these teachings to various aspects of their lives.

Greece

Messages were received telephonically from Mr George Sivris about the problems of the Greek Section, and how they could be resolved. The outcome was that a new set of officers, including the new General Secretary, Mr Theodoros Katsifis, was elected, along with Mrs Erica Letzerich as secretary. An effort is being made to form the seven Lodges which are necessary to maintain the position of a Section.

Greece, of course, has a long and glorious past, and many important Western thinkers and philosophers, including Socrates, Plato, and Pythagoras, who taught people matters about the deeper mysteries of life, belonged to that culture. Greece has an extensive and special place in Western thought as a result of its being the European centre of philosophical and artistic expression; it is important to maintain these traditions.

Greek members feel the need to resurrect the Section and give it some of the fragrance of earlier times. Recently a study programme was held there by the European School of Theosophy. It is hoped that such programmes will be held regularly in the future so that Greece will become once again a strong and vibrant Section and a centre of new thought in Europe.

Australia

This Section’s annual convention was held during January in Adelaide, South Australia. The convention rotates to a different state every year due to the vast size of the country. The Guest Speaker this year was Dr Harry Oldmeadow, Associate Professor and Coordinator of Philosophy and Religious Studies, La Trobe University, Victoria. A new annual TS prize has been commenced in 2008 for the School of Philosophy and Religious Studies at this university, and is being awarded for undergraduate and

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postgraduate research into the perennial philosophy in its Eastern and Western traditions.

Dr Edi Bilimoria from the English Section undertook a tour of the Section for the first time in April, which was very well received and included nine TS centres. During this time he also led the morning study classes at the annual School of Theosophy on the theme 'Occult Science — Principles and Applications'. Recently, another event took place at the Section's Canyonleigh Centre in New South Wales, which is an annexe of the National Headquarters. The theme was 'Foundations of *The Secret Doctrine*: Exploring its Three Fundamental Propositions'.

Members continue to receive two study papers from the Section's Education Unit each year as well as a variety of books from the National Headquarters. The latest study paper, sent in March, was on the three fundamental propositions. It was accompanied by a copy for each

member of the book *Buddhist Meditation* by Ven. Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche.

Singapore

The Singapore Lodge, in the best possible manner, has followed the advice of Dr Annie Besant, who wrote in *The Theosophist* of March 1908, indicating that what a Master of the Wisdom had said in January 1888 served

as a trumpet call, summoning the Theosophical Society to take up its great role as the pioneer of humanity, which will be the mother of a new civilization, and to prepare to lay the foundations of the civilization in a way worthy of future master-builders.

Dr Besant had felt that the Theosophical movement must go in front of the socialist movement, and founded the Theosophical Order of Service to carry out ideals which the Society inspired. Singapore Lodge has accepted this challenge in its centennial year. ✧

OFFICIAL NOTICE

CONVENTION 2008

In accordance with Rule 46 of the Rules and Regulations of the Theosophical Society, the Executive Committee has determined that the 133rd international Convention of the Theosophical Society will be held at the international Headquarters, Adyar, Chennai, India, from 26 to 31 December 2008.

Mary Anderson
International Secretary