

# On the Watch-Tower

RADHA BURNIER

## **The Mind is the Slayer of the Real**

Let us observe the mind at work. It is one thing to hear a statement and vaguely believe it, and another thing to discover its meaning for oneself. But there must be complete objectivity and honesty, without prevarication of any kind.

There is a sort of mirroring in the impure mind of activities of the cosmic mind, which has two aspects. One is concealment of what truly is, and the other is incompleteness. Manifestation is a sort of revelation of the truth, and at the same time an incomplete or imperfect revelation, which obscures the totality of the truth.

At lower levels of existence the veil over consciousness is thicker because consciousness functions through various kinds of matter, subtle and less subtle. The other aspect is the throwing up of images which gives a false picture of what is. It is like the mind imagining a picture of a snake when the eyes see only a rope. We cover up the aspects of existence which we do not want to see, because of personal likes and dislikes, prejudices, and other previous conditions of our mind, which become thoughts. It is very important to perceive for ourselves that in almost all our judgements, conclusions and opinions this is happening. That is why the wise

advise: 'Do not judge', because we do not know. Our conclusions about anybody or anything are bound to be false. They represent our mental projection of what is. When we say such and such a person is like this, it is just a sort of imagination, or fancy. But the mind's nature is such that it wants to assert the validity of its own projections and images, its personal evaluation of things.

We all have the idea that our opinion represents the fact, or even the truth; that when we make a judgement our mind is truly assessing the nature of things. That is a very strong feeling in the mind and is perhaps the nature of the mind; but we deceive ourselves by believing this. This is why the teaching given, at least from time to time, upon the attitude, 'I do not know'. I think I know but I do not know. I do not know what my close friend is really like, although I see the outer appearance. I come to some conclusions and judgements on the basis of certain experiences, but the whole thing amounts to nothing. It does not correspond to what is deeply within that individual. As Krishnaji often said, the image we have created is in our own mind, created by the imagination, the picture-making capacity of the mind. It is constantly 'slaying the

## The Theosophist

real'. We should grasp this, not mentally, but actually. If at least to some extent we can realize this, it is a good beginning. It is different from what we call thinking which is generally what somebody else has said.

We may know how a motor car works, or how to invest our money in the stock market; all that has nothing to do with the inner life, the spiritual unfoldment which has to take place. So we need not count that as knowledge at all. But if we think of knowledge which is worthwhile from the point of view of the Path, we really do not know a thing. When the mind has an attitude of recognizing its own limitations, it qualifies to receive knowledge; as long as it thinks it knows, it is erecting a wall through which truth cannot get reflected.

This is also very well known from Socrates and Indian sages: the man who realizes he does not know is the one who knows. He who thinks he knows is the ignorant person. So we must have an open mind. When we say 'a clean life, an open mind' we must be aware that the mind needs to be open at various levels, not just at the mental or intellectual level. It must be open to the inner nature of things. A person may have contact with us every day of our lives, but we do not know what that person is in reality. That is so in regard to almost everything of which we can think.

### The Mind and Its Habits

The mind believes only in what comes to it through the body. It becomes entangled with the sensory perceptions of

the body. In Theosophical books it has been pointed out that even in regard to the physical world we know very little because we see very little of it. This seems an astounding thing but it is a fact. We see solids and liquids, but we cannot see existence in a gaseous form except occasionally. We see vapour, we see perhaps some fumes of a gas occasionally; but there are gases all around us, and our instruments of perception are quite unaware. We accept their existence, because there are certain effects which are caused by their presence, and therefore we say they exist. But according to the esoteric philosophy there are other subtle levels of the physical world.

Forms are first created according to the person's karma, or in the shape of plants, flowers, or whatever it is, by the devas who are given the duty of moulding forms. The etheric body is called the etheric double, because the baby's form exists first at the etheric level and then comes into existence at the lower physical levels, where we are able to perceive it. All the time, that subtler counterpart of the physical existence is associated with what we perceive with our senses. A few people always talk about it, but most materialists (and the world is largely made up of materialists) do not accept it. They cannot explain what energy comes from, and how it keeps the body in health and in a living state.

All energy is the one energy, the energy of the Reality or the sun which is not the physical sun. It passes into the physical body only through that counterpart which

## On the Watch-Tower

is called the etheric body. It is the channel through which *prāna* flows, but we do not see it. When going to graveyards, the more sensitive people see a ghost or two hanging around. That is because the etheric body takes a little more time to disintegrate after the physical body. Sometimes it happens that when a person dies, a daughter, or somebody who has been close to the dead person, sees that person from a great distance. He or she appears alive, and there are many cases of these sightings. I remember one of our members who lived in Agra, and when her mother died in Benares, she saw her mother and telephoned to ask. She saw the etheric double and presumed that something had happened to her mother. So occasionally we see what exists at that level.

A large part of the physical world is unknown, but we think we know the physical world. This is much more true of the vast field of subtle existence, which increases in subtlety the further consciousness is able to penetrate. The habit of thinking that physical existence is the only thing that matters, and what we see of the physical is the most important element is one way in which perception of what is real is impeded. Then there are other characteristics of this lower mind, for example the feeling of pride.

There are people who have to do a work to which they are unaccustomed. A man retires (this is an imaginary case, but it could be real), and comes to an organization like the Theosophical Society and says he would like to offer

his services. He asks: 'What can I do?' He is told that we do not have need of his capacity now, but if he is prepared to do something else, then he could come along. That something else may be something about which he does not know anything. This has actually happened, that the person is not prepared to stay and learn. When anyone told this particular person anything, he used to immediately say: 'Yes we already know that, we are already doing that.' So he did not allow the other person to say any more. That becomes our attitude even in regard to teaching of a spiritual nature.

It was the case of poor Sinnett, who was really deeply devoted to the Master KH. But in certain fields, Sinnett was convinced that he knew better. As an Englishman, in his eyes he was one who could know about these things. How could the Master, an Indian, whatever may have been his accomplishments, know about these things. That is the natural reaction of the lower mind. Pride does not allow a person to say, 'let me learn'. This attitude of learning is absolutely essential for the spiritual life, from the beginning to the end. That is why HPB says: These are the Golden Stairs, up the steps of which the *learner* may tread the path. An open mind is the basis for learning. The open mind is willing always to see what it has not seen before, anywhere.

### A Learner's Mind

There are people who talk about subjects of which they know nothing as if

## The Theosophist

they know everything. This is always egoic pride, the feeling of importance which is characteristic of the lower mind. The mind is the slayer of the real. Therefore we have to watch out to see whether that attitude exists in us or not.

The restlessness of the mind which leads to distraction, this running about here and there, is also due to egoism. It is very difficult to listen, because the mind has the habit of escaping from where it is to something else. This is a problem for everyone of us — the mind refusing to be quiet. It has created this notional being which we call the ‘self’ and it wants to maintain that fiction by being active, running about, connecting everything that it finds, inwardly or outwardly to the fictitious centre which is the self. It looks at everything from that centre: ‘How does it affect me! What will it do to me, will it please me or displease me.’

Suppose there is no distraction for a few minutes, the mind is absolutely quiet without a thought (thought is only the energy of the mind moving about). At this time, even at the subconscious level, the existence of the notional self is not strong. It may even appear not to exist at that time, but the mind looks and wants the self to exist because it has identified the self with existence. This has also been called death.

When there is no self it is death, and

we do not want to die from that point of view. But we want our own notion of existing as a separate individual, with virtues and qualities as attributes which give a great feeling of satisfaction. Wanting it to exist is at the crux of the Buddhist teaching of Vipassanā or deep perception. It is not only the observing of how the body and emotions act, but that penetration to the inner nature which sees that there is emptiness and not self. When the self is, there is division; when there is emptiness there is no division. This is also the desire for possession, attachment, clinging to existence, the desire to get something, out of anywhere. The mind moves like that, because it has separated the self from others. ‘The real Sufi is one who possesses nothing and is possessed by nothing.’ The acquisitiveness of the mind is the source of a variety of problems, and it is continually active.

Through sustained reflection we must see how the mind slays the real, what it is that obscures our perception of things as they are. Seeing things as they are is liberation, liberation from the prison-house from which our senses do not free us; it is the pollution created by limitation. All the undesirable feelings and emotions arise out of it. We have to examine this question and try to understand, without becoming more self-centred. ✧

**Scatter abroad what you have already amassed rather than  
pile up new wealth.**

’Ali