

## Freedom of Thought

As the Theosophical Society has spread far and wide over the world, and as members of all religions have become members of it without surrendering the special dogmas, teachings and beliefs of their respective faiths, it is thought desirable to emphasize the fact that there is no doctrine, no opinion, by whomsoever taught or held, that is in any way binding on any member of the Society, none which any member is not free to accept or reject. Approval of its three Objects is the sole condition of membership. No teacher, or writer, from H. P. Blavatsky onwards, has any authority to impose his or her teachings or opinions on members. Every member has an equal right to follow any school of thought, but has no right to force the choice on any other. Neither a candidate for any office nor any voter can be rendered ineligible to stand or to vote, because of any opinion held, or because of membership in any school of thought. Opinions or beliefs neither bestow privileges nor inflict penalties. The Members of the General Council earnestly request every member of the Theosophical Society to maintain, defend and act upon these fundamental principles of the Society, and also fearlessly to exercise the right of liberty of thought and of expression thereof, within the limits of courtesy and consideration for others.

## Freedom of the Society

The Theosophical Society, while cooperating with all other bodies whose aims and activities make such cooperation possible, is and must remain an organization entirely independent of them, not committed to any objects save its own, and intent on developing its own work on the broadest and most inclusive lines, so as to move towards its own goal as indicated in and by the pursuit of those objects and that Divine Wisdom which in the abstract is implicit in the title 'The Theosophical Society'.

Since Universal Brotherhood and the Wisdom are undefined and unlimited, and since there is complete freedom for each and every member of the Society in thought and action, the Society seeks ever to maintain its own distinctive and unique character by remaining free of affiliation or identification with any other organization.



# THE THEOSOPHIST

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**Cover:** Peacock (national bird of India) made of molten glass and mirrors, from a mansion in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, India — Daniel Villafuela

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# THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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**The Theosophical Society** is composed of students, belonging to any religion in the world or to none, who are united by their approval of the Society's Objects, by their wish to remove religious antagonisms and to draw together men of goodwill, whatsoever their religious opinions, and by their desire to study religious truths and to share the results of their studies with others. Their bond of union is not the profession of a common belief, but a common search and aspiration for Truth. They hold that Truth should be sought by study, by reflection, by purity of life, by devotion to high ideals, and they regard Truth as a prize to be striven for, not as a dogma to be imposed by authority. They consider that belief should be the result of individual study or intuition, and not its antecedent, and should rest on knowledge, not on assertion. They extend tolerance to all, even to the intolerant, not as a privilege they bestow but as a duty they perform, and they seek to remove ignorance, not punish it. They see every religion as an expression of the Divine Wisdom and prefer its study to its condemnation, and its practice to proselytism. Peace is their watchword, as Truth is their aim.

**Theosophy** is the body of truths which forms the basis of all religions, and which cannot be claimed as the exclusive possession of any. It offers a philosophy which renders life intelligible, and which demonstrates the justice and the love which guide its evolution. It puts death in its rightful place, as a recurring incident in an endless life, opening the gateway to a fuller and more radiant existence. It restores to the world the Science of the Spirit, teaching man to know the Spirit as himself and the mind and body as his servants. It illuminates the scriptures and doctrines of religions by unveiling their hidden meanings, and thus justifying them at the bar of intelligence, as they are ever justified in the eyes of intuition.

Members of the Theosophical Society study these truths, and theosophists endeavour to live them. Everyone willing to study, to be tolerant, to aim high, and to work perseveringly, is welcomed as a member, and it rests with the member to become a true theosophist.

# The Effect of the Future

TIM BOYD

THE premise on which this talk is based is that there is something that could be called “an ever-present future”, that in some way is continually reaching into our lives and world, shaping and guiding them in ways of which we may not be aware.

Simply by virtue of being human we are future-oriented beings. One of the discoveries of recent genetic research has been that within each of us there is genetic material that has yet to be expressed. Genetically, biologically, there is a future unfoldment that awaits us. In the theosophical tradition we are familiar with our Third Object, which speaks of powers that are latent within us. These powers are not yet awakened, but the assurance is that in time they *will* awaken, make their presence known, and expand our capacity.

All of us think about the future, and it seems that for most people who give any thought to future matters, there is a sense that right now we are on the cusp of something great. Depending on our habits of thought, the way we see that greatness can vary substantially. For many people who have been raised on a diet of media

news and broadcasted reports, the vision of the immediate future could be a bit disturbing. Based on what one sees in the news, the fearful response that so many have about what lies ahead is justified. Something great is ahead, but greatly to be feared, is a current that seems to be sweeping through our world today.

The fearful response is the basis of the nightly news, of the violence, wars, and limitations that we witness. That is one way of responding. There are others who base their vision of the future on something different. In the Theosophical Society (TS) we have this idea that has been expressed in one of the three Truths in *The Idyll of the White Lotus*: “The soul of man is immortal, and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendor has no limit.” To the mind that embraces this vision of the future, the greatness that we have yet to see is of a different order.

In the founding of the TS, the founders, and particularly H. P. Blavatsky (HPB), were keenly aware and in tune with what she had been brought to India to do. She had no illusions about it. She said that she had no expectations that during her

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Public talk delivered at the International Convention, Adyar on 4 January 2017.

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lifetime, and even into the next century, the teachings that she was introducing as the modern form that we know as Theosophy could be understood or clearly implemented until some time in the future. It was remarkable work that she did and a very lonely position to have been in.

At that time, the language did not exist in the Western world to even discuss the rich seeds of thought that she was planting in human consciousness. There was no language with which to discuss this radical form of Oneness, or the multidimensionality of being. There was no language in the Western world to consider the ever-present intelligence in the Universe, or about self-responsibility toward our own spiritual unfoldment and evolution. These were ideas for which the language and the thinking were not yet prepared. That was the labor that was put to her and her co-workers.

The science of HPB's day had not yet evolved to a point where it could reach effectively into unseen worlds. Today is a very different time. I was most impressed when Dr Sangeetha Menon spoke to us during the international Convention about consciousness and the scientific research into it. It was illuminating because my scientific thought was stuck maybe ten years earlier. There was a time in the very recent past when academic scientists who wanted to study consciousness would damage their career. This unmeasurable thing called consciousness as a subject for scientific research was off limits in the academy. For me it was fascinating to hear that the academic

approach to science had evolved beyond that point.

When the TS came into being in 1875, it was deliberately directed toward the future. The Maha Chohan's letter speaks about two currents of human thought and behavior that the reintroduction of Theosophy and the TS needed to address. They were spoken of as "degrading superstition", that is, the effect of bad religion on people's minds, and "brutal materialism", or the materializing effects that the science of that day was so keenly focused upon. To the mind of the scientist of that time it was solely a material universe. It was felt that unless some more profound way of appreciating the universe, genuine religion, and the potential depths of science of the day was introduced, the future of humanity and the planet would be badly affected. Into this milieu, Theosophy and the Theosophical Society come on the scene.

In *The Key to Theosophy*, HPB describes the purpose of the TS quite distinctly as showing to humanity "that such a thing as Theosophy exists". This is a clear statement, but I would hope that it would lead us to ask a further question: "What is the effect of showing that Theosophy exists? What changes with this awareness? What is it about Theosophy that its mere presence and the recognition of it by the minds of people like us would have some effect? In the remaining portion of the quote from *The Key to Theosophy* the thought is extended. After noting the first part of the TS's purpose she goes on to say that it is also intended

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“to help them to ascend towards it (Theosophy) by studying and assimilating its eternal verities”. It does seem, initially at least, that certain concepts needed to make their way into people’s minds. Powerful ideas which, given even casual thought, have the power to affect our thinking and behavior. The process could be compared to a bar of iron, a cold piece of metal, which when placed near a fire becomes warm and takes on some of the characteristics of the fire near which it is placed. Theosophy seems to have a similar effect. It reminds us of deep but sometimes forgotten truths. Like the fairytales, it points to buried treasures hidden within us.

Theosophy as a guide to the exploration and unfoldment of the inner life is much like a map of the geography of our inner world. But even the best map will not get us to our destination. A map can describe, but it does not transport. There is quality information which can influence our thought and behavior, but neither low- or high-quality information has the capacity to transform. So what we find in the Ageless Wisdom tradition, is that there are many ways that the Great Ones have chosen to try and communicate these deeper messages to us.

The Buddha, at the time of his experience of enlightenment, made the initial decision that he was not going to make any attempt to teach about it, because it transcended the possibilities of language. His resolution was that he would experience enlightenment, but retreat from the role of the active teacher. Fortunately for

all of us, that decision changed, and he went on for the remaining fifty years of his life to communicate in a variety of ways: through meditation, through dharma teachings, and also through stories.

Regardless of what our spiritual tradition may be, one of the most profound avenues by which these deeper truths are communicated are not in intellectually formulated teachings, but by means of great stories. In the Stanzas of Dzyan, the basis for the Secret Doctrine, we find: “The eternal parent, wrapped in her ever-invisible robes, had slumbered once again for seven eternities.” These words resemble the fairy tales we heard as children. This fact does not diminish its power. In the simplest of language it speaks about a time prior to manifestation, where there are no parents or robes, and even no universe to contain them.

The beauty of stories and their ability to communicate profound insights is that, just like when we read a bedtime story to our children, it fuels our imagination. In that process they enter into the life of the story. Much like climbing a ladder, these Wise Ones lead us step by step to follow these great stories. This method of teaching has been with us all the time. The holy books of the great religions are story books, which does not diminish, but perhaps exalts the wisdom and brilliance of the way Teachers have tried to instruct us. In spite of our unearned high opinion of ourselves as an evolved and highly civilized humanity, the Great Ones recognize what we do not, that we are in fact a child-like, immature, and often even

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childish humanity. And so they give us stories — grand stories.

There are many common themes that run throughout the great stories of the world's religions and Theosophy. Often these stories describe grand cycles such as the ones of outgoing and of return. There is a beautiful story told in many different traditions. The simple version of the story is the basis of "The Prodigal Son", "The Hymn of the Pearl", the Rāmāyana, even the Mahābhārata.

An example is a story about a young prince, born in a palace, but who as an infant was taken away. He was lost to his kingdom and royal home. He was raised with an extremely poor family. As he grew up, somebody brought him to work in a servant's position in the palace. After some time, somebody became aware that this lowly young man working in the palace was, in fact, the prince who had been gone for so long. When this was discovered, immediately his status changed. He was moved to his royal room and provided with all the princely articles that he was supposed to have. When his food came, he was served on golden plates, as was the custom in this wealthy kingdom. But the prince was of a mind that all of this was too good to be true. He had been raised in poverty, and he believed that this sudden opening of wealth and access to the highest things would soon end. So he would hoard the plates, candelabras, and jewels — his own possessions as prince; he would hide them in the closet for that day when this illusion would come to an end. In

the story, his mind eventually changed because of the continual kindness, love, and compassion from his kingly father.

The common theme of this story is presented to describe the nature of the cycle of existence in which we are involved — cut off from the palace, the state of union with our source, perhaps on this journey of return to an exalted, but doubtful, state, doubtful because our conditioning and habits are such that we cannot accept a reality in which we are royal and divine. In the story the royalty of the prince was not something that he gained through effort, or developed through wise methods, or that was given to him. His royalty, just like our divinity, was simply by virtue of his birth. Our divinity is by virtue of our emanation from the one undivided consciousness.

We are familiar with a variety of these kinds of stories, but their message is very similar. It is the story of consciousness: how it becomes limited, how it becomes involved in matter, how progressively it frees itself from its limitations, and how it returns to its pristine nature — a state of unity. No matter which tradition, or which images and symbols are used, it is really one story being told over and over again.

It is also the story of the drop of water and the ocean. An ocean is a vast body of water. Water evaporates from that ocean continually; it gets carried far away by the wind, and somewhere it rains down to earth. The drop of water is cut off from its origin, and goes through many experiences on its journey of return.

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From being a drop of water, it finds its way into the root of a plant, which may then be eaten by an animal. Living within its body, the drop's experience is shaped by the life and processes of that particular animal. At some point it leaves the animal's body. Maybe it is again taken up by the wind and dropped in some new place with a new range of experience. Eventually, the drop finds its way to a river, reuniting with the ocean. In the beautiful words of Edwin Arnold's poem, *The Light of Asia*: "The Dewdrop slips into the shining Sea." In whatever way this story is framed, it is a story of consciousness, one and undivided, learning its nature and powers through involvement with realms of limitation.

These are the types of stories from which the theosophical message has been derived in order to present the radical form of unity that was described in the First Object of the Theosophical Society as "Universal Brotherhood", the human solidarity that is the nature of who *we are*. Towards the end of HPB's life she made this statement about the future: "If you could foresee what I foresee, you would begin heart and soul to spread the teaching of universal brotherhood. It is the only safeguard!" An awareness of unity brings healing, power, and peace to daily life.

Some years ago I was in Tibet. Everywhere we went we encountered signs of the great 8th century Indian Buddhist master, Padmasambhava. He was the one who brought Buddhism from India to Tibet. He was quite a mystical and magical

personage. When traveling to religious sites in Tibet, it is not uncommon to be in a place where Padmasambhava had been, and there we saw a footprint or a handprint in the stone which had been impressed by his step or his touch. He was also deeply involved in the Dzogchen tradition. He suggested an approach to meditation that is profound in its simplicity. It involves four steps.

(1) "Do not follow the past." As we sit, when thoughts might arise and engage us in past things, we recognize them for what they are, and allow them to go their own way. We do not follow them. (2) "Do not anticipate the future." Just as thoughts of things past arise in the mind, so do projections of an as yet non-existent future. The meditation advice is that as these thoughts arise, observe them, and withdraw from them. (3) "Live fully in the present moment", which is self explanatory. And (4) "Leave the mind alone." This step may be the most fascinating of them all. Do not do anything with the mind; allow it to revert to its pristine nature, an enlightened nature from the perspective of Dzogchen, and allow this ever-present future possibility to express itself.

St Francis said something that relates to this same idea: "What you are looking for is what is looking." We find our senses and attention turned outward continually, always looking, hunting, trying to find that next thing which might bring some satisfaction and ease, but the consciousness that is capable of turning outward, is the very thing that we are ever in search of.

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It is hidden in the last place we think to look — inside of us. As the poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote, “Inside of man is where God learns.”

The outgoing path is best described in terms of confinement, limitation, separation. This is a description of the path of deepening involvement in the world and in matter. The path of return, which necessarily we find ourselves involved with, could be described by openness, freedom, union. So we ask ourselves: “How do we open?” What can be done to bring us to a state where we are actually open to express the higher possibility that is ever available to find its way into the world through us.

As a Theosophical Society, and as members, from time to time, each of us has the experience of being open, still, aware. This experience finds us in different ways, perhaps when we least expect it. One of the purposes of meetings like our international Conventions, is to create the conditions for such an experience.

During the course of our time together, there are moments when we become quiet, our mind becomes still. We find that we feel enlarged, more expansive, perhaps more connected to one another. These are moments that we recognize and are the ones for which these meetings are intended.

It is a wonderful thing to be exposed to new ideas and different thoughts, but probably the moments that are most fulfilling for us occur when we are most quiet and connected, the still moments. It is at these times that the Inner Founders of this Theosophical movement, those Great Ones, have an opportunity to radiate their light and presence through us as a body into a world so deeply in need. So particularly during the time of this Convention, the practice of stillness is of supreme value for the future that lies just beneath the surface. It is a thin membrane of consciousness that separates us from union. To thin and dissolve *that*, is the emphasis of our practice. ✧

**Whatever plane our consciousness may be acting in, both we and the things belonging to that plane are, for the time being, our only realities. As we rise in the scale of development we perceive that during the stages through which we have passed we mistook shadows for realities, and the upward progress of the Ego is a series of progressive awakenings, each advance bringing with it the idea that now, at last, we have reached “reality”; but only when we shall have reached the absolute Consciousness, and blended our own with it, shall we be free from the delusions produced by Maya [illusion].**

H. P. Blavatsky

# Beyond the Brain: The Unifying Force of Self and Consciousness

SANGEETHA MENON

Two friendly birds sit on the same tree; one jumps up and down pecking at sour and sweet fruits; the other silently observes, without eating.

— *Mundaka Upanishad*, III.1.1.

The brain is one of the most important parts of the human body, which is today being studied to understand the working of sensation, emotion, and consciousness. The single unit of information and experience that connects sensation, emotion, and consciousness is agreed to be the “self”. There are two major streams of discussion. The self is debated both as a cognitive concept that helps tie the missing ends between the physical and psychological functions, and as the seat of conscious experience. However different the arguments for these two positions are, it is agreed that human behaviour, attitudes, and emotions are intricately tied to the neural structures on one side, and the indivisible experiential self on the other. Brain and self are the common threads used by neuropsychiatry, neuropharmacology, and philosophy

to have some hold on one of the most intractable problems of humankind, namely, “consciousness”.

Is there a common issue in brain and self studies that appears over and over again? Yes, that is the attempt to explain the unity, continuity, and adherence of our experience, whether it is sensory or mental. Philosophically we continue to ask the question about mind-body unity, how the mind and body — with different natures — can connect and give rise to meaning and quality to life. The “binding problem” and the “Chalmersian hard problem” showcase the age-old mind-body problem in the context of consciousness. Both demand mechanisms and reasons for mutual influence. The interconnections between brain and self have been especially eschewed in the developments in understanding the brain and its functions. The classical idea about a brain with designated cortical areas and assigned functions, though, is not in vogue now; the view that supersedes it is that the brain is an organ with high capacities to survive even with less cortical areas.

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**Dr Sangeetha Menon**, Professor, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore. Theosophy-Science Lecture delivered at the TS International Convention, Adyar, 3 January 2017.

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Where and how in the brain is the “self” housed? How does the self make adaptive changes in the person corresponding to changes in the brain? How does the self influence and alter neurochemical functions of the brain? Can the brain address its structural and functional challenges without recourse to the self? Can there be a self without the interface of the brain and the limbic system? Are the brain and self constantly challenging each other?

These and similar questions may not elicit an immediate answer considering the complex ways in which both our brain and self are wired to our concepts and causal thinking. We do not even have many ways of understanding the subject and the object other than by causal relations. Medical cases studied by neuropsychiatrists often show that the way the patient behaves before and after a cure is not even amenable to arrive at straightforward causal relations between brain and self. The subject-object distinction itself is violated when the brain behaves in ways not true to its essential physical neural structure. Can the brain be considered as distinctly objective and physical when it defies the laws of medicine? How do the brain and self conceive their role play and create the conspiracy of experience where the physicality of the brain is lost in the subjectivity of the self?

Just as there are neural correlates of consciousness, I wish to suggest that there are self-correlates of consciousness (such as compassion, love, quietude). Self-

correlates (both positive and negative) seem to alter the functions of the neural correlates in curious ways. The *Bhagavad-gītā* is a text that could be considered as a foundational text to understand the relevance of “self-correlates”, commencing from the attributes of a person of steady wisdom (*sthitaprajñā*) (*Gītā*, II.54), to the values and mental states (*Gītā*, XIII.8–12) required for a healthy life.

The emergence of Spiritual Psychology as an important discipline will help us to understand the significance of Self-correlates which are essential for “inner development”. We need to understand and work towards developing therapeutic tools for assuaging challenges and dysfunctions that arise due to poor or insufficient abidance in Self. Self-abidance is the central feature of spiritual traditions, whether Eastern or Western. And, Self-abidance will involve mental and physical disciplines, appreciation of culture, rituals, art, and involvement of indigenous understanding in medicine and health care.

Greater insights into the nature of the self — neural, psychological and therapeutic — will emerge if we focus our research on the challenges brought in by Spiritual Psychology.

### **An Introduction, and the Questions Forward**

We might conjecture that the journey into the uncharted space of consciousness began since the dawn of human life, or the use of language, or the advent of disciplines such as biology, philosophy,

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and psychology, or since we became curious to know the brain better. How far have we reached, and how much distance have we covered in this journey?

We, mostly following the falsifiability principle, have gained new wisdom and discarded old ideas on complex concepts that relate to the biological organ that is the brain, and the psychological organ that is the mind. In this route we have also understood that the self, whether we call it synaptic, neocortical, unconscious, or spiritual, is the inescapable presence that gives meaning to the coexistence of the mind and the brain.

Without the self, there is no purpose for the existence of the brain and the mind. We cannot legitimize our enquiry without a self to experience or discover the uncharted spaces of consciousness. Essentially, the traveller in the sojourn of consciousness is the self itself. The self brings to us the mystery of consciousness, its origin, and nature, by pointing to the limits of the physical and psychological structures that we know through the brain and the mind.

The major puzzle that consciousness presents to us is finding the evading agent and the enjoyer in and through the experience. We use brain imaging techniques, encephalographs, radioactive tracer dyes, clinical diagnostic tests, cognitive and artificial intelligence experiments to trace the contours of the agent of action and the enjoyer of experience, knowing well the possibilities and limits of methodologies.

The crux of the puzzle that conscious-

ness carries with it inspires us to conceptualize ways in which the brain and the self mutually challenge each other. Consciousness is fringed by neural and self-attributes.

As we know today, the brain is not an isolated biological organ, but a *self-challenged brain*, by its very existence and sustenance. Conversely, we concur that the self cannot be a completely abstract entity that reveals only through experience, but is to be seen as a *brain-challenged self*. Hence, better methodologies to understand consciousness will have to emerge from positing the brain-challenged self and the self-challenged brain as the heart of the problem, and not viewing the brain and the self in isolation. Without the brain we may not have the cognitive capacities to enquire into the intricacies of biological complexity that influence the sophisticated existence of life. Without the self, there is no joy in enquiring into the most challenging and unpredictable organ of the body. It is the self which gives us what we humanly call “fun” and “joy”.

The final frontiers of consciousness are the brain and the self. The self concretizes the “harder problem” of consciousness. In this journey to see and be in the uncharted space, theories might fail, but experiences will give new insights.

The *self-in-the-brain* and *brain-in-the-self* might also require us to see the brain not just in the vat (that is, physically) and the self not just in culture. The abstract possibilities of the unknown self surprise us experientially and therapeutically

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beyond the confines of culture and biology. The brain and the self are cross-wired in a fashion that challenges between these two decide the course we take to locate consciousness. In the process, we concede the biological imperativeness of an evolving brain and an emergent self. The greatest challenge before consciousness studies is to ask, and then to proceed to chart clear pathways that begin with the physicality of neural structures, and end with the subjectivity of the experience, though it is a near-to-impossible task. With that challenge also arise questions such as:

Is the brain hardwired for each sensation separately and without change?

What is the nature of the intervention of the conscious agent and its role in building adaptability?

What is the role of memory as the bridge-builder between physicality (of the brain) and subjectivity (of the self)?

How do the brain and the self together create the conspiracy of experience where the physicality of the brain is lost in the subjectivity of the self?

How can we conceptualize the self as the meaning-giver, having both emergent and abiding features?

Primarily, is the self the highway to the space of consciousness?

### **Self and Alternate Self Experiences**

Experiments on plotting neural correlates of mystical experiences are about a decade old. Commenced by the initial work of Newberg et al, and others, and

with the advent of sophisticated brain-sensing machines such as fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging), and SPECT (single photon emission computed tomography), certain experiences termed “mystical” are being increasingly addressed by neuroscientists. This new approach to study mystical experiences is called “spiritual neuroscience”, which, like other branches of neuroscience, considers mystical experiences as well to be mediated by the brain.

The turn of the new millennium has seen the emergence of “Spiritual neuroscience”, a field of scientific investigation at the crossroads of psychology, religion, and spirituality, and neuroscience. The main objective of this novel domain of research is to explore the neural underpinnings of religious/spiritual/mystical experiences (RSMs).

Recent studies on the connections (structural and ontological) between the brain and God have brought in a humanizing picture of the brain. These works do not move away from the fundamental (scientific) position that however profound the God experience is, it will have to be channelled and experienced through the brain. The major hypotheses that underlie these works are the role of the association areas of the brain, myths that underlie the concept of religious belief, integral function of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system, and the brain’s capacity to distinguish between the self and the rest (not-self) outside it, and also to alter or extend this division.

It is also to be said that these studies,

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with amazing details of the human capacity to form a self and to continuously extend its limits, are now possible by the advancement in brain-scanning technologies. The most significant technologies are single positron emission computed tomography (SPECT), different forms of positron emission tomography (PET), low-resolution electromagnetic tomography (LORETA), electroencephalography (EEG) and quantitative electroencephalography (QEEG).

A widespread, if not mainstream, theory about the physicalist version of religious and mystical experiences, is that they have a neural location. Many researchers consider that religious and mystical experiences are processed in the temporal lobe and limbic system. Inspired by this theory, religious and meditational experiences are often translocated (from the natural environs of the Tibetan monk or the Franciscan nun) to lab conditions where such experiences are triggered, watched, and even controlled. One of the emergent hypotheses from such experiments is that similar experiences can be induced in normal brains with the help of electrical stimulation of the specific brain areas, by administering psychedelic substances, or is available as a natural experience for a patient with temporal epilepsy.

The most important question to sceptics as well as experiencers is: is religious or mystical experience always correlated to some form of brain anomaly or dysfunction? Is it true to pinpoint religious experience to aberrations in the temporal

lobe? The history of mind studies has greatly favoured naturalistic interpretations, in order to compare with something structurally closer. But, then by this approach, do we undermine a phenomenon uniquely central for the human experience, in order to favour a comparable other in the natural world?

In recent discussions, the debate has moved from the existence (or non-existence) of God to the representation of God experience in the brain. The first debate perhaps is a philosophical whirlpool. But the second opens up possibilities of dialogue on not just the nature of religious experience, but also the myriad baseline and alternate human experiences. Along with the second debate comes the re-entry of myths and cultural expressions to understand mystical experience from an evolutionary standpoint.

The absolute, unitary being experience is marked by clear neural signs such as increased blood flow to the prefrontal cortex, which is the area of concentration and decreased activity in the orientation association area in the parietal lobe. The decreased activity in the orientation association area is responsible for the sensation of losing one's self or expanding its boundaries.

So, where is the self? Is it a figment of mind produced in cooperation with the brain activity? What is the relation between the brain and the body? How does the trio of brain, body and the self work?

### **Self-correlates**

In conjunction with the idea of

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embodied living that we use today to explain and understand much of human actions, the question that arises is about the locale of the self. Where is the self placed to aid embodiment? Is “embodied living” the best way to “understand” consciousness? Is consciousness better understood, as far as its core essence is concerned, by the possibility of non-embodiment? Consciousness functions through the self as self-awareness, self-other-awareness, and “self-other-awareness’ awareness” (a third level of awareness that reflects on one’s theory of mind). Does the third level warrant a non-embodied state? On the contrary, does metaphysical mysticism that upholds redemption from the body (disembodied states), such as liberation of the self, disregard the significance of embodied living and the sensitivities of the self? These central queries also invite us to conjecture on the order of the placement for the brain, mind, and consciousness, and the relation of each with the self. Is the self located in the brain, or consciousness, or both? Are the locality of the self and non-locality of consciousness mutually tenable?

Another side of the brain-self interaction is the presence of reified human expressions such as empathy, which I would like to term as a “self-correlate”. Why empathy? Is there an evolutionary advantage for favouring mirror neurons? Empathy and love create extended meanings for the self’s existence and experience. The plasticity of the brain teaches the self to make sense, every time, of the

change. The brain together with the self perfects the art of transformation and adaptation. The cases of neuropsychiatric patients, subjects with spinal cord injuries and impaired proprioceptive capabilities, who make sense of their oddities, invoke a deeper dimension of the self which is the core and is unnamed. Our ability to self-reflect in deeper ways and discover new meanings causes well-being. Just as we assume that there are neural correlates of consciousness, it might also be reckoned that consciousness has self-correlates. Self-correlates are reified capacities such as empathy, self-reflection, and abundance in a core-self. We experience and recognize the smaller versions of self-correlates in the mechanisms of the many neuronal maps that are translated through the complex abilities and sensitivities of the body. The body, in a way, is a smaller reflection of the core-self.

### **Beyond the Brain and the Body**

If not otherwise asked, the notion of the body is something given and natural to us. But perplexity arises, not just in terms of understanding, but even experiencing, when we reflect upon the possessor, user, and witness of the body. The very first thought on these three relations brings to us the question of embodiment. Is embodiment the primary experience bound by certain extremities, such as the exteriority of the skin and the interiority of the private mind? Is embodiment that which gives us the distinction of “outside-inside” and “yours-mine”, both fine-tuned by a distinct sense of “me” and

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“the rest of the world” (other)? The sense of the body — does it ensue from the basic distinction of “me and the rest”, or is it the other way around — does the distinction of me and the other arise from the sense of the body (however much inclusive or exclusive it is)?

The major limits of current takes on embodiment are: the overt focus on a concept of the body, to retain the conceptual structure of the body without its physicality, and to place the possibility of transcendence as a property of embodied structures and events.

The idea of the body in much of the cognitive science literature is skewed and restricted, being mostly limited to functional representationalism and contextual body acts. The Platonic dual world theory, the Cartesian mind-body interaction, the Chalmersian easy and hard problem divide, which imply dualism and exclusivity of the *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, continue to influence theories of mind and body.

For an alternate perspective let us discuss the Vedantic notion of *jiva*, the equivalent of an embodied self, in brief. This notion tries to explain the issue of embodiment in the context of what I wish to call “enworldment”, situated within the larger question of the experienced world. Embodiment is secondary to “enworldment”, since from a macrocosmic view the world is the body (*vapus*) of God. Embodiment is understood in the context of “enworldment”. For Vedanta, embodiment is the means to realize the never-bodied nature of pure consciousness,

which is the core-self. The Vedantic notion of three bodies and embodiments breaks through the either-or aporia. For Vedanta, the dualist perspective emerges from the point of view of the body, and is not a valid one from the point of view of pure consciousness (*ātman*). The inside-outside view is from the point of view of the body, and not pure consciousness. This does not mean that the hierarchy is real, or that, in the hierarchy, pure consciousness is at the top. The emphasis is on the subjectivity that is embodied by a liberated person. Embodied liberation, *jivanmukti*, according to Vedanta, is centring the body in pure consciousness, and not the other way around. Embodiment is viewed from the point of view of a complex and “networked body-system”.

Today, when much of phenomenology-inspired cognitive sciences has saved the “body” from being just a tissue-muscle physical thing to something more subjective, one is still stuck with the notion of a discrete, disconnected, and deconstructed body, whose agency is defined around exclusive cognitive and neural functions rather than organismic expressions. A perspective like that of Vedanta, which focuses on transcendence that ensues from pure consciousness (and not embodiment) presents the concept of the body afresh.

### The Core-Self

The idea of a core-self and its existence has been differently theorized and interpreted by scientists and therapists.

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I use the core-self to mean the deep organic self that is not influenced by the physical, mental, or social self. Core-self is a space of consciousness without forms or names, and is the source of healing. Much of the discussions on the body and embodiment have hijacked the possibility and presence of the core-self, which is non-embodied and non-ideated. Core-self is not an emergent or minimal entity that is dependent on the body and bodily functions, but it expresses through them.

Without a concept of the core-self, therapy and healing of disrupted minds is almost impossible. Psychotherapists go beyond the physical, neural, and at times even the mental, to put together the disintegrated mind into one whole, which leads to the person's growth and well-being. The major limitation of body-centred theories and approaches, such as embodied cognition and embodied action, is that something that is physical, and hence mortal, is given an immortal status. The overt need to preserve the body and bodily concepts is perhaps a response to the traditions and classic theories that have viewed body with apprehension and doubt. But recent attempts have also brought in the metaphysical elevation of the body to a non-corporeal entity, which it is obviously not. The concept of the core-self will help to critique in a healthy fashion the overdone fascination in using the body and embodiment to explain all that is human and humanly actions, and to bring in metaphysical clarity with the highlight on a spiritual non-corporeal presence.

Several cognitive therapists today recognize the importance of experiential learning to ground conceptual learning in the body in order to create new experiential references and habits. The self-narrative of *jivanmukta*, the Vedantic ideal of a self liberated from the world, suggests that the ideal state of liberation is not a disembodied state or an additional acquisition, but that which involves a change in the experiential references and the concept of the "other". For that reason, embodiment for a *jivanmukta* is situated in the world, in enworldment, and is not necessarily in the giving up or acquisition of the body and its acts thereof. The integral unity conceived for human embodiment is best understood when it is lived and experienced with the focus on the core-self.

### **Self in the Brain and Brain in the Self**

Given the overwhelming rule of the brain over the human body and mind, can the way we act, think, and make decisions be altered by understanding the human brain? Brain studies in participation with a score of disciplines, including religious and spiritual teachings, anticipate the possibility of changes in the experience of the self. Studies on neural dysfunctions, affective neuroscience, art-mind relations, and spiritual experiences reveal not only the possibility of major cognitive and motor changes, but also changes in self-perception and self-expression. The regenerative nature of the brain throws open exciting challenges for all engaged in knowing the human self better.

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Consciousness studies have heralded all along that the brain is the basis for consciousness, and consciousness can be traced to different areas of the brain. While definitely the role of the brain, and also the functional specificities embedded in different neuronal patches, cannot be undermined, the idea that the brain is the cause of consciousness is unacceptable to those who believe in the greater power of the human self.

We begin with the theory that the brain creates the self. But then at some point the self starts influencing the brain. There is a reverse influence violating the classical causal route. The *self-in-the-brain* and *brain-in-the-self* influence each other to create adaptability for new scenarios. With self-effort, the brain creates new neural networks. With new learning, one receives hope that further encourages brain functions. Can we presume that it is the core-self which makes the effort, whose brain is influenced by hope, who tells the brain to change and adapt?

Do we experience, or have access to, a core-self, which is not related to the self that is assembled by, and filtered through, the brain?

Can I have a self in spite of my brain and my embodiment? It is not at all easy to answer this question either in the affirmative or negative.

In our analysis of which part of the self remains after brain death, we make a sort of category mistake. The concept of the self that is understood in a scientific discussion is a composite of neural, emotional, and behavioural aspects.

When death occurs, there is no way to understand these aspects in a distinct fashion. While we assume the post-mortem existence of the self in some form, what we forget is that the concept of the self itself has changed with the death of the body. It is no longer the self that we conceived of while the body was alive and which the body expressed in many ways. Therefore, is it logically correct to assume that a part of the self is left after death though its neural and emotional parts remain absent? If a major chunk of the self is lost (with death), then can we assume some parts of it to remain? These are questions that emerge if our idea of the self is a composite self that is conceived on the basis of life and its expressions.

Should we, the civilized Homo sapiens, also believe, like the ancient Neanderthal, that the self (soul) rises above like the smoke from the fire and goes to the unseen space of the sky? Perhaps not! But the question that is essential for us to ask is: Is there a core-self somehow hidden and which master-controls the living self through the body and the brain? Is that pure consciousness? Is the existence of pure consciousness unhindered by the birth and death of the body?

A short response is that the core-self is beyond the binary of birth and death of the body, and it is the central key to resolve the puzzle of consciousness, which is the unifying force that is beyond the neural structures and functions of the brain. ✧

# The Masters' Home

DIEGO FERNANDES

ADYAR Day was established so that members of the Theosophical Society (TS) may remember two things: first, our Founding President and other great theosophists who were born or passed away on 17 February; and second, to remember this glorious place where we have the privilege to live in, the Masters' Home.

Since I became a TS member in the 1990s, I began to hear about Adyar, and the desire started growing in me to get to know it and learn what this place would be like, its environment, its atmosphere, its sanctity. . . . But it was all too abstract. My concrete mind needed images, then I looked for photos that could give me a notion of the place, the buildings, the great banyan, the temples. . . . But it would all end in disorder and chaos. Where to locate the temples? . . . The main building is next to the banyan tree? Then I said to myself: "One has to know Adyar and to live it." To have the map of a place does not mean that one knows it. And life gave me the privilege to know Adyar, to experience it. And the comments heard and the photos collected are nothing by comparison.

One of the things about this place that made the biggest impact on me was the first time that I climbed to the terrace of the Headquarters Building and read the framed phrase that reads: "Work for Adyar, the Masters' Home." I had never heard it mentioned by anyone, and if it was in front of my eyes in some text or article that I had earlier read, it went unnoticed by me; but in the motive for coming to Adyar, it was implicit to collaborate wherever it was necessary.

Once I heard a phrase in a film saying that "each power implies a great responsibility", understanding "power" as the ability to do something. And to be able to be here, or to have that privilege, to breathe in this environment of peace and love, to walk these paths surrounded by trees, hearing the song of hundreds of birds, also generates a great commitment toward my friends and brothers who have not had the possibility of knowing Adyar, yet with each step that I take, they are with me, keeping me company.

But what is Adyar for those members of the TS who have never come here? They base their knowledge on the expe-

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**Mr Diego Fernandes** is a member of the Theosophical Society in Argentina, who volunteered at Adyar. Talk delivered on Adyar Day at the international Headquarters of the TS, 17 February 2017.

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rience of those who know it and on the writings of Col. H. S. Olcott, Madame H. P. Blavatsky, Annie Besant, N. Sri Ram, Radha Burnier, and others, the great personalities who lived here and made of Adyar what the Inner Founders wanted it to be — an ashram. For the benefit of those who are not aware of it: Adyar is an ashram, mainly a spiritual center, in addition to being the TS International Headquarters.

But once an ashram is established, is it maintained forever? Maybe so, as it applies to the physical part of it. For example, there still exist beautiful structures in the world that are the physical skeleton of what were great temples of antiquity. But what happens to the *inner* Adyar, that which is invisible?

Many have written about the inner Adyar, and they have described it in different ways: as the center, the ashram, the point from which diverge and towards which converge spiritual energies, the sacred heart of the Theosophical Society, a magnetic place, the Presence, the intangible, and so on. The inner Adyar is a chalice into which spiritual energies are poured for dissemination over the whole world. The nucleus of Universal Fraternity begins here; it is the nucleus within the nucleus. The Unity of all Life, the *pranava*, the Om, the indivisible totality of existence, is easier to perceive here than in any other place. In Adyar everything collaborates so that we cease being TS members and start being true theosophists.

We could relate the worldwide Theosophical Society to a great human body,

Adyar being its heart. Adyar residents would be the heart cells. No two cells are the same, but they group themselves by their affinity, and work for a common goal, forming the cardiac tissues or valves, which in our case are the different campus departments (such as the library, administration, Olcott School, kitchen, and others), but without losing sight of the main goal which is the well-being of the heart, or, in our case, of Adyar, enabling the circulation of spiritual energy and instilling vitality into all the other body organs.

Keeping the above analogy in mind gives us another perspective of the work done at Adyar and of what it really means to live here. It is of great help to set aside our prejudices, to maintain harmonious relationships among ourselves, to understand and have compassion toward our own and others' defects and mistakes, to have patience to adapt ourselves to the different ways of thinking of the various cultures of those who come to serve here, and to try to recognize the One Life in its multiple forms. For Adyar to continue being the convergence point of spiritual energies, for the sacred heart of this institution to continue to beat, depends exclusively on us, on those of us who have the privilege of living here; and this is our responsibility toward our brothers around the world.

Many of us have a tendency of falling into a routine, of not being totally aware, and I am no exception. The routine of living in a specific space, of walking on the same road, of our daily work, of

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sitting and listening to a lecture, are only some examples. In those kinds of routines things lose their essential value and start to become “part of the landscape”. We forget about the place that we are in, of its sanctity.

When one goes around this place and is conscious of and attentive to it, one begins to realize *where* one is really standing: here, where Blavatsky, Olcott, Besant, Krishnamurti, Sri Ram, Radhaji lived and contributed their great ideals to this atmosphere. All of them, and many

other beings who contributed anonymously, generated this atmosphere that we have today inherited.

Now it is in our hands, it is up to us. It is very important for us who live or come to visit here, to be in a state of alertness, of reverence. When the paths, the work, the buildings, the temples begin to look “the same”, the images of my friends and brothers come to me, and they again focus me on the place where I am, and on why I am here, to work for Adyar, the Home of the Masters. ✧

**The ancient ashrams were generally guided by holy and wise men whose presence and influence, and not merely their teachings, brought the conviction that it is possible to live differently. The function of Adyar is to foster such a way of living. . . . Adyar has proved to be a true ashram, for within it there has always existed the presence, example and instruction to dissipate doubt and fear. Its atmosphere gives stability to those inner movements in the individual which take him near to the realization of peace and freedom. There is something of the atmosphere of the eternal in its tranquility.**

*The World Around Us*  
Radha Burnier

# Albert Einstein's Untested Idea

JOSEPH RAUTENSTRAUCH

YOU may have heard in the news recently about the discovery of gravity waves, that were predicted by Albert Einstein in the early 1900s, when scientists did not have the means or sensitive tools to confirm their existence. The particular waves detected were formed more than a billion years ago as a result of the collapsing into each other of two black holes.

This was just one of a series of confirmed predictions that supported the corroboration of a few of Einstein's theories that very directly speak to the Universe as a connected fabric of space-time, gravity, matter and energy.

However, this short article is not about Albert Einstein's contributions to the world of science and physics. The idea expressed by Einstein which I would like to address is about the effect of a person's awareness of the interconnectedness of humans and the forces which conspire to separate or isolate people from one another.

Einstein's equations in the early 1900s spoke to the interdependent relationship of *measurable phenomena*, but the idea

expressed by him in a letter to a grieving friend, expressed a deep feeling, an attitude about the effect of the delusion of separation of a human being from the larger human community. One of the first records of him expressing this idea of an interconnectedness was in a private letter in 1950 when a rabbi wrote to him and asked him how he could explain and help him come to terms with the untimely death, due to polio, of his sixteen year old son. Einstein responded by sending him a letter that said:

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us "Universe", a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest — a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the issue of true religion. Not to nourish the delusion but to try to overcome it is the way to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind.

With best regards,  
Sincerely yours,  
Albert Einstein

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**Mr Joseph Rautenstrauch** is a Theosophical Society member from Buffalo, New York. Based on a talk given at the TS in the Ojai Valley on 31 January 2017.

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Later, this idea was expanded to include the following:

This delusion of separateness is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of Nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.

When I first came across information about this letter, I asked myself — how does this help one to come to terms with such a loss? Perhaps it has to do with the transformative power of feeling connected, and identifying with a purpose much larger than ourselves.

In a similar vein, there is an ancient story of a woman who had lost a young child and had difficulty dealing with it and accepting this tragedy. She finally went to one of the village elders and asked for help. The wise one said: “Yes, I can help but I need some mustard seed . . . would you go to your neighbors and get me some mustard seed?” She agreed, but the wise one added: “Take mustard seed only from a household that has not been touched by the death of a child, parent, grandparent, or close friend.” When the woman returned, it was obvious she had been able to deal with her tragedy. She did not bring back any mustard seed, but did bring back an understanding that there was no one in the village who

had not been touched by some tragedy — she was not alone, but connected; she could move on.

This belief in an interconnectedness is reflected in one of the fundamental propositions of the theosophical world view, which states that: “Every existent being — from atom to galaxy — is rooted in the same universal, life-creating Reality. This Reality is all pervasive but can never be summed up in its parts, since it transcends all its expressions.” This aspect of connectedness is becoming increasingly clear to many.

In the book *Living The Mindful Life — a handbook for living in the present moment*, Dr Charles Tart, in talking about the Hindu or Buddhist school of philosophy, said:

What they all emphasize is that *we reconstruct* our world and *distort our perceptions* so much that the experienced world we live in is an illusion — a dangerous illusion. Meanwhile, the actual world is whatever it is. But we are often way out of that actual world, and that is the problem, that is what creates useless suffering.

Abby Martin, an American journalist and activist, commenting about the letter from Einstein said:

What Einstein proposes is that it is our *ego* that inhibits the expansion and unity of humanity's collective consciousness. Our thoughts, dogmas, and preconceived notions about the world, whether it be rooted in religion, politics or just selfishness, hinders us from looking at life as it truly is

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and each other as we truly are. It deprives us of the understanding or feeling of how we are truly connected to and depend on those around us. It is our ego that decreases our ability to understand, to perceive that many share the very same hopes, joys and sorrows that we experience.

Perhaps the haiku, or short poem, titled *The Lamp Once Out*, by Japanese poet Natsume Soseki addresses this effect of the ego:

The lamp once out  
Cool stars enter  
The window frame.

Ivan M. Granger, in commenting on this haiku, said:

On the most literal level, Natsume Soseki is giving us the image of a lamp going out. When that strong, close light is no longer there, our eyes can then see the stars in the night sky through the window. Just three lines are enough to give us that beautiful moment.

However, another way to read it is that the lamp light could suggest the ego. That is the familiar light we normally live by. It is useful in that it allows us to interact effectively with the immediate environment. But we forget that it also affects our focus, and, limits our full vision.

It is only when it finally goes out, that we can see the vastness of the people and world around us.\*

The idea of separateness and its effect on an individual is only one small part of Einstein's concern about this delusion of separateness. He was equally concerned

about its effect on humanity and its need for boundaries or borders.

Today, most people would agree, that Einstein's work, and that of his colleagues in the scientific community, have had a vast impact on our worldview and the daily life of people throughout the world. We all share in the many benefits of an increased understanding of the physical world. However, I believe his idea expressed to a grieving friend about the delusion of separateness and the real connectedness of all life, is truly the most important and most powerful. We know of the transformative benefits that a feeling of human connection can have on the individual. We know of the possible stifling effect that boundaries of separation, imagined or real, can have on the flow of the life force through an individual, family, community, nation or the world.

What many do not know is how to move beyond the use of boundaries and fear as an organizing tool. However, some believe that we may be closer to a solution than most realize. Buckminster Fuller, a 20th century architect known for his "invention" of the geodesic dome, said: "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." People like Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, and Karen Armstrong, an author and scholar, are examples of people who are developing programs based on a new model. Instead of a model based on controlling behavior by fear and separation of peoples by

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boundaries or walls, they are spearheading models based on love and compassion, and on connections among peoples. Karen Armstrong has recognized that all of the major religions have a form of the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" at their core. However, they all have not lived up to this basic principle and have been among some of the causes of much human suffering. She says it is time for them to move back to their core.

Ms Armstrong has created "The Charter of Compassion" which urges the peoples and religions of the world to embrace the core value of compassion. Individuals and communities throughout the world are being asked to sign this charter and it has been signed by thousands of people throughout the world. The Charter has inspired a global movement for compassion.

This charter is one example of addressing and testing the effect of dissolving the delusion of separateness and possibly helping many to experience the effect of an awareness that we are connected. The results are not yet in. I am certain that as a community, as a society, and as individuals we can think of many other forms of testing ways of dissolving the imaginary boundaries between peoples and communities.

Our generations have directly or indirectly witnessed the effect of fear,

hate, and separation in our fragile world, which is often based on a model of fear, boundaries, and confrontation. Perhaps it is time for a few new models based on compassion, service, and love. Einstein said: "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." A quote, attributed to Marshal McLuhan, a 20th century philosopher and commentator on the influence of media, says "we shape our tools and then our tools shape us". I wonder what kind of a world we could shape for ourselves, if compassion became our primary tool.

I currently do not pretend to know how we are going to move to a more peaceful world community, but evidence seems to support the belief that confrontation, fear, boundaries, isolation, and hateful thinking may not be the tools or change agents we want to use.

"The Charter for Compassion" truly represents a step in the direction that Albert Einstein believed was necessary to travel — a direction toward recognizing that we are all connected and depend on each other. However, I am sure there are many other ways.

Whatever happens, it may just be true that getting back in touch with the awareness that is buried deep in our hearts, of our connectedness and interdependence with others and the universe, may play not just a small part in changing the world, *but* a very large part in transforming ourselves. ✧

\* Ivan M. Granger, Poetry Chaikhana Blog — *Sacred Poetry from Around the World*.

# Changing Perspectives and Converging Values

PRADEEP TALWALKER

“PERSPECTIVE” is the art of representing three-dimensional (3D) objects on two-dimensional (flat) surfaces, like canvas or paper. The closer objects appear larger and the distant ones smaller, in proportion of how far they are from the observer — and that is the way they are drawn; if we move, the perspective changes, and it is drawn so. The flat picture must appear real, in 3D. In the night sky, the moon appears much larger than the stars, which is how it is drawn. But we know that each star is really a sun, and the moon would be insignificant before it. What we see is only the *apparent* reality, which very often is far from the actuality; but the popular proverb is: “Seeing is believing.”

As children, when we played outdoor games the ground appeared flat and we believed it really *was*; then we learned in school that the Earth is round like a ball — we also *saw* it in later life. Yet we know that for centuries people believed that the Earth *was* flat. Galileo was declared a heretic, and kept under lifelong house-arrest for championing

the Copernican model. Those who see reality ahead of fellow beings always face ridicule — or worse, public wrath. Such is the power of “appearance” and a flawed, illusive perspective! What is only an illusion *cannot* be the reality. But it appears *so* real that we never doubt it. Only when the level of our observation and knowledge goes up, only when we notice the anomalies in our beliefs, do we begin to see the need to correct our perspective.

This leads us to the figurative use of the word: how we see reality from *our* personal point of view is our perspective. Born with a self-centred mind, *each of us sees the reality differently* — and the differences can be wide. Due to this diversity, the figurative usage of the word has acquired much greater currency and importance than its literal usage. In the present discussion, too, we are considering “individual” perspectives — the figurative angle.

Even on a personal level, our perspective keeps changing. As children our perception is different. As we grow up,

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we see our earlier childishness and re-define our perception. We realize we were wrong when we were children. Yet, that does not mean *now* we are right. Even as grown-ups, our views on the same matter vary now and then. Then again, we have our biases — hardly anyone is free of them: we *all* view the world through our own “coloured glasses”. This is a complication, since we are not even *aware* of our glasses being coloured. Everyone stoutly denies any such possibility — each insists it is *he* who is right.

A story from the Mahābhārata brings out the point. After the Rājasuya Yajña, Duryodhana (the eldest of the “wicked” Kauravas) became very envious of the Pāndavas, and accused Śri Kṛṣṇa of being partial to the Pāndavas. Kṛṣṇa protested that for him everyone was equal — that Duryodhana’s *perspective* was faulty. To illustrate his point, Kṛṣṇa asked Duryodhana to select a priest worthy of a special honour from among the hundreds of priests present. Duryodhana viewed them all and reported to Śri Kṛṣṇa that all the priests were sinful, and none deserved honour. Then Kṛṣṇa asked Yudhishtira (the eldest of the Pāndavas) to point out a priest who was *not* worthy of being honoured. Yudhishtira viewed them all and reported that each priest was as glorious as the sun and each deserved honour. The diametrically opposite views expressed by Duryodhana and Yudhishtira boldly underline the matter of biases. Our bias makes a big difference in our perspective — our individual “world view”.

A person who, like Duryodhana, sees a majority of bad people around, goes by the maxim “tit for tat” and spends his life “setting people right”; in the bargain he forgets the great harm he has done to *himself*, and earns a bad name. Everyone pays him back in the same coin, which he thinks is a confirmation and vindication of his attitude. He simply does not realize that he made the huge mistake himself. Slyness, treachery, opportunism become his tools for survival. Like attracts like, and, a gang is born. (Children in such families are naturally ingrained in the same philosophy, perpetuating the unfortunate trend.) Who can say how many lifetimes would be spent in feuding, before he evolves to the Right Path? Of course, all this is more to be pitied than censured — a game of perspectives! Would it be right just to brand *him* bad — absolving *ourselves* of a share in the blame? He is a creature of circumstances created by all of us.

Many parts of the world are strife-torn. The cause may be political, religious, or any other. Both sides insist they are fighting for a just cause. What one side regards as terrorism, for the other it is fighting for a religion or an ideology. They are ready to *die* for the cause. Each side puts its *own* perspective “on a pedestal”. Who can say which side is right and which wrong? *Europe*, too, has seen religious persecution, inquisition, and burning of “heretics”. Religions teach love but our self-centred perspectives only learn hatred.

If there is God in each one of us in

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equal measure, He must be equal in a Mahatma, a corrupt politician, a criminal, or the “enemy”; in the rapist as well as the rape victim; in the murderer as well as the person murdered! If *all* is a result of past karma, this too could be karma of *some* lifetime being avenged — not that the explanation is any solace for the victim, of course. People feel pity for the victim and blame the culprit. It is understandable that they express in terms of *white* or *black* — no greys. Just natural! Sanskrit, too, has many widely quoted aphorisms (*subhāshita*-s), supposedly written by wise people, on “clear-cut” signs classifying good and bad persons — this is an old theme.

But a theosophist does not fit people in such compartments. For him there *are* no bad ones — *all* are Buddhas in the making. Jesus was teaching people one morning, when scribes and Pharisees came to “expose” Jesus in the eyes of the people. They had brought to him a woman caught in adultery. They said Moses had commanded that “such should be stoned”. They asked Jesus what *he* had to say about it. At first Jesus continued to write with his finger on the ground, as if he had not heard them. But when they kept asking persistently, he replied: “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” Then he continued writing; and all but the woman went away, “convicted by their own conscience” (John, 8:2–9). Jesus has warned: “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matt., 7:1). Sterling advice — particularly for those on the Path!

Undergoing the vicissitudes of evolution, stubbing toes on the way times without number, when wisdom begins to sprout in our mind, we start the real progress — one little and laborious step at a time. And *then* we begin to realize the need for changes in our fixed perspectives. As we feel it poignantly, changes automatically set in. Our vision improves and slowly we start seeing things more clearly, as they really are — glasses not so dark any more. Leaving our misguided ways, we turn towards the Path Proper. We make durable growth in our positivity, clear many testing situations over hundreds of incarnations and become useful to the Master.

Actually there is no paucity of “generally good” people in the world, but only after being tested on the touchstone of changing fortunes and seen to be still firmly virtuous, unaffected by painful experiences and negativities of the world — and shedding his own negativities — can a person be said to have withstood the test of time. His perspective will now be infinitely improved. Now he will freely love everyone. Even then he will have to be in a few more earth lives for “final seasoning”, before he reaches perfection *during* the earth life. In a world of seven billion, who can say if there are even seven *hundred* such “perfected” persons around us. The criteria are very rigid!

The qualities needed for perfection have been told by saints: Love, Devotion, Humility, Honesty, Non-violence, Serving the needy, and so on — the eternal

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values — we know them by heart. The only problem is in their practice. The good thoughts we read in books look fine in the books. We are not sure about their *actual* utility in the turbulence of life. It is doubtful if we even know what these *really mean*. Love can mean love for a mate, or for one's own child; but do we realize that it is a beautiful emotion that also includes compassion, and that it is extended unconditionally to *all* beings — in fact, the entire creation *and* the Creator?

Devotion for some means visit to a temple on a “holy” day, or performance of rituals. But devotion really means total surrender to God's will, accepting gratefully even “unpleasant” events as God's grace, being full of joy no matter what happens. Do we agree, and *practise* this? Whether we go to a temple or not, whether we perform the “prescribed” rites or not, it does not matter one bit.

Non-violence is not just avoiding getting into fights — the moment a rough thought comes into the mind, violence has already taken place. Similarly, we insist that honesty and humility are things that *everyone* must practise; *except us*. You see, *we* have “compelling reasons” for making wee compromises — well-intentioned, of course . . . everyday human comedy! Perspectives can be obliging and convenient! Other necessary qualities also go down similarly. We do not single out anyone — *all of us* stuck in the cycle of rebirths *are* involved to a greater or lesser extent. Otherwise we would not be here. We all need to share

thoughts to pool our knowledge, and also for mutual assurance — like smiling nods to each other on a promenade, to avoid loneliness in this dogged journey.

We who come together at the TS lodge may not yet be “liberated”, but to some extent are already on the Path, evolved to a fair degree. Only those who *at least in principle* agree upon the importance of all the saintly virtues come here. Some virtues have been picked up by us, and are being practised. It may not be possible to instil *all* the virtues just yet — some we are able to, according to our individual capabilities, while others are hard for the time being. Because of this “halfway” stage of ours, we see these virtues as several, and distinct from each other. Possibly it is a ramification of the illusion of separateness (duality). As a person gets more and more evolved, he begins to perceive the deep similarity between *all* the virtues. Community service is an excellent way to turn our self-centred mind outwards, and stride fast on the Path. As perspectives change, we *see* the values converging — gradual removal of illusion.

As we approach permanence, our perspective will become utterly firm, like a diamond — a true vision of the Ultimate Reality. It will no longer be an illusion. As we get rid of the illusive duality, as the perimeter of the Ego (our “I”) goes on enlarging, we *experience* that all the virtues are the *same* at the root level. All are just corollaries of the Unconditional Love that we are now overwhelmed with . . . on losing our duality — not a

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loss really, but a gain all the way! Now the values do not just *converge*, but are seen to be *branches and twigs of the same Tree of Love*: Devotion sprouts from the Love for the Creator, further leading to Gratitude, Humility, Surrender — everything. If I see myself in everyone, whom shall I regard as enemy; to whom shall I cause harm; whom shall I be violent with? The person I would be violent with would be *me*, and the person *causing* the violence would also be me. Violence is nipped in the bud! Whom shall I deceive,

but myself? If I am not going to deceive anyone, what else is Honesty? Truthfulness is automatic. Not just Truth and Non-violence, but the entire Eight-fold (*ashtānga*) Yoga merges here — *all*, facets of Love.

We may *now* be plodding in a dark tunnel, but we can help each other. Able Powers guide our step, taking us unmistakably to the Goal. Reach WE WILL! Cardinal Newman's guidance is helpful here: "I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me." ✧

**It was the understanding of the power of perception that allowed the Martin Luther King, Jr. generations to stay true to the strategy of non-violence, refusing to retaliate when every emotional instinct would justify them doing so.**

Burgess Owens

# On Adyar

N. SRI RAM

EACH year, as February 17th comes round, Adyar Day, as the day is named, is celebrated both at the Theosophical Society, Adyar and in Lodges all over the world, with a view to commemorate the life and work of the President-Founder, Colonel Olcott, who passed away at Adyar on 17 February 1907 at 7.17 a.m. It happens also to be the birthdate of Brother C. W. Leadbeater, to whom the movement owes so very much, and we think of him also on this day with affection and gratitude.

“Adyar” began as the administrative headquarters of the Society in 1882, when the Society was still in its early adolescence. Today the Society has reached the fullness of its stature, it has thrown its branches far and wide, and many a pillar has taken root in the ground to support this wide-spreading tree. Many a member even in faraway Sections such as New Zealand, Argentina and Finland — it is needless to name others — regards Adyar as a source of inspiration to him as well as for the whole Society. Brother Jinarājadāsa once described Adyar as “a vision of hope for mankind”.

All the great thoughts which give rise to such a hope, which we can find in the Theosophical literature, seem in some way to be centred at Adyar. It is, therefore, well that there should be one day in the year which is dedicated to this Centre.

Adyar is largely maintained physically by donations from members in many National Societies, made out of their abundant goodwill and faith. It is also constantly strengthened by their thoughts.

The main link between Adyar and the members who are abroad has always been *The Theosophist* which was founded by H. P. Blavatsky herself and has had after her a succession of eminent Editors. It is a magazine which goes out to Lodges and members in various parts of the globe, carrying with it the influence of Adyar, as well as the thoughts contained in its articles. There is, of course, much correspondence with Sections and members taking place all the time, through the President, the Recording Secretary, and no doubt also some of the workers who come from abroad and stay at Adyar for a while. The letters which go out from here, as well as the writings published

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N. Sri Ram was the fifth international President of the Theosophical Society from 1953–1973. From *The Theosophist*, March 1956.

## On Adyar

and sold, have influenced the minds of members in a way which has kept up the unique place which Adyar holds in the Society.

Dr Besant loved to call Adyar “The Masters’ Home”; for so she regarded it. The early writings are full of references to their visits on a number of occasions in their materialized forms. And if Brother C. W. Leadbeater’s testimony can be accepted, it has since then been frequently visited by them, though invisibly. According to Brother Jinarājādāsa, it is their “brooding thought” which gives Adyar its special atmosphere, which even many people not connected with the Society feel quite often. The magnetism engendered by their visits and thought must be present here, in addition to the magnetism of the various leaders who have lived and worked here. Those of us who look up to them for guidance may well regard it therefore as a place dedicated to them.

I referred to the leaders of the Society. With hardly an exception, all of them have been here for a longer or shorter time. Surely that fact alone makes it unique among the various theosophical centres. Each centre, each Lodge, has a magnetism of its own; but part of the work of Adyar is to radiate that quality which is needed by all.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is a remarkable fact that Theosophy as we have it can be presented to even the simplest minds in a form which they can easily grasp. HPB, in her monumental work *The Secret Doctrine*, refers

to an ancient scroll which contains only a few symbols, and she explains how the meaning of each of these symbols can be expanded to comprise the various stages of the whole cosmic process. A symbol may be quite simple, easily understandable; yet inside such a symbol as, say, a circle, there can be drawn many circles, different radii can be inscribed, and there can be gradually created a beautiful and complicated pattern. But it is not necessary to be acquainted with the intricacy of the pattern in order to appreciate the beauty and simplicity of the whole. Similarly Theosophy can be explained simply in fundamental terms, as well as presented in a complex, intricate pattern. It is the simple understanding which, I think, is the more important.

Brother C. W. Leadbeater was also very closely associated with Adyar. He has described his coming to Adyar with HPB and his early experiences here in his book *How Theosophy Came to Me*. He has been in Adyar since then for different periods, and much of his important work has been done here.

Among others who have left their impress on this place I would like to mention Mr J. Krishnamurti, who is regarded with affection and great respect by many, many Theosophists, although he is not now a member. He has lived here at different times in the past and spoken on different occasions on this estate. If you read what he has written about Adyar in the earlier years, you will know what he thought about the place at

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that time. I do hope, and believe, that what was true to him then still holds good.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Our Present Work:** After saying all this, the note that I would like to strike is: It is of little use for us to subsist on past glories or make such capital out of them as we can. The question which every one at Adyar should put to himself is: "How far do *I* contribute to the peace, the harmony, the brotherly understanding and dynamism of this place?" By putting that question to ourselves in a constructive spirit we would benefit Adyar greatly and ourselves. How far in our talk, in our contacts with fellow students, do we see the good in them and draw a veil over their faults and weaknesses?

We are all only too prone to talk about what we consider to be the defects of other people. But actually their defects may have a different look if viewed not through our personal reactions, but from a standpoint which is completely outside us both. It may be that what we think is the worst side of another does not represent his fundamental fault at all. That fault may be elsewhere, may be different from what appears on the surface.

Although Adyar has a magnetism of its own, a tremendously strong atmosphere, according to Brother Leadbeater, the maintenance of that atmosphere depends largely upon those who live and work here. It may be that the influence of Adyar is radiated from each part of the estate, even from its trees and its very ground. For an influence which is spiritual can attach itself not only to

human beings, but even more perhaps to such things of Nature as trees, leaves and stones which are more passive than man. Nevertheless much depends on what we do and think when we are here.

**Dynamism:** I have used the word "dynamism". That dynamism does not consist merely in showing a certain excitement, in celebrating this or that, or in disturbing other people. True dynamism, from the real, spiritual standpoint, is different from what people in general understand it to be. It stands still even when it is moving. Using the language of poetry, the lotus, as it rises out of the mud and opens its heart to the sunlight and the fresh air, is a picture of both dynamism and creation. It is really the divine energy in a tree which presently covers it with blossoms, causing it to overflow with the wine of life. To be similarly overflowing not with the mere "vital breath", but with the life of the Spirit, which rises from the tranquil depths, is to be really creative. Those of us who are here should live, as far as possible, not superficially but from those inexhaustible depths.

Dr Besant, our late President, wanted Adyar to be a Flaming Centre. But what kind of a flame? Again, I would say that it should be the flame of the deep, cool spaces, that each one metaphorically holds within himself, the flame that creates beauty, not ostentatiously but in a natural course, that creates music of the heart, a music which is one with its silence. Does not music, when it is divine, seem to melt into and become one with

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the silence of the heart which is receptive to the music?

Every one who is here at Adyar, or who wants to help the theosophical movement anywhere, should learn to live from his depths, not only realizing but becoming the very expression of the truths we call Theosophy. He should express them in his life, his relationships, his speech and all his little actions. That is one thing which Brother Leadbeater taught those around him, that one can live a truly beautiful, spiritual life, even attending to the simple duties of one's daily routine. He himself came to Adyar expecting nothing. He thought he would probably be given the job of sticking stamps or sweeping the floor. In those days there were no servants on the estate. He was quite prepared to do such work, and that was all he expected to do. He did not come with the hope of seeing the Masters, because he had too much reverence for them to expect that They would manifest themselves to him. Nor did he come with the idea of developing all kinds of psychic faculties, of impressing the world with his revelations, of sending out works of revolutionary significance and import.

There are not many in this world who are willing to serve the general good without any personal ambition, free from any self-importance that they can derive from their work, not asking for reward or recognition. If Adyar is to become a greater spiritual Centre, that aim will be accomplished only by making this

whole estate a kind of temple-court with an atmosphere which is beautifully sensitive yet brooks no petty thoughts or aims. There are temples in India with several courts one within the other, and as the devout pilgrim walks into the first court of the temple, even that is regarded as sacred. We should help to create a similar feeling with regard to this estate. My own hope is that some day Adyar may be made beautiful even physically in every aspect of it, not by gaudy decorations but in a naturally simple manner. Its landscape at every point, the trees, the architecture and the whole ensemble should be such as to make a pure appeal to the heart, an appeal which opens up a vision of brotherliness and harmony.

**Simply but Beautifully:** We have all to learn to live simply and beautifully, in sympathy with the Nature around us. Thus we may create, as Nature creates, with a quality which comes deeply from within ourselves. It is not the smallness or bigness of our work that matters, but its quality. It is not the size of the stone which makes it precious, but its pure water, the lustre with which it shines.

Adyar can flame more. Look at certain trees which are covered with flowers so that they appear the most wonderful things on earth. But it is possible for our earth to produce something even more beautiful and for us to receive that beauty in our hearts. There is no limit to the beauty that life can create and express. ✧

# Theosophical Work around the World

## Argentina

The 52nd Summer School of the Theosophical Society (TS) in Argentina was held in their Centre in San Rafael from 22 to 29 January 2017. Its theme was “Towards the Experience of Unity”. The guest speaker was Prof. Eduardo Gramaglia, a TS member in Argentina, musician, and philologist (Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit). In the afternoons members from different areas of the country delivered short talks on “Beyond Illusion, a Call to Unity”. Prof. Gramaglia was also in charge of three musical evenings, with different analyses of *Mozart’s* opera, *The Magic Flute*.

The Proem of *The Secret Doctrine*, Letter No. 22 of *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, and a letter written by H. Roerich in January 1933 were first considered by Gramaglia in the mornings, and then by all the participants, meeting in small groups, in order to answer suggested questions. Three meetings were held in the afternoons to discuss the conditions and possibilities in order to

start a Theosophical Education School.

The National President, Dr Esteban Langlois, conducted a training meeting on “Sharing Theosophical Teachings”, where the main requirements about the how, what, and where were discussed.

## International Rules

The International Rules have been amended and approved by the General Council in its meeting on 30 December 2016. A comprehensive work to update the Rules is now finalized. The revised Rules have been sent to the contacts in *The Theosophist* Directory, and are now added to the Adyar website under the “About” menu.

## World Congress

The 11th World Congress has been scheduled to be held in Singapore from 4 to 9 August 2018, followed by the International Conference of the Theosophical Order of Service from 9 to 11 August. The venue and registration details for both will be forthcoming. ✧

**Theosophy is not neutral but all-pervading, all-enlightening, all-directing, for it is the Divine Wisdom which sweetly and mightily ordereth all things. Nothing useful to humanity is alien to it; no science, no art, but is within its purview; every department of life is illumined by it; and only in its Light can we find the Truth of anything.**

Annie Besant

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