

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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CONTENTS

Presidential Address <i>Tim Boyd</i>	5
What Shall We Study? <i>Joy Mills</i>	19
We are All Fragments of the Divine <i>Pedro Oliveira</i>	22
The Art of Parenting <i>Clemice Petter</i>	28
How Shall I Live? <i>Rami Shapiro</i>	33
Love at Its Finest <i>Ananya Sri Ram Rajan</i>	37
Theosophical Work around the World	39
International Directory	40

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(See corresponding poem to this image, "Tree of Love", on p. 32 of this issue.)

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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.

Presidential Address

To the 144th Convention of the Theosophical Society (TS)
Varanasi, 31 December 2019

WELCOME all to the 144th Convention of the Theosophical Society, this time being held, after a 30-year interval, in the recently renovated national headquarters of the Indian Section of the TS in Varanasi, while Leadbeater Chambers, the Western accommodations building at the TS international headquarters in Adyar, is undergoing its own renovation, as I speak. Now let us please rise for the invocation to the Great Ones who protect the Society with their energy and strength:

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

I am now pleased to open this 144th Annual Convention of the TS.

This year we gather for the 144th annual International Convention of the Theosophical Society (TS). One of the benefits of our relative longevity is that it affords a vision of a sweep of time — global changes, changes within the Theosophical Society, and the impact of the Ageless Wisdom on both. The relentless changes brought about by natural impulse and the application of human will, reveal a pattern to the observant mind. These patterns are part of a larger cycle. Nature, human and otherwise, is abundant in its production of seed potentials. There are trees that produce millions of seeds each year in order for one or two to find fertile soil, take root, and grow, assuring the future of the species.

In recent times we as a human family have come to the view that we are some special creation, apart from the natural world, and have behaved accordingly, forgetful of the greater life in which we are imbedded. This is a pattern of thought and behavior which has become a characteristic of our time. As members of an organization formed to stem the tide of this current of thought, we need to consider this moment carefully.

The current of “brutal materialism” and “degrading superstition” which the TS was intended to address, has grown and taken on a variety of threatening forms since the TS’s founding. What has been the impact of the work we have done in the world? What has been the impact of the world on

Presidential Address

our work? We cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that the the relationship between “the world” and ourselves is reciprocal. If we are not vigilant in our awareness, our surroundings affect us powerfully, mainly because we are unconscious of its pervasive influence through culture, social norms, and education. The idea was well expressed by J. Krishnamurti when he said: “We are the world.”

It is the nature of seeds that those which are nurtured grow more prolifically. The first line in the *Dhammapada* quotes the Buddha as saying: “All that we are is the result of our thoughts.” Having spent countless lives feeding the seed of a separate, independent identity, we find

ourselves inheriting the world shaped from that current of thought. At this point there is a dawning clarity that this collective creation is both unsustainable and unsatisfactory. From the theosophical point of view, it is also clear that the Ageless Wisdom tradition can move us toward an experience of a dramatically different inner potential capable of invoking a brighter future.

In our brief time together let us pay attention. Let us hear beyond the inadequate words we share. Let us look and see in each other and ourselves the seed of an unfolding divinity. Let us commit to nurture that seed regardless of appearances.

* * *

In the **Indo-Pacific** region, the highlight of this year was the much-needed and long-awaited restoration of **Blavatsky Bungalow** in the Adyar Campus in Chennai, India. The refurbished building was inaugurated by me on the evening of 1 January 2019. After two years of meticulous work done with painstaking attention by a group specialized in renovating historical buildings, it was open again to students.

The **Indian** Section has 10,703 members as of September 2019 (a net drop of 441 over last year), distributed over 486 Lodges and Centres under 16 Federations. Its website <theosophy-india.org> was recently upgraded and provides basic information about Theosophy and recent events in the Section. A recent Internet-based system has helped in ef-

ficiently managing membership, financial data, and so on. The Indian Section’s 127th convention was inaugurated at Adyar by me on 1 January 2019. It was chaired by international Vice-President Dr Deepa Padhi. Pradeep Gohil, president of the Section, welcomed the delegates and delivered the state of the Section address. The second part of the convention was chaired by Yogendra Desai, with talks by Shikhar Agnihotri, S. U. Mahesh, N. C. Krishna, S. P. Malini, and Dr M. A. Raveendran. In order to motivate Federations and Lodges to propagate Theosophy, a unique goal-setting meeting of Federation leaders was organized on 6–7 October 2018 at Bhowali, attended by my wife Lily and me. Progress was continuously tracked and reported every month. The Section was able to achieve 90% of

Presidential Address

the planned goals by the end of the year. The Rohit Mehta Bhavan hostel was built in record time with a capacity of 146 students. A 100-kW solar power generator was installed resulting in significant electrical power savings. It is expected to break even in 5 years. Other buildings were revamped too with the help of the city authorities, and all these helped to accommodate the delegates to the TS International Convention 2019–20, being hosted by the Indian Section after a gap of 30 years. Shifting the Convention location this year is also enabling the Leadbeater Chambers building in Adyar to be upgraded.

The National Study Camp on self-transformation led by Vicente (Vic) Hao Chin, Jr, was held at Varanasi during 23–25 November 2018 with an attendance of 105. An international workshop on teachers' training was attended by about 140 delegates from all over India. Ven. M. Mehoankara Thero of Sri Lanka and Vic were the faculty. The 96th Easter Theosophical Conference on “The Real Purpose of the Theosophical Society” was held from 19–21 April 2019 in the recently renovated Blavatsky Bungalow in Adyar under the auspices of the Kerala Theosophical Federation. International Treasurer Nancy Secrest inaugurated the conference and I presided. About 124 delegates from various Federations attended. Study camps were conducted by the Telugu, Kerala, Marathi, Karnataka, Gujarat, Bombay, Utkal, Assam, Bengal, Bihar, UP, MP/Rajasthan, Tamil, and Rayalaseema Federations at the Bhowali

Himalayan Study Centre, from March through September 2019 on a variety of theosophical topics. Other study camps and classes were conducted by various Federations around the country. Also the National Lecturers conducted visits and talks at various locations during the year.

National President Gohil was invited to address the Belgian Section in Brussels where he spoke on “The Source of Spiritual Energy” on 26 June 2019. He also visited Naarden to attend the General Council and Strategic Planning Meeting last summer. An initiative was taken to propagate Theosophy amongst students by introducing theosophical and moral values among students and exposing them to the aims and objectives of the TS. A 6-month certificate course was designed on “Self-realization through Theosophy” in October. The TOS annual camp was held in Bhowali during 11–13 June 2019. TOS International and the Indian Section jointly contributed towards flood relief and cyclone relief during the year.

The National President of **Australia**, Linda Oliveira highlighted the visit of Lily and me in May. She has further indicated the certification of the new group at Logan in Queensland. They had a successful National Convention held in Sydney on the theme “Divine Wisdom in Theory and Practice”. They had a large number of activities throughout the year, including the completion of a new website available to all Lodges and Branches.

It is heartening to know that **New Zealand**'s effort in creating greater visibility by strategic efforts has paid

Presidential Address

dividends in attracting the attention of members. All programmes are developed on the basis of language understandable to the present generation; highlighting the usefulness of Theosophy as a practical tool for providing content and imparting wisdom on the way of life. During the year under report two interesting seminars were organized, namely “The Process of Self-transformation” and “The Rainbow Bridge — Searching for the Divine Within” directed by international speaker Dorothy Bell. The programme of developing online introductory study courses exploring Theosophy continued. The videos will be available shortly. It is a pleasure to see the results of strategic planning and the growing attraction of the younger people to modern theosophical explorations in New Zealand.

The **South-East Asia** Presidential Association has 504 members and consists of four countries: **Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Singapore**, with an active lodge in each country. The Singapore Lodge is the largest, with 333 members. Other than weekly meetings and study classes, the highlight of the year was “The Self-Transformation Seminar” by Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, in October. The team developing the Chinese website <chinesetheosophy.net> and translating theosophical literature into Chinese is based here. The Selangor Lodge in Malaysia has 97 members and conducts regular reading sessions and theosophical talks by guest speakers. Their library is open twice a week for the members’ use. Japan has the 37-member Nippon Lodge

which holds monthly study meetings, creates videos of lectures, translates theosophical books into Japanese, and publishes a monthly magazine, *Theosophia*. The Olcott Lodge of Myanmar has 37 members and has been granted a temporary registration certificate from the Home Affairs Ministry. The TOS conducted dental hygiene awareness campaigns. Three books were translated to the local language. In addition to weekly meetings, meditation sessions are also done. The common website for the region is <theosophyasia.net>.

Bangladesh has 65 members. Blavatsky Lodge observed Foundation Day and organized regular study classes on Theosophy. The proposed Annie Besant Lodge was also active. The historic building of Comilla Lodge was locked by local municipal authorities due to legal issues, and the matter is being pursued for a resolution. The **Philippines** has 21 Lodges, one of which is new, namely “Hearts” in Davao City, chartered on 11 February 2019. There were 16 new members in the Section.

In **the Americas**, the Theosophical Society in **America** (TSA) continued their active and comprehensive activities during the year including outreach to the general public. During the past year, two additional centers were certified and a 12-month course on “Death and the Afterlife” was designed and mailed to 516 members. It is a matter of pride that the Henry S. Olcott National Library continues to provide quality facilities. Digitalization of film, slides and historic documents

Presidential Address

continued as a major activity with personalized service. Throughout the year, high-quality study, meditation, service, and public participation continued with success. Apart from workshops, online interactive webinar programs were organized. Large participation is witnessed in online programs like “Walking the Theosophical Path” and “Mahatma Letters Reading and Discussion Group” conducted by Pablo Sender. Online classes are also offered such as Ravi Ravindra’s course on “Learning to Live by Dying Daily”.

The Theosophical Publishing House is providing audio books. The entire collection of different journals can be accessed online by all interested; similarly, the Internet seminars. The IT department extends its services to all departments to upgrade their activities. There are almost 48,000 subscribers to the TSA YouTube channel. Ever since the Olcott Library joined SWAN (System-Wide Automated Network), a library consortium in Northern Illinois with a potential patronage of over three million people, their circulation of requested items showed an increase of over 700%. Library membership has gone up by 21%. This year the Quest Bookshop at the national center is celebrating its 50th anniversary and for that over 4,000 customers are contacted for special events, featured items, and seasonal sales.

The annual convention in **Cuba** was organized in January on the theme “Seeking a Path”, which included lectures on “Kriya Yoga”, “Three Paths of Perfec-

tion”, and study of the book *At the Feet of the Master*. It is interesting that the Section also organized a theosophical Summer School under the banner “Theosophical Research, Theosophical Authors and Meditation”. This event was attended by members from Costa Rica, Spain, the US (Hialeah and Ojai), and the Presidential Representative for Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. This approach needs to be encouraged. The Cuban theosophical magazine was available quarterly online. The studies in the Lodges cover a wide spectrum of themes relating to Christianity, Man, God, the Universe, the Science of Yoga, J. Krishnamurti, and so on. The Havana center hosts the study of H. P. Blavatsky’s (HPB) *The Secret Doctrine*. Three courses were held for new members.

The General Secretary of the **Argentinean** Section, Esteban Langlois, reports that in November, together with the White Lotus Branch, a national conference was organized with the theme “The Mission of the Theosophical Society and the Purpose of Its Members”, at Horco Molle, a few kilometers from the city, with the peacefulness of Nature. A Luso-Hispanic seminar was organized in collaboration with the Inter-American Federation and had Pablo Sender as the main speaker. An introductory course was started through the Internet, a team was formed and a sixteen-week course was presented covering the main teachings of esoteric philosophy. A next-level course for those who subscribed to the introductory course is in the making.

Presidential Address

The **Mexican** Section celebrated its centenary with the visit of Isis M. B. Resende, President of the Inter-American Theosophical Federation, who visited branches and study centers and spoke and interacted with members and the public in general. Dr Isaac Jauli and Dr Enrique Reig also took part in the celebrations, where they gave a workshop on “Coaching without Coach” in the cities of Guadalajara and Poza Rica.

In **Puerto Rico** members meet regularly. On 22 and 23 September they welcomed Gaspar Torres, a senior resident member of the Krotona Institute in California. He conducted a two-day seminar on “Spiritual Development and Managing Emotions”. From 30 October to 2 November Enrique Reig and Isaac Jauli came from Mexico and Spain respectively to give a two-day workshop, “Living the Truth of Our Soul: The Coherence in Our Personal Lives”. Two public lectures were also given, “Intuitive Intelligence” and “Which is Our Destiny?”

In **Chile**, Lodges continue to meet weekly to study Theosophy and related subjects. The Department of Education organized public meetings and workshops for members and collaborated with the work of Andean Conferences in Mendoza, Argentina, last October.

Both the HPB and Verdad Lodges were active in organizing public talks offered free on the Internet, as courses on Theosophy. Activities have been varied and covered a wide spectrum of subjects. Sonia Obando was elected President of Lodge HPB while Rosa Atahualpa was

elected President of Lodge Verdad for 2019–20. On 1 June 2019 Lodge HPB celebrated the 95th anniversary of the foundation of the TS in **Peru**, which coincides with the foundation of this Lodge.

The Blavatsky and Fraternity Lodges in **Venezuela** met regularly during the year. In addition to celebrating the important dates, in-depth study of books like *Pillars of Spiritual Life*, *A Yoga of Light*, and *Tolerance* were organized, which were well received by the members. In each Lodge there is half an hour of meditation for peace.

As reported by Maryse DeCoste, Organizing Secretary, **Canadian** Theosophical Association, the duties of the directors were streamlined to make the Association and its activities more effective. The Association has been extremely busy in organizing numerous holistic programs. The national convention and conference were held in Vancouver in August on “The Three Objects of Theosophy in the 21st Century”. This was very well attended, including by non-members. The Congress of the World Religions was held in Toronto in November 2018, where representatives of both Toronto’s York Lodge and Vancouver’s Blavatsky Lodge were in attendance. Another important activity was the get-together of the Quebec School of the Wisdom in Magog in August on “The Powers Latent in Man”. Although there has been a decline in membership of 10% overall, there has been growth in Quebec, Manitoba, and BC. On the whole the year was well planned and the activities held regularly.

Presidential Address

Despite some local problems, the Theosophical Society of **Costa Rica** continued with their enthusiastic activities in conducting study classes, celebration of the important days by Virya, Shakti, Dharma, and HPB Lodges. There are two lodges and a study center with a total of 8 active members. The new Organizing Secretary for **Central America** is Beatriz Elisena Martinez Pozas. I had visited her during the month of May 2018.

In **Africa**, the **East and Central African** Section is comprised of four countries: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia. The highlight of this year was the year-long centenary celebrations of the Nairobi Lodge in **Kenya** with several indoor programs like lectures, and outdoor activities like the planting of 250 trees at “Moi Forces Academy” in May 2018. Ananya Sri Ram Rajan was invited to conduct a weekend seminar on “Towards a Just World” on 15 to 16 September 2018. A special feature is the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis undertaken to extend the presence of Nairobi Lodge by further activating the members and attracting new members. Narendra M. Shah was once again elected as the General Secretary of the Section of the TS for a two-year term. The election was also conducted for four Assistant Secretaries for the Regions. Both Nairobi Lodge and Dar es Salaam Lodge are active in humanitarian activities, such as providing food to orphans, and school and college fees to deserving students. The Nile Lodge of **Uganda** has met on scheduled days and studied theosophical

books. Kitwe Lodge in **Zambia** is fortunate to have their own building. They held their regular study meetings with good attendance, and have been making efforts to enlist new members. The Sara Rose Orphanage has been the focal point of the Zambia TOS. The Section is in the process of revising their Constitution.

In **Europe** the **Italian** Section, with 26 groups and 18 centers, continued their “members only” meetings and public conferences, which were very well received. The 105th Italian National Congress took place in Cavallino-Treporti, from 30 May to 2 June with the theme “Consciousness and Awareness in the Light of Theosophy”. For the first time the Section held a silent retreat conducted by Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu from 27 to 29 September in a peaceful and natural environment in “Miri Piri” in Travo. Antonio Girardi was reelected as General Secretary of the Section for a period of three years from July 2019.

It is heartening to note that on 30 September 2018, the transition from “association” to “charity” status was finalized and the Charter handed over to the new TS **England** (TSE) Charity. While the regular activities continued the main activities of the Section were the North-West Federation Weekend Conference in May with the theme “Esoteric Teachings: A Path to Wisdom” and the week-long Summer School in August on “Reality, Illusion, and Life”. Both events were productive and the participation was large and encouraging for all. At the TSE Headquarters several

Presidential Address

international speakers including Isis Resende from Brazil and Kurt Leland from America were hosted to give lectures on important and interesting topics. Some of the important theosophical books were studied this year. Courses were offered on sacred geometry, *The Yoga-Vāsishtha*, *Sermons of Meister Eckhart*, Vedic astrology, after-death states, and meditation. The 24 Lodges and centres continued their activities in reaching out to the wider community. Many of the lodges concentrated their studies on the Three Objects of the Society. Training courses for new speakers have been introduced. The diploma course on Theosophy has been well received. It is good news that a higher diploma course has been introduced this year. These courses have attracted around 150 students. The merger of the Welsh region with TSE is progressing well. They are producing a bi-annual magazine, *Esoterica*, which is widely distributed to members and the public. The national President releases a bi-monthly newsletter particularly in order to be in touch with the members independent of groups.

The activities of TS **Finland** covered many special programmes of immense interest on important theosophical themes. A silent retreat was held in Kreivila in August. The annual convention of the Finnish Section was held in Oulu on 27 April. The important function of the year was the Summer School in Kreivila during 7–11 June. The course with the theme “The Foundation of Theosophy” was conducted by Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu from

France. On White Lotus Day, the special guest was Tim Wyatt from England who spoke on “The Extinction Myth”. The Lodges are active providing courses in basic Theosophy and related subjects using different study methods. It is interesting that TS organized two big fairs in Southern Finland selling books and holding interactive sessions. Estonian Lodges also held a winter seminar in January 2019 and *The Secret Doctrine* study classes in May both in Tartu. An autumn study camp in Aegvidu was conducted in August. The Finnish Section has 21 lodges and one study group. Total membership is 345.

It is heartening to note that all the main targets were met by the **French** Section during the year, in terms of meditation meetings, silent retreats, improving Internet presence, et al. Unfortunately, the activities in Paris, though they continued steadily, were adversely impacted due to social unrest and hacking of the website. A new website has now been set up. The Lodge meetings, discussing important topics, were held monthly. Courses were held once in two weeks, free of cost. Silent retreats for only members were also held as planned, attracting many new members. A regular meditation group was formed early this year and continued to meet every two weeks. Outside of Paris, theosophical activities were organized regularly. Lodges in Marseille, Orleans, Toulouse, and Brittany were regular and active. The National Convention was held in Paris on 22–23 June 2019 on “Animal to Human Evolution of Consciousness”. The programme included a public lecture, sym-

Presidential Address

posium, and discussion on the theme. The magazine *Le Lotus Bleu* was published ten times during the year.

The 12th edition of the silent retreat that takes place annually in **Spain**, conducted by the President of the European Federation of the TS, Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu, took place in Arbuçeis, near Barcelona from 1 to 4 November. The theme was “Exploring the Different States of Consciousness after Death”. The 41st edition of the Iberian Days function, was organized by the Portuguese Section at the Seminario de Aguilha, in Sao Domingo de Rana, near Lisbon. The topic was “From the Unreal, Lead Me to the Real: Illusion, Truth, Discrimination”. The Section’s summer school took place from 25 to 30 August in Sant Feliu de Guixols (Costa Brava), with Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, as the guest speaker, on the topic “Self-Mastery, Meditation, and the Spiritual Life”.

The **Swedish** Section continued their praiseworthy efforts by bringing out their magazine, organizing interesting lectures like “Tibet in my Heart”, “Do we have a Free Will?” and so on. Study groups, workshops and dialogue groups were held throughout the year. A summer school was organized in the Archipelago not far away from Stockholm. The theme was “Thought, Word, and Action”. Most of the programmes are open to non-members. The bookshop has a rich collection of new and old books and is a centre of togetherness. An activity of the TOS in Sweden is the support extended to school children in Goa, India.

The **Dutch** Section maintains a close and brotherly cooperation with the International Theosophical Center (ITC) at Naarden which has been active through the year. It hosted the international strategic planning meeting inspiring a new project “The TS Netherlands in Changing Times”, which aims to bring the TS fully into the 21st century.

The members of the TS in **Portugal** have remained fully active holding public lectures, panels and group discussions through the year. Maria Jose Barrios, from Spain visited Lisbon and Porto where she delivered a public talk on “Creativity: Welcoming Our Potential”, in both cities the talks were well attended. In April the Portuguese Section hosted the Iberian Days with the theme “From the Unreal to the Real: Illusion, Truth, Discernment”.

The charter of the Theosophical Society in **Ukraine** (TSU) was granted on 12 August 2019, raising its status to a National Section. Its rules and regulations were ratified by the General Gathering in Ukraine on 2 July 2019. The 16th TSU Convention in November 2018 was devoted to celebrating the 143rd anniversary of the TS. In May 2019, a seminar was held on the topic “The Process of Self-Transformation: Research of the Higher Potential for Effective Life”. In the year under report, the summer school on “The Power of Unity” was held in Pavlynka, Odesa at the HPB Cultural Center. The website started in 2017 has been rendering substantial services to all interested people. The scientific group of the TS in Ukraine

Presidential Address

held two very interesting sessions. A key event was the Scientific Interdisciplinary Conference on “Spiritual Aspects of Modern Attitude” with international participation. The exhibition “Inexhaustible Source” dedicated to HPB continued to be exhibited around the country under the banner of TOS.

The main event which was largely attended was the German Summer School held in July 2019 at Bad Zwesten in the center of **Germany**, on the topic “Living Theosophy in the 21st century”. The guest speaker from France, Jacques Mahnich held nine lectures, a workshop and meditation seminar. His focus was on tackling problems of today’s world. Other highlights were a music session and a presentation on Sulamith Wulfing. To encourage and enrich the members, copies of the book “O Lanoo” were distributed free to the members. A new study group has been set up in Kronberg, near Frankfurt.

Apart from the regular annual programmes in **Greece**, two important international conferences were held in October 2019 at Athens on the “History of Theosophy” and at Eretna “European School of Theosophy”. The quarterly magazine has been regularly published. Important books of Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater were translated and published in Greek language. The seven Lodges in Athens and one in Crete have been vibrant with interesting discussions on important theosophical publications.

The **Icelandic** Section held their summer school near Reykjavik on the theme “Life is One”. They have regular biweekly

public meetings with an attendance of 30 to 60 persons. Their journal *Gangleri* is published annually with a Roerich painting on its cover. They have a good library and bookshop. A triennial newsletter is also published. There are 7 active Lodges.

The **Russian** Presidential Agency has 135 members spread over 9 Branches. They have study meetings weekly, hold public meetings twice a month and have monthly online discussions whose videos are published on the Internet. The annual All-Russian Theosophical Conference took place from 23 to 24 March 2019 in Kemerovo. The annual summer theosophical seminar was dedicated to the study of *The Secret Doctrine*. Some books were reprinted and some new translations were published.

The 14th All Ireland Convention was held on 25 May 2019. The guest speaker Bernice Croft gave an inspiring address on the theme, “Mysticism of Theosophy”. The centenary celebration of Theosophical Society in **Ireland**, coinciding with the 10th year of existence of Phoenix Lodge was celebrated with a lot of enthusiasm. A large number of enquiries are received on their website which is encouraging.

Despite logistic difficulties, the Lodges in Budapest, **Hungary**, functioned. The lectures were recorded and made available to the public, which were received with a lot of enthusiasm. During the year under report, the public lecture series on Hungarian Pranadi group were continued. The last part of *The Secret Doctrine* was published and there is a plan to print *The Key to Theosophy*. The

Presidential Address

Presidential Representative participated in the EFTS council meeting in August 2019 in Brussels, Belgium.

In June 2018, the **Norwegian** Regional Association took positive steps to set up an interim board which would, in turn, help out in establishing a democratically elected and functional board to take forward its activities. Of the two local groups only the one at Strommen is functioning. Hopefully steps will be taken to revive the other in Moss. Lodge Dharma has been reawakened and regular activities initiated. It will open for general participation after the initial members receive training and (theosophical) education.

Apart from the regular annual activities, **Swiss** groups and Lodges continued on their regular structured programmes. The Swiss and European Theosophical Seminar was organized on “Beauty, Wisdom, Harmony in Spiritual Research” which was well attended. In order to help the members, the Lugano Group has been separated from the Ascona Group. The Zurich Group, under the leadership of Frank Henkel was very active with positive approach and created a website and a press release. It is heartening to note that the French-speaking activities provided by Geneva have been posted in their website and are available free. Andrea and Greta Biaska-Caroni continue to manage the non-profit Association “The Luigi Pericle Archive”.

There are three Lodges with 62 members in **Austria**. They provide weekly lectures during the whole year. In October 2018, some of the members attended

the annual meet of the European School of Theosophy in Florence, Italy. The theme of the week-long lectures was “Memento Mori — World Views of Death and Dying”. The annual meeting of the Austrian Association was held at Linz Lodge in March 2019.

The **Welsh** Region was founded in 1922. It had 63 members as of September 2019. The report of the TS in Wales has been filed by the former Regional Secretary, Julie Cunningham. It is likely that most of the Welsh members will be shifted to TS in England next year based on the request to include their membership in the English Section after a possible merger. Some study meetings and public talks were held at different places.

Covenant Lodge, Israel, in Tel Aviv, reports that a monthly public lecture continues to be held throughout the year. Two weekend and three one-day seminars were organized and proved to be a good channel for study. Five study groups are active and meet twice monthly. YouTube has been explored to upload 45 films on theosophical subjects for public use.

Members of the **Blavatsky Lodge in Slovenia**, meet regularly twice a week and are studying the law of karma and *The Voice of the Silence*. Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu, Chairman of the European Federation visited on 27 October 2018 and attended a seminar in Celje on “Discerning True Spirituality from the Occult” with 30 participants. On 27 November the Lodge organized the first public lecture by Francek Dobovisek on “Theosophy and the TS” with 23 in attendance.

Presidential Address

The **Ananda** and **Arc en Ciel Lodges** in Marseilles, **France**, report that a three-Saturday seminar was held in Marseilles with Jacques Mahnich conducting the first Saturday on “Theosophy, the Remedy for a Sick World”, “The Path of Hero” done by Myriam Philibert on the second, and Cecile Giuliani speaking on the third.

At the **International Headquarters**, renovation work started on the **Lead-beater Chambers** and is expected to be completed by September/October 2020. The **Archives and Museum** department is being shifted to the newly built extension to the Adyar Library building and will be named “Surendra Narayan Archives”. During the year, 20 research scholars used the facilities, either in person or requesting scanned materials by electronic media. During the international Convention, archival exhibitions on “The Mahatma Letters” and “Prominent People Associated with the Theosophical Movement” were inaugurated by me on the first day of the Convention. The Archives team consisting of V. Vedavathi, Mohan Mani and Jaishree Kannan was supported by Bernd Jesse, whose contribution as a volunteer was very much appreciated. In 1886 Col. H. S. Olcott established the reputed **Adyar Library and Research Centre (ALRC)**. T. Narayanan Kutty is the Director and C. A. Shinde the chief Librarian, with 14 supporting staff. In January, on behalf of the Society, I signed an important co-operation agreement with Sree Sankara University in Kerala for joint publication of books, and for research scholars to better utilize the contents of the ALRC

and revive Sanskrit. A new system was introduced for the arrangement of the books considering the Library’s closed nature and to facilitate space for the Archives. The changes took about two months. Digitization and automation activities continued to progress; catalogue digitization has been completed.

The School of the Wisdom conducted four courses during the year. Pablo Sender gave a comprehensive presentation of H. P. Blavatsky’s teachings, both philosophical as well as practical, with his course “Higher Consciousness — Its Nature and Awakening” in November 2018. In December, Jacques Mahnich offered “Living Theosophy in the 21st Century”, emphasizing the role of the timeless wisdom as the guiding light of our lives in a science-and-technology-centered world. In “Meditation in the Light of Theosophy” conducted in January, Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu guided students in the practice of Madame Blavatsky’s “Meditation Diagram” for a much-needed transformation of awareness. The **Olcott Education Society (OES)** runs the **Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School**, which has been giving importance to the academic as well as co-curricular activities such as sports, cultural events, social issues, educational tours, and so on, for the overall development of the students. Speaking in English is emphasized as a tool for global communication. Upgrade of teacher skills is also given equal importance. The **HPB Hostel** is also run by OES with a resident warden and eight boys staying. OES’s **Vocational**

Presidential Address

Training Centre has 3 teachers, and 24 students undergoing free training in tailoring, weaving, embroidery, and other crafts. The **Social Welfare Centre** looks after 46 young children with food and play activities. Parents are also involved during social and national celebrations.

The Theosophical Order of Service exists in 36 of the 59 countries where the Theosophical Society is active. The e-newsletter and the rich website provide the latest relevant information. The Facebook page also provides interesting posts. Though TOS activities are different from country to country, the common strands are women's issues, theosophical education, and encouragement of youth involvement in TS and TOS. Nancy Secrest, TOS International Secretary, visited many TS/TOS groups in India this year. She also gave a presentation of TOS activities around the world to the International Theosophical Conference (ITC) in July. Several TOS groups are active in animal welfare and providing humanitarian help. Many groups confine themselves to healing, while some practise peace meditation regularly. Flood relief efforts in India were also supported this year, in addition to the recovery efforts in Bhubaneswar after Fani, a devastating cyclone. The members were personally involved. The work that TOS groups are carrying out across the world testifies to Annie Besant's foresight in putting the First Object of the Theosophical Society into action, and it follows HPB's teachings that theosophists should live a life of altruism.

The long-felt need of having schools with a theosophical educational approach was fulfilled this year by the formation of the **Adyar Theosophical Academy (ATA)**, which commenced on 24 June 2019 with 21 students and 8 staff within the campus of the International Headquarters of the Theosophical Society (TS), in the building formerly used by the Theosophical Publishing House and repurposed to house the new school. ATA is run by the Theosophical Education Society (TES), formed on 9 April 2019 with the four International Officers of the TS as its Ex-Officio members. I visited the school on 8 October and planted a Bodhi tree sapling to denote wisdom. Then I addressed the parents and invitees gathered there and spoke of my shared vision for the school and what it embodies, which endeavors to create an atmosphere that invites the deeper aspect of a human being in its complete expression.

ATA draws upon its motto of "Learning and Growing through Transformative Education". Led by Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, Director of the Golden Links Institute in the Philippines and former National President of the TS in the Philippines, ATA aims to prepare students for life in all its dimensions, imparting wholesome education in its true sense. The school currently has 5 classes and 48 students from Pre-school to Grade II and aims to expand every year by one grade until Grade XII. Each class strength is limited to 20 students with a high teacher-student ratio to impart quality education.

Three new classrooms will be con-

Presidential Address

structed by April 2020. The campus has beautiful trees, some being quite old, including a clump of Jamun trees (Indian blueberry), and is flanked by two banyan trees. The Besant Gardens grounds that surround ATA serve as an inspiration and initiation into science and discovery through Nature. Students have also gone for many field trips for practical learning. These include a museum, the Post Office, a zoo, a planetarium, and the Guindy National Park.

Like-minded teachers and students were drawn to the school as it started taking shape. Most staff has some old connections with the TS which has been renewed and likewise with some of the parents. We have a devoted TS member volunteer from Colombia and look forward to more members joining from other countries.

School of the Wisdom Directors, TS members visiting Adyar, as well as guests have come and interacted with staff and students on various occasions. The academy Director, Sonal Murali, worked at the TS Adyar from 1983 to 1997, and has explored alternative education based on J. Krishnamurti's educational philosophy for a decade.

ATA has a website and social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram. There is an information page on the TS Adyar website under "Explore" that has a link to the ATA website. Targeted Facebook and Google advertisements are placed from time to time for a wider reach. Admissions are open for next year.

May you have a fruitful and inspiring experience during our Convention.

TIM BOYD

Enlightenment is not a fixed end; it is a timeless movement in love.

J. Krishnamurti
Public Talk 4 in New Delhi, 19 November 1972

What Shall We Study?

JOY MILLS

NOWHERE, as we have been reminded on many occasions, is there an official definition of Theosophy. Membership in the Society is not dependent upon the acceptance of any credal statement; that one is in sympathy with the Three Objects is the sole declaration necessary for joining the organization. Yet we are told there is a need to study. Many are the admonitions to know Theosophy. If we would teach, we must first learn. But study what? What is it we must learn?

For the individual seeker, the question of what to study is usually solved by the dictates of personal interest. In the initial stages of theosophical study, one is inclined to read widely, almost without discrimination, eager to explore in all directions, wading or swimming in that “shoreless ocean of truth” which Theosophy has been denominated. Later may come specific programs, developed out of need or interest or preference. One person may come to study only *The Secret Doctrine*, another *The Mahatma Letters*, while to yet another only the texts on meditation and the spiritual life seem to

answer the inner need. For some, the works of Besant and Leadbeater are sources of never-ending inspiration and enlightenment. Others confine their studies to the writings of HPB and her Teachers. Yet others find Theosophy as much in literature published outside the Society as that issued within the organization. All the numerous individual approaches are reflected in the many modes by which Theosophy (or what is called Theosophy) is shared.

When we turn to group study, however, other considerations enter the picture. Individuals studying alone are free to pursue private interests, but group work demands a certain discipline that often seems to impose restraints upon individual freedom. Frequently individual differences in interest, preference and background, need to be resolved before the group can proceed. It may become necessary to place certain bounds on the study, to delimit Theosophy as it were, in order that the maximum benefit may be derived by the entire group. What, then, is to determine the bounds? What guideline exists by

Ms Joy Mills was international Vice-President of the Theosophical Society (TS) for two terms, National President (NP) of the TS in America for three terms, and NP of the Australian Section of the TS, among her many other responsibilities. From *The American Theosophist*, March 1964.

What Shall We Study?

which we can say for group study, “This is the area of our concern; that is not”? Is there a measurement by which our studies may be said to approximate truth or deviate from the norm? To say that discrimination is necessary does not solve the dilemma that often confronts us.

Before the content of group study can be determined, it may be first necessary to define the purposes for which the group exists. The purposes of the theosophical group may seem self-evident, but is it in reality? Since the individual members of the group have subscribed to the Three Objects of the Society, it may be assumed that these describe the uniting focus of the group work. But are the Objects descriptive of purpose? Many theosophical groups would declare their purpose to be: “To study Theosophy in order to share the wisdom with those who are seeking understanding.” Whether stated in such precise terms or not, it must be admitted that most theosophical groups *do* study (in members’ meetings) and *do* share (via public classes and lectures). Yet the Objects of the Society do not enjoin the study of Theosophy (for Theosophy is not even mentioned in them) nor advocate public work. Therefore, it may well be asked: “What is the essential purpose for which the theosophical group exists?” Only when and as this question is answered may there be some approach to the nature and content of study in the group.

In line with the freedom of thought emphasized by the Society’s official statements and the autonomy reserved to the groups, it may be suggested that it is for

each group to explore its own inherent purpose. Beyond official statements of freedom and autonomy, however, there is a deeper consideration: purpose, to be truly valid, can never be imposed from without, whether it be in respect to individual or group purpose. This may be seen most clearly in relation to the individual, where it may be recognized that purpose is essentially integral to the nature of being human. What is imposed then is not purpose, but discipline in pursuit of purpose. As this may be applied to a group, we may say that purpose arises from within the nature of the group itself. If anything is imposed, it is not purpose — although it may masquerade as that — but disciplines, orders, injunctions, and even commands. The problems that most frequently arise are actually the resultants of a conflict between the inherent purpose (expressed or unexpressed, consciously recognized or unconsciously felt) and an outer command to pursue a given end.

Reflecting then upon the nature of purpose, we may come to understand the importance for examining this concept in our group activity. If the purpose of the group transcends the sum of the purposes expressed by the individual members of the group, the group itself takes on an existence, becomes an entity, over and above the individuals that compose it. Everyone who has participated in real group work has had an experience that verifies this view of a group as more than the sum of the individuals that compose it. The recognition of this fact is essential in defining the purpose of the group. At

What Shall We Study?

the same time, it aids in understanding that the purpose of one group may not necessarily be the purpose of another group or of all groups, even of similar aims and ideals. Each theosophical group may well ask itself: “why do *we* exist as a group? What is our uniqueness?” As these questions are answered, the content of our study begins to come clear. . . .

The answer to the question of what we shall study lies, according to this analysis, not in formalized programs adopted by majority vote out of a compromise of individual preferences, but rather in that deeper perception of the nature of our work and the total group consciousness seeking to fulfill that basic nature or purpose. Specific programs develop out of the mutual group search to identify principles. Reading and discussion, sustaining and nurturing such programs, reflect individual interests and backgrounds, and serve to focus those principles upon the field of human affairs in terms of practical applications to the problems of life. When we mistake applications for principles, there is the danger of group disintegration, since this is the area in which differences may arise, and unless such differences are referable

to basic principles, they can be the cause of separation.

It is not, of course, that group work represents uniformity of view or approach, but unity of aim. As this is recognized, there is the enrichment of mutual study and work as new insights challenge and divergent interpretations stimulate creative thought. What we shall study is not a categorical question separate from our mutual endeavors in a group, but represents the focal point at which universal principles meet practical needs, harmonizing interests and preferences, enlarging understanding, and providing exciting adventures across new continents of thought. In the paradoxical way truth has of revealing itself, the answer to what we shall study may be comprised in the words of *Light on the Path*:

Seek out the way . . . Seek it by study of the laws of being, the laws of Nature, the laws of the supernatural; and seek it by making the profound obeisance of the soul to the dim star that burns within.

The paradox, finally, is not that the question is unanswered by a specific this or that, but that the answer is itself a continuing question, for it is to seek. ✧

Life has a message to give and this message can be received only within ourselves.

N. Sri Ram
The Way of Wisdom

We are All Fragments of the Divine

PEDRO OLIVEIRA

THE Sanskrit word *sādhana* implies “leading straight to a goal, guiding well, furthering; effective, efficient, productive of; accomplishment, performance”. (Monier-Williams’ *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*). It is usually translated as spiritual practice. However, the so-called modern mind has made of it a veritable supermarket. Not only are there many practices on offer, most of which involve some kind of payment, but there is also a subtle “competition” between them, as if a particular teacher whose “spiritual brand” was more famous would perhaps attract more followers.

One of the most bizarre features of the modern world is to see so-called gurus and spiritual teachers building an enormous publicity machine around them. Contrast this with a life of utter self-effacement lived by Sri Ramana Maharshi, for example, and you will realize the difference between spiritual integrity and sham.

Besides what was described above, some people tend to view spiritual practices as if they were commodities for their pleasure and satisfaction. For example, there may be those who enrol in

a meditation course, do not achieve results in the short term, and proceed to search for another practice. This may be one reason why J. Krishnamurti said that no practices can lead one to Truth. Another question that also arises, given that Krishnaji used to meditate when he was a young man, is what kind of mind do we bring to a spiritual practice?

If a superficial mind approaches meditation, then it becomes just an exercise in self-delusion. Perhaps the noblest example of the right attitude in this regard was given by the Buddha. It only took him one meeting with a beggar on the roadside to build in him an unmovable determination to find the truth about suffering.

Carlos Castañeda’s teacher, Don Juan Matus, had this to say about travelling on a path: “For me there is only the travelling on paths that have heart, on any path that may have heart, and the only worthwhile challenge is to traverse its full length — and there I travel looking, looking breathlessly.” (Carlos Castañeda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*)

A genuine spiritual path has to involve

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We are All Fragments of the Divine

our whole being — our heart — which means that it can never be unrelated to our daily life and its many relationships. It is precisely this that Rule 20 of Mabel Collins' *Light on the Path* points to: a practical and holistic approach to spiritual practice. Rule 17 of the same book encourages us to seek out the way, implying that it remains undiscovered in the midst of a life governed by self-centredness. This involves the paradox of getting out of oneself and at the same time looking at oneself objectively. Rule 20 presents us with a practical itinerary for doing so, involving openness of mind, plunging into the mysterious depths of our own being, and discovering the life beyond individuality. Equally important for us is to understand “those other divine fragments which are struggling side by side” with us. It is a discovery that knows no end.

The Oxford Dictionary gives as the meaning of the word “fragment”: a small part broken off or separated from something; an isolated or incomplete part of something. It is only when we look at ourselves intelligently that we discover that our sense of self is incomplete, for such a sense amounts to isolation, separation from others. As fragments we fail to know the truth of our being. When that truth is found there are no others, only the One Self, Ātman, indivisible consciousness. But to pretend that we have reached that state is only a form of dangerous illusion.

The “way” suggested in *Light on the Path* is truly to be found in one's living, in how we approach daily contacts, rela-

tionships, and choices. The implication is that the way is a perception transformed by other-centredness, by welcoming others into our existence and not by shutting them out. As Radha Burnier once said: “Universal brotherhood is a mind without barriers.” What such a mind sees is the very truth that all life is one. To live a spiritual life can be seen as carefully building a vessel into which the newness of life can be poured. That means have no demands, no expectations, no projections. If the right work is done, the blessedness will come. But it cannot come at all into a consciousness in which the illusion of self is still alive.

H. P. Blavatsky's (HPB) *The Voice of the Silence* (Fragment III, v. 273) illustrates the fact that the struggle against the sense of self is not for the faint-hearted:

The fearless warrior, his precious life-blood oozing from his wide and gaping wounds, will still attack the foe, drive him from out his stronghold, vanquish him, ere he himself expires. Act then, all ye who fail and suffer, act like him; and from the stronghold of your Soul, chase all your foes away — ambition, anger, hatred, e'en to the shadow of desire — when even you have failed. . . .

Then, from fragments we become an integral part of humanity, of the wholeness of life. Such realization has depths that cannot be fully fathomed. It transforms the world. Every great spiritual Teacher has inundated human consciousness with powerful streams of wisdom, compassion, love, and forgiveness.

We are All Fragments of the Divine

According to the Occult teachings, humanity would not be here if it was not for them. But there is a limit to what they can do under the reign of Karma. We must do our part too.

Let us try and consider the contents of Rule 20 of *Light on the Path* carefully:

Seek it not by any one road. To each temperament there is one road which seems the most desirable. But the way is not found by devotion alone, by religious contemplation alone, by ardent progress, by self-sacrificing labour, by studious observation of life. None alone can take the disciple more than one step onward.

When we identify ourselves with only one perspective our view tends to become lopsided. Dissent was stifled in Europe for eleven centuries by the brutal domination of the Roman Catholic theology over secular learning and it took the cruel and inhumane sacrifice of Giordano Bruno's life for free thought to dawn in Europe. The above-mentioned Rule also shows that the way to the infinite light cannot be a mere "technique", something that we simply apply in the hope of making progress. As mentioned in *The Voice of the Silence*, Fragment II, v. 114:

The seeds of Wisdom cannot sprout and grow in airless space. To live and reap experience the mind needs breadth and depth and points to draw it towards the Diamond Soul. Seek not those points in Māyā's realm; but soar beyond illusions, search the eternal and the changeless SAT, mistrusting fancy's false suggestions.

These are wise instructions indeed, for they show that although experiences come to all of us it is only the mind that has "breadth and depth" that can transform experiences into real learning instead of getting enmeshed in them. The wise mind receives every experience as a teacher instead of an agent of satisfaction or suffering. For the immature mind experiences are always a struggle between the "like and doesn't like", implying that the self or the ego-sense acts like an unwise, self-appointed judge of whatever life brings to us. The tragedy is that this mechanism of unawareness may go on for many lives until the blows of Karma shatter it. Returning to Rule 20:

All steps are necessary to make up the ladder. The vices of men become steps in the ladder, one by one, as they are surmounted. The virtues of man are steps indeed, necessary — not by any means to be dispensed with. Yet, though they create a fair atmosphere and a happy future, they are useless if they stand alone. The whole nature of man must be used wisely by the one who desires to enter the way.

The Christian tradition provides stunning examples of saints who had a distinctly immoral past. St. Augustine, for example, included the following in his *Confessions*: "As a youth I prayed, 'Give me chastity and continence, but not right now'". (Wikiquote) In spite of their moral weakness such saints seemed to have the capacity to tread the path by overcoming them. However, overcoming vices and practising virtues, according to *Light on*

We are All Fragments of the Divine

the Path, is not sufficient. Only wisdom can properly deal with weaknesses and make of virtue a stepping stone towards self-transformation, and not a road to self-righteousness. Rule 20 continues:

Each man is to himself absolutely the way, the truth, and the life. But he is only so when he grasps his whole individuality firmly, and, by the force of his awakened spiritual will, recognizes this individuality as not himself, but that thing which he has with pain created for his own use, and by means of which he purposes, as his growth slowly develops his intelligence, to reach to the life beyond individuality. When he knows that for this his wonderful complex separated life exists, then, indeed, and then only, he is upon the way.

The word “individual” comes from the Latin *individuus*, “indivisible”. For Carl Gustav Jung, we are not truly individuals yet as our lives are heavily influenced by what he called the “collective unconscious”. The resurgence of racism in different parts of the world today corroborates his view. The road to individuality, according to Jung, is not an easy one, as it involves confronting and integrating our shadow side, those aspects of ourselves we refuse to look at, like anger, ill will, and the tendency to dominate.

Rule 20 makes the remarkable statement that the sense of individuality was created by ourselves so that, in the course of our evolution, we may reach the life beyond individuality. In other words, the sense of individuality is not an end in itself but a scaffolding to help us reach

that truly undivided life that lies beyond *manas*, our potent cognitive principle, the centre of awareness and intellectual activity. In Theosophy that life beyond the individuality is *buddhi*, an unmediated understanding that the entire existence is one, a life-transforming realization that “to work for oneself is to work for disappointment”. And that is the beginning of the way.

Seek it by plunging into the mysterious and glorious depths of your own inmost being. Seek it by testing all experience, by utilizing the senses in order to understand the growth and meaning of individuality, and the beauty and obscurity of those other divine fragments which are struggling side by side with you, and form the race to which you belong. Seek it by study of the laws of being, the laws of Nature, the laws of the supernatural: and seek it by making the profound obeisance of the soul to the dim star that burns within. Steadily, as you watch and worship, its light will grow stronger. Then you may know you have found the beginning of the way. And when you have found the end its light will suddenly become the infinite light.

In its final part Rule 20 describes the depths that can be entered into by someone who underwent the right preparation. Here the spiritual practice acquires a dimension of profound discovery, of what a human being is meant to be when he or she leaves behind a worldly mind, completely dominated by self-centredness. Consciousness has become extraordinarily sensitive, purified from

We are All Fragments of the Divine

the dross of selfishness and pride, ready to understand all that lives and approaching every relationship as the nearness to the sacred. The teaching contained in this Rule does not come from an ordinary mind. It comes from a consciousness that has reached the *svarūpa* of life — which is life in its essential nature, divine, sacred, one, eternal.

How does one plunge “into the mysterious and glorious depths” of one’s inmost being? The first step may be by listening to the contents of the personal mind. Each one of them — emotions, thoughts, memories, and reactions — is claiming the attention of the perceiver. And yet, the moment the searchlight of awareness and attention is shone on them they dissolve. This opens the door for experiencing a new depth within oneself. The deeper the experience, the lesser is the feeling of self-importance. And the reverse is equally true: the more shallow the experience, the greater, more pronounced is the feeling of self-importance. When perception matures into spiritual perception there is not an ego to be advertised, protect, or promote.

How does one “test all experience”? By remaining objective, non-identified, alert and sensitive. “Action is only for the purification of the mind” taught Sri Sankarachārya. The practice of *nishkāma karma*, desireless action, cleanses the mind from the impurities created by lifetimes of indulgence in selfishness.

The core of our individuality is *manas*, the mind principle, the coordinating centre for all experiences, and the theatre

for the great evolutionary drama in each human being. HPB said that *manas* is dual in its nature: part of it expresses a strong pull and attraction towards desire — *kāma* — and creates what she called the “desire-mind”. Another part yearns for communion with *buddhi*. Desire is not just a recurrent focal point; desire is present in every aspect of the activity of the mind, even at subtle levels. The Buddhist tradition holds that one of the fetters that prevent the disciple to move towards the stage of Arhat is conceit. Extraordinary alertness needs to be exercised towards the very end of the path for desire may lie hidden in every nook and corner of the mind.

On the other hand, the mind is the connecting link between Spirit and matter and thus has vast creative potential. Within the mind lies the power of profound assimilation of experiences as well as of timeless truths. Our individuality grows by understanding and assimilating the truth of every experience but also by responding to the depths of the Wisdom Teaching passed on to us by numerous generations of mystics, adepts, and initiates. In them the individuality blossomed into a fully-grown flower of exquisite beauty, radiating wisdom, compassion, love, and boundless helpfulness.

Next, Rule 20 mentions the need for us to understand “the beauty and obscurity of those other divine fragments which are struggling side by side with you, and form the race to which you belong”. The personal mind tends to react to every contact, as was said before,

We are All Fragments of the Divine

through a pattern of likes and dislikes. Under dislikes lies hidden indifference, an attitude towards others as if they did not matter. Indifference may lead to callousness which adds much more sombre dimensions to self-centredness in us.

However, the wise teaching contained in the Rule above-mentioned states that all around us are divine fragments, struggling side by side with us. In every person we meet or relate to is a portion of the divine, a fellow pilgrim on the way to the Source, a wayfarer in search of wholeness and peace, a soul seeking its true home in a universe of constant change.

In her weekly morning meditation at the Krotona Institute of Theosophy many years ago, Virginia Hanson, an advanced pilgrim, used to remind us how precious every person we meet is. And she meant every person. The Buddhist tradition mentions that Angulimāla, a bloodthirsty criminal who used to cut off a finger from each one of his victims, on entering the field of consciousness of the Buddha when the latter was asleep, was completely transformed, regenerated, and became a disciple of the Buddha. St Paul, a former persecutor of Christians, became one of the greatest apostles of Christ after a life-transforming encounter on the road to Damascus. We are all fragments of the divine.

The same Rule 20 enjoins: “study of

the laws of being, the laws of Nature, the laws of the supernatural”. Understanding the order which is at work in the universe helps us to find the uncreated order within us. It is said that Pythagoras used to heal people with different kinds of illnesses by playing acoustic instruments near them. He maintained that the essential nature of the soul is harmony, and that the harmony expressed in music could help to restore balance in a diseased body. If we learn to look closely, every life form is an expression of awesome order and beauty.

The teaching concludes with an exhortation for us to make “profound obeisance of the soul to the dim star that burns within”. It implies a faint perception of a much deeper dimension within us. Some mystics suggest that this perception may lead to an “unknowing” — going beyond everything known by the personal mind. The Rule also mentions the words “watch and worship”, indicating that this is not a merely intellectual exercise; it is a preparation to meet the sacred. At this level, whatever is personal has been left behind.

We are told the end of the way is lost in infinite light. And the final secret is revealed: that infinite light is not only our destination. It is who we are. It is also who all those around us are. We were all along fragments of the Divine, now made whole again. ✧

Errata: Please note that in Dr Deepa Padhi's article published in the December 2019 issue of *The Theosophist*, p. 14, left column, line 14 from the bottom, the word “Theomorphic” should instead be read as: “The morphic”.

The Art of Parenting

CLEMICE PETTER

WHAT is important to know about the art of raising a child? The first thing to realize is that we are talking about a being that is developing his potential, whatever this potential may be — that we have more to learn than to teach. This may sound strange to most of us, but if we can look at it in an objective way, we may understand that a child is in a learning state all the time, her curiosity and innocence is a precious flower that, if not dealt with in a proper way, will lose vitality and freshness as the years go by. So it is important that we can understand what is the role of the parents in the process of the flowering of a human being.

Let us start from the very beginning. When we decide to open our heart and commit, at least 20 years, to walk with another human being in this process of living, we are committing to the most difficult of all arts. It is then time to become a parent. At that moment, it is important to understand what is involved in the process of pregnancy, that the environment to which a pregnant woman is exposed interferes with the formation of the new bodies.

We use the word “body” in the plural

because, even though many people can see only the physical body, we know that we also have the emotional, mental, and vital bodies. There are also other bodies that are more subtle, therefore more delicate, but for now we are going to talk about these four bodies.

The physical body is influenced by the kind of food taken during pregnancy, more so at the beginning. If the mother smokes, there is a great danger of the future child developing a serious illness. There are cases of severe addiction, where the child is born with abstinence syndrome, that is, the child became addicted in the womb to the substance used by her mother. Of course this is an extreme case, but we are mentioning it in order to make clear how the physical body is affected and that everything a mother takes into her system, will be used as raw material in the development of the new physical body.

Similarly, the emotions to which the mother is exposed will interfere in the formation of the emotional body of the child. In the case of the emotional and mental bodies, due to their subtle nature, the influence comes from the whole environment in which the mother lives, as

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The Art of Parenting

the energetic influence of the environment greatly affects those bodies. But the responsibility for the environment to which a pregnant woman is exposed is not only hers, it is also important for the father to understand the level of commitment, from the very beginning, that this new member of the family needs from him.

We are not talking about living in a bubble of perfection, which does not make sense at all, we are calling attention to the fact that *everything* counts and will influence the child's future bodies. There are many factors that cannot be controlled by us, so one should not become neurotic about it, but there are certain things in life that we can do to help each other, and the more we understand this process, the better for all concerned.

So it seems to be important that during the period of preparation for the arrival of the new family member the mother should, as far as possible, have peaceful days, not get involved in stressful situations, keep in mind all the transformations that are going on inside her body, and avoid unnecessary worries. She can be a conscious helper of Nature in the process of building a new body, a temple for the traveler Soul, who will soon join her in the journey through planet Earth.

After the child is born and we can now hold the small body, it seems incredible how the miracle happened, and the miracle has only started. In fact, the miracle will repeat itself until the last day, until the last breath. And here is where we learn the everyday miracle of life, happening right in front of our eyes, if we know how to

look, if we can look at the child with eyes of innocence, that is, to look at the child with eyes that do not know anything about that small little flower that has been entrusted to us.

The problem begins because we cannot look at anything with a learning spirit; we think we know so much, we think we know who that newborn child is. We think that because it is my daughter or son, I know what is best for her/him. And this starts very early, it starts with the kind of food we feed them. There is this tendency to feed what we have been fed, and we think this has to be so, after all, everyone for generations has been eating this way, so we think it is natural for this child also. But it may not be.

Maybe it would help to give a living example of this. Such cases are happening more and more in the West, where meat is part of almost every family's diet, but, even though the child is offered flesh since a very young age, when she starts to eat cooked food, she does not want it. There is a video in YouTube where a three-year-old boy teaches the mother, who is trying to feed him lunch, and on his plate there is a piece of fish. So he starts to ask her about the head, and the conversation goes on until he says that he cannot eat fish, and that we should not eat animals; instead, we are supposed to take care of them, not serve them cooked on the lunch table. This is just a small example of what we are talking about. We have much more to learn than to teach, and this is not only when it comes to raising children, it is in every situation in life, but especially

The Art of Parenting

when it comes to the children entrusted to us by life.

We can even say that we are able to teach only when we are open to learning, which means that the process of teaching and learning is one whole movement and one is not separated from the other. To help a child to understand herself and therefore the world she is helping to create is possible only when we are open to look at the child without expectations, without trying to direct the course of life. To look so fully with our entire being is the key to the teaching/learning flow to come into being.

After all, life is a learning process from the moment we are born until our last breath. So, the first thing to learn in relationships with children is how we relate with them, to be aware of what our feelings are, our thoughts about their life and future. Do we expect something from them? Are we trying to shape, to mold them into our understanding about life, or are we able to listen to them, help them to understand themselves, instead of giving ready-made answers that do not help?

It has been proven that conclusions and formulas for life only create conflict in the mind, because when a child is asking a question, she is not looking for an answer, she is looking for understanding through the unfoldment of that question. However, most of us, parents, are so busy in our own world, that there is little, or no time at all, to help the child in the process of self-discovery and the understanding of life as a whole.

Maybe we can use a personal story as

an example of how we can help the child to deal with life. When my son was little, as any other child, he did not like to go to the hospital and take injections, he would refuse and protest at the sight of a needle. It was not easy, because the nurses in the hospital are not prepared to talk it over with the child. They are used to hold the child and apply the medicine — it does not matter how loud the screams are — it has been part of the culture that children cry and scream in order to avoid the needle. Therefore it is common to tell the child: “It won’t hurt, it’s just a little sting.”

In this context, it may be important to look at another aspect, which is the fact that children trust the adult, and if we do not mean what we say, it is better not to say it. If we keep on saying what we do not mean, they will learn that to talk without meaning what we say is the norm in life, therefore they will turn into superficial or dishonest adults themselves. So because we know it will hurt, it is important to help the child understand the need for it and not try to rush it just to be free from the awkward situation as that would mean we are not looking at the child, our interest is in ourselves, in finishing the troublesome and inconvenient event. To be aware when our focus is directed to “me” instead of the child is an important part of the learning process in parenting.

Sometimes it would take quite a bit of time until my son allowed the injection without anybody holding him. I would talk to him and explain the need for it. And tell the truth: “It will hurt a bit, but it will soon go away, but if you don’t take it, the

The Art of Parenting

pain in your throat (for example) will get worse.” Finally, he would allow it. He would say: “OK, but can I see the size of the needle first?” This was shown to him, and after much talking he would allow the injection to be given. To respect is the golden rule in any relationship, and a parent-child relationship is no exception.

It is important that we help children to learn about themselves and about life, to face challenges with intelligence, always learning about everything, to help to avoid victimization, so common when we do not understand the mechanisms of life. It is the parents’ task to help the child to grow up in a healthy way. But when we talk about a healthy way of life, what do we mean? It means to look at life with eyes that are capable of learning, that are interested in what is going on. It means a life that is vital, has plenty of energy to look and see the situations as challenges and not turn them into problems.

So parenting, above all, is a relation of trust. The child needs to feel safe, that whatever happens, parents will always be there and they can trust their heart to their parents and not be judged. This is another crucial point — not to judge the child when she makes a mistake or even when she does something grossly wrong according to our understanding. When we put on the robe of the universal judge and think we are entitled to judge right and left, the only thing we are attesting is that we do not understand life, and with the mask of a judge we try to hide our helplessness from the child.

However, the real message we are

sending with this kind of attitude is that we are on a pedestal, that we never make mistakes, so the child starts to withdraw into her own world, the seed of inferiority has been sown, and she thinks she is the only person making mistakes, and that no one else makes them. This can develop into many things. One possibility is that she starts to try to cover up her wrongdoings or mistakes in order to look good in the eyes of the parents, and an artificial relationship starts to develop. Another possibility is that of rebellion, she starts to do everything to irritate and show the parents that they are not perfect after all. In any case, it turns into an unhealthy and tiring relationship, and what was meant to be a partnership is slowly turning into a battlefield.

It is also important to see the danger of authoritarianism, which is different from authority. There is a natural authority in parenting, which does not have to be made into a burden for the child. In fact, all that is natural is beautiful and it develops ugly features only when we try to turn it into something unnatural. And it is easily done when we have a possessive relationship with our children, when we look at them as “my” son or daughter.

This sense of ownership is unnatural; it is a belief developed by the primordial instinct of protection, and retained by the mind that looks at everything through the lenses of the “me” and the “mine”, this way of relating seems to be the cause of most, if not all, our problems in any relationship, and especially so with children. This is because when we look at the child through

The Art of Parenting

the lenses of ownership we lose the lightness required to see the vulnerable innocence that comes from the complete trust a child is capable of.

If we betray a child's trust we may be crippling something that cannot really be measured, therefore the damage may be deeper than our eyes can see. To prevent such a disaster we need to keep alive the spirit of learning and help the child to see that life is a vast ocean with infinite potential for endless discoveries. If we are able to see the beauty of every new discovery, life turns into a joyful adventure rather than the ugly and painful battlefield where most of us got used to living, believing that life is a painful journey that has to be

undertaken, and so we go from one painful problem to the next. Can we help our children to teach us how to look at life with eyes of innocence? With eyes that do not know anything about life? With a heart that is not burdened with the pains of yesterday? Can we give life a chance to show us its beautiful face of joy and love?

If we as parents are ready to learn with every moment of life, we may be able to help the child to see life as an everyday discovery, so that the heavy loads we accumulate which seem so natural to most of us may completely disappear and may never be experienced by the fortunate souls who learn to explore life rather than to be sure of everything, which in itself is a burden.

**You are the Universe and Light,
It is within you and all around you,
You will never be alone
if you trust your inner guide.
For the roots know the branches,
the branches know the petals,
the petals are yourself,
the beat of your heart,
the flowers of The Tree of Love.**

Joma Sipe

How Shall I Live?

RAMI SHAPIRO

YOUR answer to our fifth question, “How shall I live?” depends on your answer to our previous question, “Where am I going (when I die)?” If you believe Heaven is an option for you, you will, assuming you are a rational person, choose to live in a manner that will earn you entrance to Heaven when you die. If you believe that entrance to Heaven is a matter of behavior, you will seek to live your life in accordance with whatever system of ethical and ritual behavior you believe will earn you a place in Heaven. If you believe that entrance to Heaven is determined by holding a certain set of beliefs when you die, you will seek to hold those beliefs as soon as you decide which set of beliefs these may be.

Similarly, if you believe in reincarnation, you will act in ways that will secure you the best rebirth you can imagine. These behaviors, like those that will get you into Heaven, will be determined for you by the system of belief you find most compelling. If, on the other hand, you do not believe in Heaven or reincarnation you are more or less on your own. After all,

if there is no prize to be won, there is no way to win it. Sadly, I fall into this camp.

I say “sadly” because I think I would be comforted in knowing that there is a set of beliefs and behaviors I could adopt that would secure me a sought-after reward. After all I am not immune to the lure of reward. It is just that, as tempting as it sounds, the notion that there is a “me” that survives death just rings false to me. But even if it did not, I have not got the foggiest idea how to determine which system of behavior or belief would win me the prize.

“Doing good in this world, is not a bad thing,” one pastor told me, “it just is not enough to get you into Heaven. Hell is filled with good people who failed to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. That is the truth, and He is the key.”

Even if I accepted his theology, I replied, how do I know that his version of Christianity is the right one? Are there Catholics in Heaven? No, he said. What about Orthodox Christians or Mormons? No, again he said. Well, what about Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, United

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How Shall I Live?

Church of Christ, or Methodists? Are any of them in Heaven? No. Heaven is for Baptists, and not even all Baptists, but only this pastor's brand of Baptists. It must be nice to be so certain of things.

I lack such certainty. No, that is not fair. The fact that I reject normative Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and the rest suggests that I am certain that none of these ways of believing and behaving is true. Think about that for a moment. We are talking about billions and billions of thoughtful women and men who believe something that I categorically declare false. How is that for certainty? Not to mention hubris. But what is my alternative? I cannot say that they are all right since they do not agree on much. And I have no way to determine which among them is right if any among them is right. So what do I do?

A friend of mine who shares my dilemma solves it this way, "I believe that God is open-minded." But why believe this? Certainly the God of Abraham is not open-minded. He did not command the genocidal destruction of the pre-Israelite residents of the Promised Land because they were evil people, but because they were inconveniently located. If the Hittites had lived elsewhere we might have Hittite communities in the world today.

Jesus's Father is not open-minded. After all it is He who came up with the idea of eternal damnation for people who believed other than what He wished them to believe. And Allah, despite being All-Compassionate, is not open-minded for He, too, is only too willing to torture in-

fidels for all eternity. So while it may be comforting to my friend to believe that God is open-minded, and by this He means welcoming of people of differing beliefs and even no belief, there is no evidence that this is so, and believing it to be so still puts you at odds with billions of God-fearing people who fear God precisely because He is not open-minded.

So if I cannot turn to religion for help in determining how to live, where can I turn? There are many answers to this, but here is mine: I turn to the Perennial Wisdom. Remember, the Perennial Wisdom is perennial because it appears over and over again in every civilization. It is often the mystics of any given faith who reveal this wisdom, and when I explore their teachings I find that they are saying pretty much the same thing. And that same thing is essentially the Golden Rule:

Judge not, that you be not judged. (Christianity, Matthew 7:1)

Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself. (Confucianism, Confucius, Analects 15:23)

Do nothing to others that you yourself would find hurtful. (Buddhism, Buddha, Udānavarga 5.1)

This is the sum of duty: do not do to others that if done to you would cause you suffering. (Hinduism, Mahabharata 5.1517)

Treat all creatures in the world as you would like to be treated. (Jainism, Mahāvira, Sutrakritanga 1.11.33)

No one of you is a believer until you desire for others that which you desire for your-

How Shall I Live?

self. (Islam, Muhammad, Hadith)

What is hateful to you, do not do to another. That is the entire Teaching; all the rest is commentary. (Judaism, Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a)

Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain, and your neighbor's loss as your loss. (Taoism, Tai-Shang Kan-Yin P'ien)

Do not do to others whatever is injurious to yourself. (Zoroastrianism, Shayast-na-Shayast 13.29)

Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself. (Bahá'í, Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings)

So this is our starting point. I am currently working on a book on the Golden Rule, and in that book I will explore the differences, some subtle, some not, between different expressions of the Rule, but in this essay suffice it to say that the Golden Rule is a solid foundation for living.

"But it won't get you into Heaven," a friend of mine said over lunch as I shared with her my thoughts on the Rule. "The Golden Rule is all about behavior, but you can't earn your way into Heaven. That is a matter of grace."

Not exactly, I said. Will God accept a nonbeliever into Heaven? Of course not. So God's grace is contingent on one choosing to believe a certain way, and choosing to believe is an act, so grace is contingent on action and hence can be earned.

This did not go over well, and I will not burden you with the fury of a believer scorned, but she does make an important

point: the Golden Rule has nothing to do with heaven, hell, or reincarnation. It is about how to live here as if living here really mattered. Which it does.

If it is not right, do not do it;

If it is not true, do not say it.

(Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*)

Is there better advice than this? Of course you will have to determine for yourself what is right and what is true, that is the challenge of the Perennial Wisdom: it is a compass rather than a map.

A map lays out the path you must follow in order to reach the destination you seek. A compass only tells which direction to walk and not how or where to place your feet. A map removes the necessity of decision. Once you have decided to follow one map rather than another, there is no other decision to be made. But with a compass, every step must be pondered. The *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius is a wonderful "compass" for living well:

Never value anything as profitable to yourself which shall compel you to break your promise, to lose your self-respect, to hate any person, to suspect, to curse, to act the hypocrite, to desire anything which needs walls and curtains: for the person who has preferred to everything else his own intelligence and spirit and the worship of its excellence, acts no tragic part, does not groan, will not need either solitude or much company; and, what is chief of all, will live without either pursuing or flying from death.

(Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*)

How Shall I Live?

The Book of Ecclesiastes offers another:

So I concluded that there is nothing better for you than to find joy in what you are given to do, for doing is your lot. And none can see what the future holds.

(Ecclesiastes 3:22)

The message here is that the future is unknown. I cannot prove or disprove Heaven or Hell, and I cannot prove or disprove reincarnation, and I cannot prove or disprove the endless recycling of waves in the infinite ocean of Absolute Reality. And because I cannot there is no point in worrying about them. What matters is what I can prove, and that is that I am here at this moment, and because I am here I have to act, and because I have to act it behooves me to act in a manner that is beneficial to both self and other if only because this is the only position an enlightened self-interested person can hold.

But Ecclesiastes goes further than mere resignation. There is joy to be had in this life, and it comes from doing.

So what is worthwhile? Simply to eat and drink and find pleasure in your daily tasks.

(Ecclesiastes 5:17)

Does this seem like a lonely existence to you? It does to me, and to Ecclesiastes as well. So he adds friendship to his focus on food, drink, and meaningful work:

Working with a partner is better than working alone, and together you earn a

greater reward. And if you should fall, your friend can lift you up. How sad to fall alone with none to raise you! And at night in bed you can warm one another, for how does one who sleeps alone stay warm? And when alone you may be overpowered; two can withstand an attacker, and a three-ply cord is not easily severed. (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12)

Ecclesiastes is not alone in his concern with friendship:

Without a friend, nothing in the world seems friendly. Friendship should not be bounded by narrow limits, for it embraces all to whom we owe affection and love, though it is inclined more eagerly toward some and more hesitantly toward others. It, however, extends even to enemies, for whom we are also commanded to pray. Thus, there is no one in the human race to whom we do not owe love, even if not out of mutual love, at least on account of our sharing in a common nature.

(St Augustine, Letter 130.2.4; 6.13)

A person without a soul friend is like a body without a head.

(St Brigid of Kildare)

So how then shall we live? If you are living in hopes of reward, figure out how to earn it and pursue it with all your might. If you are not interested in rewards, and prefer instead to make this moment one of justice, compassion, and peace, turn to the compass teachings of the Perennial Wisdom. ✧

Love at Its Finest

ANANYA SRI RAM RAJAN

*Do not blame Love for the agony it brings;
Love is the King of all paths,
And the heart not wild with longing
Is already dead, already a burial ground.*

Kabir (tr. Andrew Harvey)

ONE evening in September, author Andrew Harvey came to speak at the TS headquarters about the poetry of Kabir. I had never heard him speak before. I remember reading some of his work years ago and not feeling drawn to it. At the time my (exhausted) mind was occupied with raising children and all that comes with it.

From the moment a child is born, one's life is handed over to them. It is the way it is and the way it needs to be. Children are, for a good portion of their life, defenseless creatures who need hands-on help, encouragement, and immense nurturing. This is why it is the hardest job ever given to anyone. Even when you feel you have nothing left within you, your heart warms at their cry despite the frustration that all you want is to close your eyes and sleep. Many people who do not have children can recognize this experience — all too brief from where I am now — if they have ever had a puppy.

It is this constant dance between exhaustion and invigorating love that re-creates you to keep on going and giving.

Lately, I have been pondering this majestic, sometimes mechanical, rejuvenating, excruciating process called Life. In a blink of an eye, life can go from being so heartwarming and playful to brutal and conflicting and then back to heartwarming again. The whisper that “this is Love at its finest” often catches me off guard. It comes from a realm of things I know, but do not want to say. However, listening to Andrew's passion for Kabir and Kabir's words itself validated that whisper. It also validated something I have thought about in the work we do as spiritual warriors. Working to help humanity is not easy. To be a theosophist we must *live* theosophically. We must put Theosophy into practice every minute of every day. A painful, but true message.

One gift I feel helps tremendously is living from a theosophical worldview.

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Love at Its Finest

In *The Secret Doctrine*, HPB states that there is a fundamental unity of all existence. Everything heartwarming, brutal, compassionate, and conflicting comes from the Absolute, the One Being, or as Andrew and Kabir say, the Beloved. It is all part and parcel of the Everything. Not different from us, who at times are compassionate and loving, but can also be petty and foolish. All of it resides within us. We are just a microcosm of something happening on a grander scale and at a much deeper level. (The difference is intent.) The dance that takes place before us, and within us, is the cosmic dance that has been going on for infinity and will continue to do so even after we step off the stage.

Despite the longevity of this, we are not released from the responsibility of our actions, thoughts, or deeds. If anything, we should feel a greater sense of duty toward everything we come into contact with. As everything is part of the Beloved, including ourselves, our thoughts, words, and actions are amazingly powerful tools for the benefit (as well as the disadvantage) of all. The suffering we see around us is the working out of evolution. It is karma, dharma, and reincarnation all working together, allowing us to play a major part of this evolution.

From a wider lens, for the Absolute, there is no emotion in any of this. Nothing is judged, there is no good or bad or right or wrong. There is attraction, repulsion, vibration, and other forces at work. But

for us as individuals, there is more at stake. We are incarnated souls working to discover the richness of where we truly came from. The only way to do that is by following the teachings the Beloved lays forth and to imbibe those qualities of divinity often found in the great teachers who have walked before us. This is why the theosophical teachings are so important. When studied regularly and lived fully, we are given a framework to work and live from. We realize that all we experience, joyful or painful, is the Absolute coming into touch with the Absolute within us.

Granted, these are difficult concepts to explain to anyone in the midst of a crisis. Taking a cue from Nature, we can learn that there is a time for everything. However, for those who use Theosophy as a guidebook, it may help us in our service work to keep in mind that we are not just making a difference to those whom we help, but to their families, their neighborhood, their community, their city, and so on.

Every difficulty we face in our work to help others is our chance to come into touch with the Absolute within and to work in harmony with the greatest harmony of all. The more we practice this, the more we move from the material to the immaterial and from the immaterial back again, creating not just an impact on ourselves but everything we come into contact with. “As above, so below. As within, so without.” ✧

Theosophical Work around the World

The 90th Annual Conference of the **Kerala Theosophical Federation** (KTF) of the Indian Section was held at Lakshmiprabha Auditorium in Tripprayar, Trichur, on 16–17 November 2019 on “What Theosophy Is and What It Is Not”. Ms Marja Artamaa, international Secretary, TS Adyar, was the Chief Guest. Dr M. A. Raveendran, President of KTF, presided, and Mr K. Dinakaran, Secretary, KTF, welcomed the delegates from various Lodges in Kerala, and read the greetings received from Lodges and TS members throughout India. In his inaugural address Dr Raveendran spoke on the relevance of the Conference and the importance of its theme.

Ms Artamaa addressed the delegates and said: “The world is facing increasing negativity in many walks of life. The result is a violent society, including environmental threat. Theosophy inspires us to look into ourselves. We have the choice to strengthen either our positive or negative qualities. Theosophy is Brotherhood and Unity first and last. It does not promote blind faith. Self-discipline is a must.” She also released a pamphlet on “J. Krishnamurti and the Theosophical Society” published by KTF in connection with his 125th birth anniversary.

In the “Short Talks” session presided by Mr Madhusoodanan Pillai, Dr Raveendran spoke on “Exoteric and Esoteric Theosophy”; Mr N. Bhaskaran Nair, Vice-President of KTF, on “Theosophists and

Members of the Theosophical Society”; and Mr S. Sivadas on “Theosophy and Occultism”.

On the second day morning Bharata Samaj pooja (act of worship) was conducted by Ms Lakshmi Bai from Alleppey. Then Foundation Day celebrations were held and Ms Artamaa addressed the delegates, conveying the message of Foundation Day. She read the Mission Statement of the TS: “To serve humanity by cultivating an ever-deepening understanding and realization of the Ageless Wisdom, spiritual self-transformation, and the unity of life.” She also added that the role played by the Theosophical Society (TS) in the world today is still very vital and relevant.

Ms Artamaa, in her keynote address, explained the Three Objects of the TS and the Freedom of Thought and Freedom of the Society resolutions passed by the TS General Council, emphasizing the role of the Lodges, Federations, and Sections. During the “Short Talks” session presided by Mr T. S. Usman, Mr T. K. Nair spoke on “The Fundamental Teachings of Theosophy”, Mr M. G. K. Nair spoke on “Nature and Man”, and Mrs P. Shobha spoke on “What Is Practical Theosophy?”

The Conference closed in the afternoon with an interactive session of delegates in which Ms Artamaa clarified doubts and answered questions, followed by the vote of thanks by the KTF Secretary. ✧

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