

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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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.

Peace

TIM BOYD

THE word “peace” describes a state of being that is much like happiness; everybody wants it, but our behaviors and actions seem to cut us off from fully experiencing it. In the words of the song, we keep on “looking for love in all the wrong places”. The idea of peace suggests certain things. When we think of peace, ideas arise in our minds such as tranquility, calm, quiet, freedom from violence, and fear. Lao Tzu gave another way of looking at this: “If we are depressed, we are living in the past; if we are anxious we are living in the future; if we are at peace, we are living in the present.”

In our times the word peace has focused on the absence of war and violence. I have not had the experience of living through a war, but I know people who have. Images that come to mind of this massive, organized system of destruction are of damaged bodies and of generations of human effort to build and create. I am told by people who have been involved that in war zones it is a surreal experience. Natural sounds we are accustomed to hearing are silent. Birds stop singing; crickets and other insects do not make a sound. Everything that can, flees in the presence of this basest of human endeavors.

In the world today there are approxi-

mately 200 countries. Of those there are 39 that do not have their own standing armies prepared for war. If we look a bit closer, among those 39 there really are only 3 that are completely demilitarized. The others have treaties with entities like NATO, China, or the US to call upon their militaries in times of need. Three nations out of two hundred have it in their minds and practice that it is possible to exist without diverting finance, human creativity, and mental energy in the pursuit of “peace” through violence.

In 1948 Costa Rica abolished their army. To prove that they meant it, they gave the army barracks to their University. I remember being with the Dalai Lama in California in 1987. He had just come from Costa Rica. In his typical humorous manner he said: “As the Dalai Lama, everywhere I go I talk about peace, but in this nation of Costa Rica, they have actually abolished the army! I talk. They act.”

There is a popular, but strange, expression about peace: “If you want peace, prepare for war.” This has become the thought atmosphere we live in and accept. Most countries in the world have a Department of Defense. They used to simply be called Departments of War, but now the protective aspect is emphasized.

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As a child, I grew up in the midst of the Cold War conflict between the Soviet Union and the US. The “wisdom” of the time was that if you want peace, you have to build the strongest possible deterrent to aggression, the nuclear deterrent. The result was that both sides had thousands of nuclear weapons, enough to destroy all human life on the planet multiple times.

During that time my older brother told me about the Atom Bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. He thought he was merely telling me something historical, but it sank into my four or five-year old mind. For more than a week I was terrified! Although I was not brought up in a strong religious environment, I knew about prayer. I remember praying in my room every day: “Please, God, don’t let them drop the atom bomb on me!” This concept that instilling the maximum fear can in some way lead to peace is a distorting influence on our approach to life. The problem is that sometimes these concepts go unquestioned.

The scriptures of the world present a profoundly different view of the meaning and experience of peace. At one point in the Bible Jesus is talking to his close disciples, those who had followed him and weathered the storms that came with their devotion. Jesus is aware that soon he is going to be killed, but he talks to them about peace: “Do not let your hearts be troubled; my peace I give to you; it is not as the world gives that I give to you.” This is a profound statement, but, like all such statements we need to ask some

questions. A problem for us is our unthinking acceptance of words. Who can give us peace? A person? A person can give us a place to stay at night, a meal, or a job, but not peace. So, “Who is talking?” is the question.

From a deeper perspective, in what he knew to be this final stage of his life, Jesus was trying to wean his disciples away from their attachment to him as a person. Jesus was also known as Jesus the Christ, so he was trying to turn their attention toward the source of peace, not the person Jesus, but the Christ principle. From a theosophical point of view we might think of it as *ātma*, the universal, ever-present, all-pervading spirit, the only thing capable of giving peace.

We have talked about the gifts of the world in terms of peace — the “maximum fear leads to minimum war” line of thought. “My peace I give to you, not as the world gives” seems simple enough, but is not easy to understand. We hear the words; we have an awareness of the existence of such a thing as *ātma*, or the Christ principle. But still, our tendencies and habits are the same — we look toward the familiar, what we can see, and talk to, and do not allow ourselves to be drawn into trusting in the unseen. It asks a lot of us.

Saint Paul tried to refine the peace message. He talks about that peace as “the peace that passes all understanding”; it is intended as another description to deepen our sense of peace. The peace that passes all understanding is the peace that flows from the connection with the Christ principle. The peace that goes beyond any

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capacity of a mental grasp, beyond understanding, is what he is pointing toward. We cannot reason our way into peace, we cannot study or buy our way into it. It is not as the world gives.

There is a real difficulty for anyone who is a genuine teacher or who has had the experience of an elevation, enlightenment, or illumination of their consciousness. The problem for such a person is that having “seen” something of such depth and splendor, they are obliged to attempt sharing it. Intelligible communication of the experience itself is impossible. “Ineffable” is the normal word used for the attempt. But they use the means available — words. Imagery, stories, poetry are invoked in an attempt to elevate the hearing of the words beyond the level of the analyzing, intellectual mind. It is like trying to describe color to a man who was born blind.

We can say all we want about red, or green, or blue to someone who has never had the experience of seeing them, and it is just suggestive. The advantage of the great ones — and even those who have only briefly entered this realm of peace — is that even though they are aware that words are ineffective, what they know is that the Christ presence resides in its fullness in every person. All of their teach-

ings, sermons, and sayings are intended to awaken that sleeping presence. Their great gift is that they provide a ladder, a practice, a means that can lead one to the actual experience.

Going back to the Three Absolute Truths, one of them says: “The principle which gives life dwells in us and without us, is undying and eternally beneficent, is not heard or seen or felt, but is perceived by the person who desires perception.” To the person who has that intense aspiration, the perception of this invisible, omnipresent spirit is a possibility. The beauty of it is that even though it is described as an exalted state of being, it is in fact something that all of us have at some time experienced. It is not foreign to us. At the very least we have touched the fringes of the sort of peace that they try to describe. Maybe it is only in deep sleep, but even in waking consciousness many of us have had that type of experience. It changes us. So, part of the practice is to try to remember, not add more content to our mind, but remember. Remember a time, an experience that brought peace into our lives and minds, where the grasping stopped for a moment. Let us remember and reconnect with that peace that has been our experience and inspiration — sometime, somewhere. ✧

**Peace cannot be kept by force.
It can only be achieved by understanding.**

Albert Einstein

The Wisdom of the Ancients

SRI M.

THE wisdom of the ancients has come down to us from immemorial times. It has in many been ways scattered all over the world in different wisdom religions. We cannot deny that India has been a source of nurturing, and perhaps founding, some of the main streams of this inquiry into the wisdom of the ancients. But there have been other traditions all over the world which have looked into this and have come to understand that as we separate the real from the unreal we come to the point which is common to all. This is one of the tenets of the Theosophical Society (TS), that there are wisdom religions, or teachings of wisdom, all over the world, and, in essence, they come from the same source.

I know a little about the Kabbalah, a bit about Greek philosophy, some Sufi teachings, and so on. But as far as India is concerned, I am deeply involved, because of the patience, kindness, and wisdom of my master, Maheshwar Nath Babaji, who always laid stress on the teachings of the Upanishads. They are among the most ancient teachings we have today, and take us directly to the

understanding of our inner being and its connection with the Supreme Being.

Since the subject of this lecture is “The Wisdom of the Ancients”, I will discuss the Indian ancients, the rishis. Any serious researcher into any field is a rishi in some way. When the rest of the world was probably looking at technology, or advancement in material terms, there was a group of people in India — spiritual rishis — who were seriously delving into the secrets of the mind and beyond. They did it, not through proselytization, not through converting someone from one idea to another, but by encouraging a *dialogue* between people. If you read the Upanishads you will find that the major part of them consists of dialogues between the teacher — the rishi — and the disciple.

The Upanishads are also called Vedanta because they appear at the end of the Vedas. There is a general feeling among many people that the Vedas consist only of hymns, prayers, and liturgical formulas, or *samhita* portions. But the word *veda* includes the *samhita* portion on the one hand, Vedic rituals, or the *brahmana* portion — the ceremonial portion — on

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the other, and after that other writings on Vedic rituals, or *āranyakas*, and then the Upanishads. In fact some of the Upanishads cannot be distinguished from the *āranyakas*, which means teachings in the forest, the ideal setting, and not the number of people. So sitting in this environment they studied and went deep into the wisdom of the Vedas. In his commentaries Ādi Śankara also said that it is called Vedanta because when it is understood, it is the end of all there is, there is no need to study anything else, as it deals with the ultimate reality and the liberation of the soul.

There are more than a hundred Upanishads; some are called principal and some minor, some are early and others later ones. For instance, there is a set of them, about 20 or so in number, called Yoga Upanishads, to which the origin of any of the texts available on yoga can be traced. Unfortunately they were not available in English for a long time, and I am delighted and thankful that the Theosophical Society has a translation of them in English. I must recommend to those practicing yoga to please read *The Science of Yoga* by I. K. Taimni, a translation of and commentary on Patanjali's *Yoga-sutras*, because it takes you away from a strait-jacketed definition of the Upanishads and yoga, to something much wider in context.

Of all the Upanishads there are 11, called the principal Upanishads, which are mostly from the Yajur Veda, the Sāma Veda, and the Atharva Veda. There are very few from the Rig Veda, except

the great Gāyatri Mantra. These are called principal Upanishads because all the great teachers, or *āchāryas*, starting with Ādi Śankara, have commented upon them. The most popular is Ādi Śankara's Advaita translation. There are also translations by Rāmānujāchārya, who preached Viśiṣhta Advaita, and of course Mādhwa, who was a dualist. They are the essence, the "Jewel of the Wisdom", of all humanity. An Upanishad does not choose who it is talking to, based on country or race. It addresses the person directly as a human being with their likes and dislikes, pleasure and pain, beliefs and disbeliefs.

Let us examine the word "*upanishad*". It comes from three syllables, *upa*, *ni*, and *shad*. *Upa* in Sanskrit means "close", to move closer to the truth; it also means it was conveyed in close quarters, with the teacher and the taught talking to each other. (It is also called mysterious, or *rahasya*, because it was not loudly proclaimed or advertised — it was personal wisdom given to individuals who wanted to figure out what the truth was all about.) The last syllable, "*shad*", means "to sit down", implying that when listening or learning something one needs to sit down, just like while eating. It is not enough to physically sit down; it also implies the settling down of the mind before the dialogue (*samvād*) between the teacher and disciple. The little "*ni*" linking the other two syllables indicates "down", down to earth, the attitude with which the knowledge is received. If the student starts listening to the teacher by saying "I know everything", there is no

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way that what is being said will register.

The teachings of the Upanishads are called *śruti*, something which is heard, not something that you can go home, read, underline, think about, and forget. *Śruti* is when the mind is fresh and the mind's attitude is clear and in a receiving mode, when it clears itself of all the prejudices it carries. When such a student listens, the *śruti* immediately has an effect. Otherwise it gets caught up in various interpretations and is lost. "Ni" implies the vessel that receives is down and the vessel that gives is up. Another aspect is the receiving vessel needs to be empty; else whatever is poured into it will overflow and be lost. So this attitude between the teacher and the student, where the student sits close to the teacher with great respect and listens to what is being said, as if he is listening for the first time, and absorbs the *śruti*, when we put all these things together it becomes "*upanishad*", even if what is being conveyed is not what is traditionally called an Upanishad.

Much of the ancient wisdom derives from the Upanishads, so I will pick just a few points from them to illustrate what this wisdom is that has come down to us, from, at a very conservative estimate, 2,000 years ago. The *Chhāndogya Upanishad* has a beautiful dialogue between the great rishi Uddālaka Āruni and his son. I am quoting it to show how the Upanishads operate.

The son had gone to study the truth, and had come back. The rishi asks the son: "Have you understood the truth?" The son says: "I think I have." The rishi feels that

if the son *thinks* he has understood the truth, then he has not really understood it. So, the rishi shows him a banyan tree and asks him to pick a seed from it. The son does so and brings it to the rishi.

"What do you see?" the rishi asks.

"I see the skin", says the son.

"Okay, peel it now. What do you see now?"

"I see the kernel inside."

"Peel it again. What do you see now?"

"I see tiny little black seeds inside."

"Pick up one of these seeds and split it. What do you see?"

"I see nothing (*śunya*)."

"It is from this "nothing" that this huge banyan tree has come."

Here, nothing means "no thing". Many people have this misunderstanding of what "*śunya*" means. It is that from which the entire universe has come and goes back into, so it cannot be "nothing". It is something, but we cannot define it, therefore we call it *śunya*.

I cannot omit here the shortest Upanishad, *Māndukya*, with only 12 verses, but *āchāryas* have written thousands of pages of commentaries on it. It discusses something common to all humanity, the different states of consciousness: waking (*jāgrt*), dream (*svapna*), and deep, dreamless sleep (*sushupti*), which we are all familiar with. Beyond these there is *turiya*, which is not a state, but the *witness* of all the three states. The Upanishad says while the witness is the same the states may change and so none of these states are permanent.

For example, in the dream state the dream is so real that it is only when we

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wake up we decide it was a dream. Thus what if one day we wake up from the so-called waking state, stretch our limbs and say, “Ah, that was a long dream!” We find it difficult to imagine it now, of course, just as we would not believe that we are in a dream while we are dreaming. Something triggers this understanding, called *turiya*. It is the witness through all the states, not affected by what happens. To find this witness is the essence of the Upanishad, and it interprets *aum* (*om*) with its three letters (*a*, *u*, *m*) using these three consciousness states.

The normal interpretation of *aum* is that the “*a*” pertains to the sound for creation, the “*u*” to preservation, and the “*m*” to destruction (or transformation). Thus if we want to speak again we have to open our mouth again. This is *sachidānanda*, the Supreme Being. The Upanishad says “*a*” is the waking state, “*u*” is the dream state, and “*m*” is the dreamless-sleep state. Whenever we write *aum* there is something more called the half syllable (*ardha-mātra*) usually represented by a crescent and a little dot, denoting the unsaid sound leading on to that which lives in silence. I will not use the words “the voice of the silence” because there is already a book of that name written by none other than HPB (H. P. Blavatsky) who started it all off.

All of you who are seriously interested in the wisdom of the ancients, please do read HPB’s *The Secret Doctrine*, and do not forget a small booklet recorded by one of her disciples, Robert Bowen, and approved by her, titled *Madame Blavatsky on How to Study Theosophy*. If you want

to explore the secrets of the ancient wisdom of other countries and other nations you may also read a wonderful text of two volumes called *Isis Unveiled*, but it is a bit scattered and you may get confused, still it is worth it. So the teaching of the Upanishads is how to find that which is permanent in the midst of this universe, which is always undergoing change.

There is another little book with only 18 verses from the Yajur Veda called the *Īśāvāsya Upanishad*, referring to “the supreme reality that pervades everything”. Here what it pervades is the *jagat* (universe) which is so called because it is constantly moving — moving from one form to another, one state to another, even one realm to another. There is nothing that does not move — the Earth, the other planets, the galaxy, everything is moving. Even the mind is always moving, and that may be the biggest problem; maybe one day it becomes still and you will understand its essence. Therefore we see only the movement and not the ground from which the movement takes place. We see the waves, not the ocean; if the mind can be considered an ocean perhaps there is a situation where the waves have ceased and there is only silence.

Then the Upanishad says something very interesting: “Let go and rejoice, do not covet others wealth” because the whole wealth belongs to the universe, not to you and me. When somebody is happy do not feel bad, he is not depriving you of anything, instead rejoice in the other person’s happiness. You and I are separated in a very artificial manner; we

are all one in a way, with the same states of consciousness, desires, and fears; we are one. The mind has to be one because the common factor is we all have fear, anger, and so on, only the object of the fear or anger is different. In the same way, when everything is quiet and the mind has subsided there is one “quietness” which is a common factor of all living beings, and when that quietness occurs to our calm mind, it is called “the voice of the silence”. The Upanishads call it the Supreme Brahman, you may refer to it as *śunya* if you like, because it is when nothing else remains.

* * *

Now we are taking up the **dialogue** form of **questions and answers** (*samvāda*).

Q: Though you had a very traditional background, you went off to the Himalayas at the age of 19 and spent time with a master, and other masters and teachers, and at some point you were associated with J. Krishnamurti (JK) as part of the Krishnamurti Foundation. He says a master is not necessary. So how do you reconcile this contradiction?

A: “First of all, I affirm that all I have learned came to me because I had a teacher. So it is my conviction that to know anything we definitely need the teacher. When I went to the Krishnamurti Foundation I did not go by my own decision, although I had listened to the talks, read some books, and so on, especially *Commentaries on Living*, which is an excellent text by JK. It was Maheshwar Nath Babaji, my traditional master, who said: “Go there, stay there for

some time, study, see what is going on.” He countered my apprehensions saying that one needs to have a dialogue even if it is being carried to the extreme. Even JK had many teachers at one time, though it is not discussed now. The clairvoyant C. W. Leadbeater (CWL) wrote *The Thousand Lives of Alcyone* (a name CWL gave to JK for a while) — imagine how many masters JK would have had! Maybe he reached a certain stage when he probably did not require any.

I left the Foundation because I was not agreeing with many things; because I thought that to say that “all tradition is useless” is like throwing the baby out with the bathwater. I have had several one-on-one discussions with Krishnaji — we were pretty close in some ways, and I have great respect for him. You know how he spoke very abruptly at times. So, one day, at one of the talks here, he said: “Throw all your holy books into this river. There is nothing out there. I have not read any of these books.” I was very young; so, I did not know whether to believe this or not, because I was sure at least when he was growing up in the TS, he must have read many books. So that evening, I decided to discuss this matter. I said: “Sir, you said throw all your books, there is nothing in there, and then you are saying I have not read any of the books. My question is, if you have not read any of the books, how do you know that there is nothing in them?”

It was a very simple, practical question, and I must admit that he did not get angry with me; the man was extraordinary.

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He replied: “You’re right, sir, but I don’t need any of those books.” I said: “Please, now, this is something different because *you* may not need it, but there may be others who do, and since people accept your words as the gospel truth, you may have to be careful with what you say.” Again he did not get angry, and that is what I appreciate about him. He said: “You’re right, I have to be careful with what I say.”

If we go back to the ancient Indian teachings and systems of thought, there have been Ājivikās, who are atheists; there have been the Buddhists, who actually do not answer the question if there is God; the Jains, who do not believe in the *śvara* concept of God (God as a person); but they are all considered to be streams of the same wisdom. So one should not look at the contradictions, but try to see how we can benefit from them.

Another example: There was someone sitting at the dining table and criticizing the Masters of the TS. I was the youngest at the table at that time. After about ten minutes of talk about how some Masters had green eyes and so on, Krishnamurti suddenly stopped his breakfast, his face was red, he put his hand hard on the other persons shoulder I have never seen anyone put their hand so hard on someone — and he said: “Listen dear, don’t talk about things that you don’t know.” K. has never denied the Masters, he has only denied the caricatures which were made out of them. So, when we examine such people and their lives and their teachings, we have to be very careful before forming judgments about them.

I am not supporting him or otherwise.

So the issue is whether we admit it or not, this ancient wisdom is so very multifaceted that it manifests itself in different ways through different lives and through different teachings. When the Upanishad says, there is one truth, but the wise call it by different names, it is talking about that source of eternal wisdom which we have with us. The problem arises when we say this is right and that is wrong. It is so wide and the human mind is so limited that to grasp the unlimited can be done only to some extent. Before forming conclusions, please go deeper into these subjects. Whether the Masters exist or not, how do you know? Do not take sides.

I suggest that you read a beautiful dialogue between Swami Venkateś-ānanda who has done a beautiful translation and commentary on the *Yoga-vāsishtha*, a very advanced Vedantic text, and Krishnamurti, in his book, *The Awakening of Intelligence*, a collection of his talks. I was present when this dialogue was recorded. When this young *swāmi* comes in JK rises and refuses to sit down though he was much older than the Swami. He says: “You are the one who is wearing the color which is ancient, the color of wisdom, so you sit, and then I shall sit.” Then there is a discussion and Venkateś-ānanda never lets go of his conviction that one needs a teacher, a master. Finally Krishnamurti ends up saying: “Maybe I didn’t need one.” So, I rest my case.

Q: How do we answer the question, “Who am I?”

A: It is answered by different people

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in different ways. . . . The great Ramana Maharshi of Thiruvannamalai found through his understanding that when everything is still and you find the essence of yourself, you are none other than the Truth. So my question is, if I, who has not had that experience, sit down and keep saying or chanting a mantra, “Who Am I? Who am I?” do you think I will reach there? There is nothing wrong, but you will find many people today who imitate him, they sit somewhere wearing a loincloth and repeat the mantra, but does it work? I want you to look at this yourself.

Q: You said that we need a master to grow and the spirit to act [sic] our spiritual growth, but it is not possible that we can understand things ourselves or find our inner Master through the understanding of our experiences. Further, you also said that we cannot become like Krishnamurti, but in Christianity, for instance, we have many examples of sinners who become saints. How would you respond to that?

A: Last questions, but very poignant. First let me start with your second question. I had the privilege of going to the Vatican in Rome during the present Pope’s reign. One of the things he said struck a chord in me: “Every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future.” It sounds simple, but what it implies is tremendous! Everyone who seems perfect

worked hard to achieve it, and everyone who seems irredeemable can work hard to remedy it.

Addressing the first question, whether the master has to be physical or can the master be inside us, a spiritual guide in our own mind, yes, I agree. But very often it is difficult to distinguish whether what comes through is our own thought or whether it is coming from another source. When you have a teacher, then you do not have that doubt because it is coming directly. At the same time, it is difficult these days to find a proper spiritual teacher because everything is stereotyped. You have certain expectations of the teacher, the way he looks, or if he is wearing some special robes, and so on. It is difficult therefore to really figure it out.

My suggestion is, instead of running around trying to figure out who your master is likely to be, if your intention is really serious, you will brook no interference, and you will not agree for anything less, then there are forces in this Universe that will become your teachers, there are forces that are actually looking for people like you. It is not as if there is a dearth of gurus, but there is a dearth of disciples. So, if you are serious, I am sure you will find the proper teacher. A word of caution: do not judge with your preconceived ideas who or how a teacher should be. . . . I wish you all good luck, and that you find a good master. ✧

There is no path to happiness. Happiness is the path.

Gautama, the Buddha

The Four Gods of Christianity — I

VICENTE HAO CHIN JR.

*A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds,
adored by little statesmen, philosophers, and divines.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Is Christianity monotheistic or polytheistic?

Christianity, like Judaism and Islam, declares itself a monotheistic religion, believing in one God and no other. This doctrine seems so reasonable that it sounds outlandish even to suggest otherwise. However, when we look deeper into the Bible and the history of Christianity, we find, as have countless scholars, that the scriptures and traditions of mainstream Christianity teach several kinds of Gods that are dissimilar to one another. They could not have been the same Gods. These views of God can be classified into four types, as defined below. What is surprising is that all these disparate God-concepts are virtually accepted as valid by mainstream Christianity — Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and so on, but because they are evidently different gods or god-concepts, we find that Christianity is, in reality, polytheistic.

Is this an outrageous allegation? This

insight is not a new one. Since the early centuries of Christianity, theologians like Marcion and the Gnostics have argued that the God of the Old Testament was not the same as the Father of the New Testament. They, in fact, considered Yahweh to be an inferior god or even an evil one. The Cathars of France in the 11th century similarly taught such a doctrine. These sects, and others, have caused deep doctrinal schisms within Christianity. When the orthodox Christians gained power and control, they suppressed these contrary views. The Cathars were massacred.

Are there really four different kinds of Gods in Christianity?

Actually, there are more than four, depending on how one draws the line between one concept of God and another. But there are four major strands, each of which can be subdivided into various theological strains. They are God-concepts found in (1) the Old Testament, (2) the New Testament, (3) Christian

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theologies, and (4) Christian mysticism.

The modern Christian is asked to believe in at least three of the four God-concepts of Christianity. They are, however, incompatible. And unknowingly, Christians are compelled to be polytheistic while still believing they are worshiping one single God.

Below are the four major strands of the God-concepts in Christianity:

1. The God (and Gods) of the Old Testament

The primary God of the Old Testament is Yahweh or Jehovah. His name is frequently translated into English as Lord, God, or Lord God. Before we go into his nature or characteristics, it should be noted that Yahweh was only one of the many Gods in the Old Testament.

Many Gods. The Old Testament, especially in its first five books, is polytheistic, that is, many Gods are recognized, but the Jews were told that they should only worship one among them. The biblical scholar Julius Wellhausen calls this “monolatry”, the worship of one God among many (Wellhausen, 2003).

The first chapter of Genesis uses “Elohim” to refer to the Creator God. Elohim is plural (singular is Eloah), and they refer to themselves as “us” in Genesis. This polytheism is confirmed further by statements such as the following:

God [Elohim] has taken his place in the divine [El] council; in the midst of the gods [Elohim] he holds judgment. (Ps. 82:1)

The role of Yahweh is defined in the following verses:

When the Most High [Elyon] gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God [Israel]. But the Lord’s [Yahweh] portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. (Deut. 32:8–9)

In other words, there is a God higher than Yahweh called Elyon (the Most High), who apportioned humankind among the sons of God, and Yahweh’s portion was the Israelites.

Yahweh became the dominant God of the Israelites. He was the God of Israel but not of the Egyptians and other people. When Moses asked the Pharaoh to free the enslaved Israelites, Yahweh caused the death of all firstborn Egyptians to persuade the Pharaoh to give in. Karen Armstrong wrote that “the tribal deity Yahweh was murderously partial to his own people” (Armstrong, 1993).

In *A History of God*, Armstrong further wrote: “It is very difficult to find a single monotheistic statement in the whole of the Pentateuch.” Even the covenant between Yahweh and Moses in Mt Sinai indicated that “the Israelites were not yet monotheists, since it only made sense in a polytheistic setting” (Armstrong, 1993).

What were the qualities of Yahweh as a God?

Yahweh required of the Israelites absolute obedience and became wrathful when he was disobeyed. He had human-like qualities and frailties.

Not omniscient. Yahweh was not all-knowing. Here are examples: He did not know where Adam was in the garden

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(Gen. 3:8–9); he had to come down to see the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:5); he didn't know where Sarah was (Gen. 18:9); he had to put the Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years just to discover what was in their hearts (Deut. 8:2); he had to test Abraham to know his obedience (Gen. 22:12).

God repented. Yahweh regretted what he had done, that is, he made mistakes and did not know it beforehand. He repented that he had made humans and decided to drown them all (Gen. 6:6–7); he repented that he made Saul a king. (1 Sam. 15:11).

Excessively violent. Yahweh commanded Moses and the Israelites to destroy anything that breathed in the cities they conquered, including children and animals (e.g., Deut. 20:16–18, 2:33–34, 3:3–6, 3:6, 7:2).

You must destroy all the peoples the Lord your God gives over to you. Do not look on them with pity. (Deut. 7:16)

He also ordered that disobedient children be stoned to death. (Deut. 21:18–21).

A jealous God. Yahweh, recognizing that there were other Gods, vehemently insisted that the Israelites should worship him only. He described himself as a jealous God (e.g., Exo. 20:5, 34:14, Deut. 4:24).

Wrathful God. He was wrathful and avenging, inflicting horrifying punishments upon his people (e.g., Nah. 1:2, Ps. 78:31, Deut. 11:17).

God unjust. God brought iniquity to the

3rd and 4th generation descendants of people who worshipped other gods (Exo. 20:5); he put to death a man gathering sticks during Sabbath (Num. 15:32–36). He killed Onan when the latter did not want to impregnate his late brother's wife (Gen. 38:7–10).

Creator of evil. God was the one who created evil (Isa. 45:7); he sent evil spirits to trouble people (e.g., 1 Sam. 16:14–16, 16:23, 18:10; evil in cities was done by the Lord. (Amos 3:6)

It is little wonder that Marcion, the Gnostics, and the Cathars considered the Old Testament God an evil God and not the same as the Father of the New Testament! Marcion removed the entire Old Testament from the Bible that he compiled. The Gnostics considered Yahweh to be the Demiurge, an inferior God. The Cathars regarded Yahweh as an evil God.

Today, Christians quote the Old Testament as though Yahweh is the one and only God since to negate this doctrine is heretical or blasphemous. Apologists go a long way to try to justify the various flaws of Yahweh. Psychologically, Christians just take for granted that Yahweh is God and subconsciously put aside the troublesome blemishes of such a God.

The understanding of who God was in the Old Testament is further confused by an episode where Jacob wrestled with a strange man till daybreak:

25 When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched

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as he wrestled with the man. **26** Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.”

But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

27 The man asked him, “What is your name?”

“Jacob,” he answered.

28 Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”

29 Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.”

But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there.

30 So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”

(Gen. 22:25–30)

Here is another God who could not overpower Jacob. This may suggest that the Israelites understood that God could be different beings, not just one.

2. God of the New Testament

The New Testament (NT), particularly the Gospels, described images of God that were radically different from that of the Old. We should note that the NT also had multiple Gods: the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. This multiplicity of divine beings caused confusion and divisions in the early centuries of Christianity and continues up to this day. To reconcile the unity of God and the variety of Gods, the Church introduced the idea of the Trinity, three per-

sons in one God instead of three Gods.

The Father of the New Testament was silent. His teachings were assumed to be reflected in the teachings of Jesus. Below are the salient differences between the Yahweh of the Old Testament and the Father/Jesus of the New.

Non-violent. Yahweh taught “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” (Exo. 21:24), but Jesus reversed this by saying:

You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. (Mt. 5:38–40)

This is perhaps the most significant difference between Yahweh and the Father/Jesus. It defines their moral nature and their attitude toward human beings. In fact, in a crucial way, it characterizes the difference between Judaism and Christianity.

Not for Jews only. Yahweh was the protector, or Lord of the Jews, his “chosen people”, but the God of the NT was for all:

Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one. (Rom. 3:29–30)

This led to the universalization of Christianity as opposed to the exclusivity of Judaism.

It should be noted, however, that this was the view of Paul. The statements of Jesus in the Gospels appear to be different:

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5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, 6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’” (Mt. 10:5-7)

One time a Canaanite woman was begging Jesus to help her. Jesus replied:

24 He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” 26 He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

Humanistic. The Father/Jesus gave importance to human beings rather than laws. Yahweh made working during Sabbath punishable by death, like the case of the man who picked up sticks. But when the disciples of Jesus were picking up heads of grains on a Sabbath day and the Pharisees were faulting them, Jesus defended his disciples and declared:

The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. (Mk. 2:27)

New commandments. In contrast to the legalistic rules of the Ten Commandments, Jesus described the two most important commandments:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.

(Mt. 22:36-40)

Forgiving. Contrasted to the vindictive nature of Yahweh, Jesus was compassionate and merciful:

Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

(Mt. 5:44-5)

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. (Lk. 23:34)

Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. (Mt. 26:52)

Space does not allow us to illustrate further differences between the Old and the New Testament Gods, but the above will convey the essential qualities of Jesus or the Father that seem diametrically opposite to those of Yahweh.

The Trinity. Next, we address the question: Are there three Gods in the New Testament?

The answer depends on what Christian denomination one belongs to. Most Christians accept the doctrine of the Trinity — that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three persons in one God. But other Christian theologians and denominations disagree with this, such as the Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unitarians, and others. A major reason is that the Bible itself quotes Jesus describing himself as inferior and not equal to the Father.

Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me

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good? No one is good except God alone.
(Lk. 18:19), (Mk. 10:18)

But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.
(Mk. 13:32)

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
(Mt. 27:46), (Mk. 15:34)

For the Father is greater than I. (Jn. 14:28)

In the 4th century, Arius gave more arguments to demonstrate that the Son, or Jesus, was created and hence was not co-substantial with the Father.

Christianity, in effect, is almost an entirely new religion compared to its mother faith, Judaism. Its new teachings differed widely from those of the Jewish traditions, and the nature of its God or gods, Jesus and the Father, is so unlike those of Yahweh that it is quite inconceivable that they refer to the same being.
(To be continued)

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The will of God will never take you to where the grace of God will not protect you.

Bernadette Devlin

Understanding Self-Centredness

PEDRO OLIVEIRA

The Nature of the Desire Mind (*kāma-manas*)

In theosophical literature we find different approaches to the human constitution. A popular one, suggested by Madame H. P. Blavatsky, points to a nexus between mind and desire, which she called *kāma-manas*, the “desire mind”. The underlying idea is that desire influences — dominates — every single activity of the mind. It is also suggested that such a nexus will prevail within the human consciousness for many incarnations. At the core of it lies a strong, resilient, and robust sense of separate self — *ahankāra*. The purpose of the present article is to understand the nature of this self and also why it has such a grip on human consciousness. The exploration will then move on to its effects on the work of the Theosophical Society (TS), at various levels.

The Seat of Human Conditioning

A sense of self has been considered, by many spiritual traditions, as well as by modern science, as the seat of human conditioning. All the influences, as well as all experiences, accumulated over many

years — many lifetimes, many incarnations — are stored in our sense of self. It acts as a converging point for them and it also moulds them into the way it sees the world, itself, and every new experience. This sense is strengthened by every new experience: it may recoil from challenging experiences and affirm itself from successful ones, but it always emerges stronger. As Annie Besant pointed out, the “I” creates the “Not-I” — the world, others, experiences — and is determined to keep this separation indefinitely and at all costs. The essence of self is, therefore, abiding separateness which is a process of profound isolation.

What is Self-Centredness?

Self-centredness is the notion that the separate self is real, and following from that, to assert its reality in daily life by maintaining that all its creations — opinions, knowledge, desires, claims, and personal will — are always right and not to be questioned. Self-centredness cannot understand life and its experiences except through separateness because it is absolutely convinced that it is the only

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reality. Again, it was Annie Besant who once said that only the blows of Karma can wake up the soul immersed in the unreality of separateness. In the Platonic tradition, self-centredness has been compared to living and being chained to the ground of a cave, never seeing the world outside. The only realities are the shadows projected on to the wall. It, therefore, involves the complete denial of relationship, being unable to recognize, accept, understand oneness with the other. It is the central human malady, and it has been wreaking havoc in the world for millennia.

It Grows with Lack of Awareness

Implied in the word “awareness” is the capacity to pay attention to an event, a person, or a subject without the intervening conditioning of self-centredness. It is highly regarded as a spiritual practice in many traditions, including Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi, and even the Christian tradition. It unfolds when the mind has been unburdened from the constant fixation on the self and its separative processes. It is like a light that allows one to see things as they really are in themselves, without judgment, comparison, or interpretation. It can become a path of immense spiritual discovery and realization. When there is no awareness, self-centredness grows strong and numbs the mind with its psychologically suffocating effect. Every mindless and thoughtless act strengthens it and makes its eradication more difficult.

Its Dangerous and Deleterious Effects

The Buddha once compared the self

to a stranger who visits a householder in the middle of the night, asks for accommodation and food, subsequently kills the householder, and takes over his property. We tend to live our lives under the impression that the sense of separate self in us is not dangerous. We in fact tend to justify it. It is only when this sense of self explodes into full mode, in anger, hostility, animosity, and violence that we may realize there is nothing harmless about it. The dark depths and enduring consequences of separateness are still roaming the world, causing unprecedented suffering, and its origins come from the ingrained sense that the self is a separate, discreet, entity. Wars, family conflicts, disintegrating relationships, addictions, racism, ethnic cleansing, misogyny, cruelty to animals, are some of the fruits of self-centredness. All the great spiritual traditions proclaim this to be an illusion, while affirming that abiding unity is the perennial truth behind every manifestation of life.

Views from Hindu and Buddhist Sources

According to Monier-Monier Williams’ *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, *ahamkāra* is the “conception of one’s individuality, self-consciousness; the making of self, thinking of self, egotism; pride, haughtiness”. To give an idea of how serious this matter is, the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines haughty as “arrogantly superior and disdainful”.

In the following passage of *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsishtha* (translated into English

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by K. Narayanasvami Aiyar, The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1980, p. 197) it is shown how the deeply abiding notion of “I” and “mine” prevents the realization of Wisdom and how it can be overcome:

If you wish to be the *akartś* (non-doer), then you should conduct yourself according to the ways of the world. There should not exist the idea of separateness in the heart. The moment the conception of “mine”, “I”, “you”, “I did it”, [and so on], arise in one, sorrow is engendered. Will persons be so foolish as to identify their self with the body? Such a conception is tantamount to (the raising up of) twenty-one hells. Even on the visitation of pain (in the body), do not confound the “I” with the body.

The wise would be as loath to identify their “I” with the body as flesh-eaters are unwilling to taste dog’s flesh. It is only because of the folly of the identification of “I” with the body that true *jñāna*-vision does not arise; but should it be dispelled, then the *jñāna* light will shine unobscured, like moonlight in the absence of clouds. Through such vision, you will be able to land safely on the other, beautiful shore of the ocean of rebirth. Having contemplated the fact that you are not a *kartś* (or doer) of anything and that there are no such differences as “I”, “thou”, and “others”, may you be the *akartś* with firm mind.

Ajahn Buddhadasa, in an article on “Essential Points of the Buddhist Teachings”, refers to *ahamkāra* as a “spiritual disease”:

In Pali, “I” is *atta* and “mine” is *attaniya*: or, if one uses the terms in the general use of Indian philosophy, *ahamkāra* meaning to have the feeling of “I” (stemming from the word *aham*, “I”), and *mamamkāra*, meaning to have the feeling of “mine” (stemming from the word *mama*, which means “mine”).

The feelings of *ahamkāra* and *mamamkāra* are so very dangerous that they are called the spiritual disease, and every branch of philosophy or *dhamma* in the Buddha’s time wanted to wipe them out. Even though they were followers of other teachings, they all had the same aim of wiping out *ahamkāra* and *mamamkāra*. . . .

This matter of “I” and “mine” is very hard to see. If you don’t really concentrate, you won’t be able to understand that it is the force behind *dukkha*, the force behind spiritual disease. <dharmanet.org/Buddhadasa.htm>.

In the following passage of *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha explains to his Bhikkhus, with extraordinary clarity, what the sense of self is and how it is always followed by suffering:

When he attends unwisely in this way, one of six views arises in him. The view “self exists for me” arises in him as true and established; or the view “no self exists for me” arises in him as true and established; or the view “I perceive self with the self” arises in him as true and established; or the view “I perceive not-self with self” arises in him as true and established; or the view “I perceive self

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with not-self” arises in him as true and established; or else he has some such view as this: “It is this self of mine that speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions; but this self of mine is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and it will endure as long as eternity.”

This speculative view, bhikkhus, is called the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the contortion of views, the vacillation of views, the fetter of views. Fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not freed from birth, ageing, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair; he is not freed from suffering, I say.

(*Sabbāsava Sutta*, All the Taints, 2.8¹)

Finally, the following verse of *The Voice of the Silence*, Fragment I, shows the role of image-making as an integral part of self-centred activity:

When waxing stronger, thy Soul glides forth from her secure retreat: and breaking loose from the protecting shrine, extends her silver thread and rushes onward; when beholding her image on the waves of Space she whispers, “This is I,” — declare, O Disciple, that thy soul is caught in the webs of delusion. (*Sakkāyaditthi*, “delusion” of personality.)

Views from Christian Mysticism

A well-known classic of Christian mysticism, *Theologia Germanica* (16th century), states: “So long as a man is seeking his own good, he does not seek what is best for him, and will never find it.” There

seems to be a spiritual resonance between this passage and the one in *Light on the Path*: “To work for self is to work for disappointment.” That which is good, as Plato taught, is never personal, but universal, encompassing all the myriad forms of life, all sentient beings.

What the personal self sees as “good” may be a combination of ambition, desire, achievement, and control. Such patterns do not harmonize with the deeper purpose of life as stated in *At the Feet of the Master*: to work for evolution and not for selfishness. As indicated by the Christian mystical text mentioned above, a self-centred pursuit makes it impossible to find what is truly good. In the many retellings of the Holy Grail story a similar teaching is given: only the worthy can find it.

Warnings from *The Mahatma Letters*

Any student who is familiar with the teachings contained in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* will remember that, for the Mahatmas, a self-centred attitude was an impediment for a seeker to receive their guidance and help. They justified such a policy by explaining that as their entire lives are fully committed to save humanity from the malady of selfishness, they could not use their energy to reward selfish individuals. As we shall see, their warnings about the dangers of self-centredness are direct, precise, and uncompromising. The following was addressed to A. P. Sinnett:

Friend, beware of Pride and Egoism, two of the worst snares for the feet of him who aspires to climb the high paths of

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Knowledge and Spirituality. You have opened a joint of your armour for the Dugpas — do not complain if they have found it out and wounded you there. (ML 66, p. 363, 3rd edition, TPH Adyar, 1962. (Chron. Ed., Letter No. 131)

A. O. Hume was a member of the Simla Eclectic Theosophical Society and was for a time a correspondent of the Mahatmas. During that process he became not only critical of them and their work, but also developed an attitude that led him to believe that he knew more than they did. The following quote addresses the nature of his attitude:

It is not that he is anxious to “do good” or “help the progress of the TS.” It is simply, believe me or not — *insatiable pride* in him; a ferocious, intense desire to feel and show to others that he is the “one elect”, that he *knows* that which all others are barely allowed to suspect.

(ML 50, p. 282. (Chron. Ed., Letter No. 77))

Yet it is in the next quote that a deeper aspect of the implicit dangers of *ahamkāra* is revealed:

Self personality, vanity and conceit harboured in the *higher* principles are enormously more dangerous than the same defects inherent only in the lower physical nature of man. They are the breakers against which the cause of chelaship, in its probationary stage, is sure to be dashed to pieces unless the would-be disciple carries with him the white shield of perfect confidence and trust in those he would seek out through mount and vale to guide him

safely toward the light of Knowledge. (ML 64, p. 353. (Chron. Ed., Letter No. 134)

This extraordinary statement seems to indicate that at least in some of the higher human principles there exists the anchor for *ahamkāra* to act. It may not be difficult to understand that the principle of *manas* — mind — may have a role to play in this regard, for unless it is fully transformed and regenerated, deep within it lurks the notion of duality and separation, which are some of the fetters referred to in the Buddhist tradition. It has also been mentioned that such patterns may subsist in very subtle forms within the consciousness of the aspirant, yet they carry with them the potential for disaster, which only selfless awareness can detect and avoid.

The Impact of Self-Centredness on the TS

Whoever has worked at any decision-making level in the TS may recognize that most difficulties arise from irreducible positions, from points of view which are conflated with one’s sense of self-importance and the “rightness” of one’s views. Many years ago, at a brainstorming session during a speakers’ seminar in Australia, one participant declared that he was in the TS because “it needs me”. He left the Society a few short years later, apparently dissatisfied.

In a letter to a former international President a well-known Theosophist said that his point of view regarding the study of Theosophical books in the Society needed to be taken into account because

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his “floodgates of perception had been opened”. Others, in more than one country, have maintained that the teachings of Krishnamurti should not be taken up in the TS because “he had failed as an Arhat”, while others say his teachings are paramount and should be given precedence in the Society. In all these instances little attention is given to what the essential work of the TS — human regeneration — while strong personal views on what should be emphasized are advanced, very often creating some unnecessary division in the body of the organization.

How Self-Centredness Ends

“Be humble, if thou would'st attain to Wisdom.

Be humbler still, when Wisdom thou hast mastered.”

This important statement from *The Voice of the Silence* (Fragment II) is not just a form of poetic license; it reflects an abiding, foundational truth: whatever progress is made on the Path, if it is indeed real progress, will always be informed by a genuine sense of humility — a steady, firm, real, and objective disengagement from a sense of separate self. As N. Sri Ram once wrote, “Love is the solvent of the little self.” Wisdom is just too big a prize to be put in the hands of those who still see any reality in a self that, by its very nature, denies the core truth that all life is one. The dawning of humility in the human soul marks the beginning of the end of self-centredness as it helps to dissolve the age-old web of unreality masquerading as “me”.

A Mind Transformed by Sacredness

“For every thing that lives is Holy.” Thus wrote William Blake in his poem *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. There is a profound similarity between Blake's statement and the following passage from *The Mahatma Letters*:

But what is “Spirit” pure and impersonal per se? Is it possible that you should not have realized yet our meaning? Why, such a *Spirit* is a nonentity, a pure abstraction, an absolute blank to our senses — even to the most spiritual. It becomes *something* only in union with matter — hence it is always *something* since matter is infinite and indestructible and *non-existent* without Spirit which, in matter is *Life*.

(ML 23B (Chron. Ed., Letter No. 93B))

Every single manifestation of Life is sacred, as it is an expression of the uncreated Spirit. In its abiding sacredness, Life is always True, Good, and Beautiful. These qualities belong to Life in its inmost essence and are not affected by time and change. They are the *svarupa* of life, its own real form. Under the sway of *aham-kāra* the personal mind reifies life, turns it into a commodity, manipulates it, invents new forms of exploiting it, descends upon it the hand of mechanized cruelty, and renders the whole world a dark cemetery:

The world of today, in its mad career towards the unknown — which it is too ready to confound with the unknowable, whenever the problem eludes the grasp of the physicist — is rapidly progressing on the reverse, material plane of spirituality.

Understanding Self-Centredness

It has now become a vast arena — a true valley of discord and of eternal strife — a necropolis, wherein lie buried the highest and the most holy aspirations of our Spirit-Soul. (*The Secret Doctrine*, vol. I, Introductory, p. xxii.)

The teachings of the Perennial Wisdom suggest that, in spite of such heavily conditioning circumstances, the human mind can break free from the prison of selfishness. Not necessarily by *wanting* to break free, but by unlearning the many assumptions which were dictated to it by the power of selfishness. In this regard, there is no distinction between unlearning and enquiring. True enquiry (*vichāra*)

gradually dismantles the citadel of *aham-kāra* by observing every aspect of its illusory structure. Structure upon structure will fall until the mind remains in its illumined state, *manas taijasa*, when all its walls have collapsed.

The ending of self-centredness reveals the most ancient open secret: there is no difference between pure spiritual insight and love. “Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.” (1 Corinthians 12) Or, as Jalaluddin Rumi once said, “Love is the astrolabe of God’s mysteries”. Selfishness finds its natural end in a heart which has become a simple dwelling place for love.

Endnotes

1. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*, Translated by Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2009, pp. 92–93.

If we could put aside all theoretical, ideological, concepts of freedom and actually enquire whether our minds, yours and mine, can ever be free, freedom from dependence, psychologically, inwardly, freedom from fear, anxiety, the innumerable problems, both conscious as well as deeper layers of consciousness. Whether there can be complete psychological freedom, so that the human mind, being free from all problems can come upon something which is not of time, which is not put together by thought, or as an escape from the actual realities of daily existence."

J. Krishnamurti
Public Talk 2, London, England, 16 March 1969

Maturity: Vector for Inner Work

SVITLANA GAVRYLENKO

TODAY, due to changed life circumstances we need to exert enormous effort to maintain inner harmony, and this represents a constant challenge to our inner life. This is not just an abstract thesis to discuss theoretically or intellectually. In fact, under the current conditions of the war in Ukraine, we need to respond to harsh circumstances, and to unexpected, painful, and sometimes tragic events taking place in both our personal and social life. As this topic comes up often for discussion with our theosophical colleagues, I would like to share my thoughts on the regulation of our inner work in terms of its prerequisites and perspective.

We do realize that humanity as a whole — every nation and the vast majority of individuals — are not yet conscious, self-sufficient evolutionary units that can carry out their evolutionary progression under the influence of their own governing impulses. We need external shocks, sudden changes in life circumstances, and unexpected events in order to make our internal resources wake up and begin manifesting them-

selves for finding a way out of difficult circumstances and harmonize internal and external life processes. We can see that these processes do not leave any of us aside.

Challenges affect everyone without exception. But the reactions to the same circumstances turn out to be very different. Being theosophists, we consider ourselves to be the most conscious part of the society, therefore we have certain peculiarities in our way of reacting to the surrounding circumstances. What does it mean? It means that we are learning, and in addition very often, we have the opportunity to simultaneously observe and also take a direct active part in the processes of our lives. It is possible for us as theosophists, because we already have some experience of self-control and recognition.

All of us are unanimous in our understanding that life ordeals should help us in self-discovery and self-improvement. So we can, on the one hand, consider them not as our enemies, but as our helpers, and we should gratefully accept today's lessons. But, on the other hand, we cannot remain only observers, because

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such a position is practically devoid of transformational potential. So we must, while maintaining the internal position of an observer, take an active and effective external life position, and use any opportunity to manifest our spiritual achievements, for service to our families, our people, our planet, and the universe as a whole. It is this very approach which can help us change and improve ourselves. We must learn to be bearers of Light, Love, Goodness, Justice, Beauty, and other virtues since this is precisely what the Divine Plan for man is all about. This is a long and ever-challenging path.

Let us talk about **the vector of our inner evolutionary process** of transformation and what achievements, what virtues are fundamental for it. Let us talk about what specific features of a person can determine his/her evolutionary maturity.

A very important feature of a person's maturity is his/her so-called **self-control**. The conventional aristocratic education system nurtured this characteristic in a person from an early age. If such skills are not laid down in a person since childhood, then it could be very difficult to curb the wayward personality in adulthood. It is important that true self-control is not achieved by willfully suppressing one's unwanted, negative, or lofty reactions, but is the result of cultivated respect for the people around, and trust in one's destiny, in the Higher Forces, that is an indicator of certain personal progress on the spiritual path.

This is an indicator of a person's freedom from the dictates of his lower

self, **freedom from his personality**. I would say that self-mastery is an adequate perception of reality which is free from actual personal needs, as well as from social conditions, stereotypes, and prejudices. Tim Boyd, President of the Theosophical Society, very aptly said in his speech at the international Convention this year, that self-mastery is the ability to *respond rather than react* to circumstances. In addition, it is also a more adequate perception of other people, accepting them as they are, and it is also the ability to appreciate other people's strengths and learn from them. On the one hand, it is the skill of empathy, the ability to feel and understand other people, the peculiarities of their reactions and behavior. On the other hand, it is a certain autonomy and independence from one's own surroundings. It can also imply a certain need for solitude.

This is what Kora Antarova writes in her book, *Two Lives*: "Think about what complete self-control is? This is such freedom from passions, that not a single spark of irritation thrown at you by someone can cause in you any passion, any irritation in return. In your heart, which is free from evil, there is nothing left for passions, but to die out. The lamp oil in your lamp of love and kindness will absorb all the sparks that people throw at you."

Modern transpersonal psychology also explores evolutionary processes towards their perfection. Thus, Abraham Maslow, speaking about the signs of a mature personality, notes the **freshness of**

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perception of the surroundings, the ability to notice something new in the usual, every time you meet it again. At the same time, such a personality is characterized by notable autonomy and independence from their environment, the ability to remain stable in the context of aggressive and frustrating life factors, the ability to endure life troubles relatively calmly, and the ability to find ways to resolve various acute conflict situations more easily. Moreover, a mature person demonstrates the **absence of manifestations of hostility** and aggressiveness in interpersonal interaction.

Another important feature of our maturity is our **positive creativity**. Creative manifestations can be multi-vector, and we are not talking about a mandatory inclination to creative professions or art. Creativity can manifest itself in any professional field, as well as in everyday affairs, in human relations, in the variety of our interests. Such creativity encourages other people to creative pursuits and is highly valued in collective work. It is also a certain looseness, simplicity, naturalness, and spontaneity of human manifestations and behavior, which can be combined consciously with the observance of established rituals, traditions, and ceremonies, with a corresponding amount of good humor in relation to oneself and conscious conformity in external manifestation.

Undoubtedly, it is also necessary to note the **stability of the internal moral standards** of a mature person. Such a person has a keen sense of good and evil, thus focusing their efforts at achieving

high and noble goals, while using only such means which are guided by these goals and are in full harmony with them. Focusing on their life tasks, mature persons consider their activities from the point of view of eternity, but not exclusively of the needs of the current moment, and make them correlate with universal human values.

Another characteristic feature of maturity is our **rich inner life**, mastering the skills of self-observation, self-control, focus, concentration, meditation, and prayer techniques. Very often, it also involves certain mystical experiences, threshold/ borderline experiences which deserve a separate discussion, because of their depth.. These are certain inner experiences, characterized by the feeling of the disappearance of one's own self, experiencing a sense of being linked to, or united with humanity as a whole. Modern psychology describes this state using the term "oceanic feeling".

So, advancing along the steps of the path of spiritual development, it is useful always to see a perspective, a vector, a direction; to see a certain close goal first, then a little further goal, and finally also the ultimate goal. And the first thing we should do is to recognize the existence of our own inner world, and start getting to know it, study it, delve into it. Our inner world is able to produce an impact on the world around us, and bring change to it.

Finally, I would like to remind you of a well-known fact that is very important for all of us today. During the Lebanese-Israeli war, a number of researchers

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conducted an experiment, during which they took a specially selected group of people who were taught the ability to “feel” peace within themselves. At a specific time, these people were thrown into the war-torn regions of the Middle East. But when, in the midst of that nightmare, they started developing the feeling of peace in their heart, terrorist incidents stopped, crimes against civilians went down, and the number of hospital admissions and traffic accidents declined.

When these people stopped focusing on experiencing inner peace, the negative environmental condition gradually returned. These studies confirmed earlier discoveries: when even a small percentage of the population acquires an inner state of peace and tranquility, this state is reflected in the surrounding world. Researchers were able to calculate the number of people with a sense of peace in their heart, which is necessary for this state to produce an impact on the world around them. For example, a city of one million people would need about a hundred people. For our planet with a population of eight billion, it would be a little less than nine thousand people.

The formula takes into account only the minimum number of people needed to start the process of healing the world. The greater the number of people embraced by a sense of peace, the faster the desired effect occurs. This study was called the “International Peace Project in the Middle East”, and its results were published in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (1988). Obviously, we still lack these nine thousand people.

The Universe rests on people who have love and peace in their hearts. This is the backbone, the matrix of the organism of the planetary civilization, it is also a sign of its maturity. Such people do not complain, do not condemn the imperfections of the world, do not despise any system, do not have the urge to exit it. They just calmly go about their business, beautify life around them for the benefit of themselves and others, sometimes without even thinking about the fact that this saves our world from destruction.

Let us set ourselves the goal of becoming such persons, this will speed up the restoration of peace and help to quell the aggression that is pouring on us today.

I am convinced that we can do it! ✧

Learning lessons is a little like reaching maturity. You're not suddenly more happy, wealthy, or powerful, but you understand the world around you better, and you're at peace with yourself. Learning life's lessons is not about making your life perfect, but about seeing life as it was meant to be.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

Introduction to The Golden Verses of Pythagoras

The ripe sayings of the Ageless Wisdom, as spoken again in the world of Greece — a world so much vaster than the area of the Greek peninsula — are somewhat fading from the minds born anew into the hurrying life of the 20th century West. But the West cannot afford to let them fade away, for more than ever are they needed now to breathe their undying music into the ears stunned with the clashing discords of a materialistic and luxurious civilization. Life grows too crowded and too showy; crowded, not full — for crowd is from without, fullness from within; showy, not splendid — for show is the veneer of wealth covering a base metal, while splendor is the gleam of the golden thread of stateliness interwoven with the silken web of noble character. Sorely is needed in such a life the strong, pure teaching of the elder days, when learning was held to be richer than wealth, and simplicity finer than lavishness. The Greece of Pythagoras, with its mathematics and music — order and harmony — has a message for the modern nations, disorderly and discordant, and this message may best come through those who, their own natures attuned by brooding over the Pythagorean wisdom, can teach by life more than by word “the Beauty which was Greece”.

One of the Master-Builders of old was **Pythagoras**; he **brought from Ind[ia] the wisdom of the BUDDHA**, and translated it into Greek thought, adding to its austere grandeur the beauty characteristic of Greece. . . . Those whose thought runs on Greek lines will here find the oldest wisdom garbed in Grecian grace, retaining the beauty of simplicity and adding the fairness of form. May those who read be drawn to meditate; may those who meditate find the hidden treasures. So will modern Western life become gradually permeated with a refining, ennobling influence, and schools of Pythagorean thought will do for the modern nations what the school of Pythagoras did for ancient Greece.

ANNIE BESANT

From The Golden Verses of Pythagoras

. . . Make him thy friend who distinguishes himself by his virtue. (Verse 5)

Avoid as much as possible hating thy friend for a slight fault. (Verse 7)

Know that all these things are as I have told thee; and accustom thyself to overcome and vanquish these passions:

First gluttony, sloth, sensuality, and anger.

Do nothing evil, neither in the presence of others, nor privately;

But above all things respect thyself.

In the next place, observe justice in thy actions and in thy words.

And accustom not thyself to behave thyself in any thing without rule, and without reason. (Verses 9–14)

And that the goods of fortune are uncertain; and that as they may be acquired, so may they likewise be lost. Concerning all the calamities that men suffer by divine fortune, Support with patience thy lot, be it what it may, and never repine at it. But endeavour what thou canst to remedy it. And consider that fate does not send the greatest portion of these misfortunes to good men. (Verses 16–20)

Observe well, on every occasion, what I am going to tell thee:— Let no man either by his words, or by his deeds, ever seduce thee. (Verses 24–25)

In no wise neglect the health of thy body; But give it drink and food in due measure, and also needed exercise. (Verses 32–33)

Accustom thyself to a way of living that is neat and decent without luxury.

Avoid all things that will occasion envy. (Verses 35–36)

Never suffer sleep to close thy eyelids, after thy going to bed,

Till thou hast examined by thy reason all thy actions of the day.

Wherein have I done amiss? What have I done? What have I omitted that I ought to have done? (Verses 40–42)

Practise thoroughly all these things; meditate on them well; thou oughtest to love them with all thy heart. 'Tis they that will put thee in the way of divine virtue. (Verses 45–46)



Books of Interest

THE HEROIC ENTHUSIASTS — AN ETHICAL POEM (GLIEROICIFURORI) by Giordano Bruno; translated from the Italian by L. Williams; Publisher, George Redway, London, 1887. (Several editions, including in Italian and Spanish, are available on the web at a range of prices from various providers.)

GIORDANO Bruno: A Martyr Theosophist

My name is Giordano, of the family of Bruno, of the city of Nola, twelve miles from Naples. There I was born and brought up. My profession has been and is that of letters, and of all the sciences. My fathers name was Giovanni, and my mother was Francesca Savolini; my father was a soldier. He is dead, and my mother also. I am forty-four years old, having been born in 1548.

These were his words before the tribunal of the Inquisition in Venice in 1592 on entering those dungeons, which he only left for the torture chamber and the stake.

In Nola, where Bruno passed the early years of his life, still lingered the atmosphere of the old occult school of Pythagoras. And the mantle of the Samian fell upon Giordano Bruno. His early years were passed in a time of social and political disorganization; all Italy was in disorder. The Inquisition stood grimly firm,

ready to play its part, through all turmoils and devastations. In order to gain opportunities for study, Bruno entered the Dominican convent in Naples when he was fifteen years old. But under the friar's robe beat the heart of the indomitable enthusiast and philosopher.

In Naples he remained till his twenty-eighth year; until his daring and unfettered spirit rousing the fear and hostility of the monks, he was compelled to flee to Rome and thence to Genoa, narrowly escaping the warrant for his arrest.

For some time Bruno earned his bread by teaching the children in the little town of Nola, but after five months he was again obliged to flee, taking refuge first at Turin and afterwards at Venice. There he composed several works, but these, and everything else he wrote in Italy, were destroyed by the murderous Inquisition. Italy was no longer safe, and Bruno took refuge in Geneva amongst the adherents of the new Reformed Church. Their intolerance, however, was only second to that of Rome; he crossed over into France, and for some time lectured in Paris as Doctor of Philosophy.

On the conversion of Henri III, Bruno crossed to England, where he met many of the Elizabethan worthies: Sir Philip Sydney, to whom he dedicated *Gli Eroici Furori* [*The Heroic Enthusiasts — An Ethical Poem*], Fulke Greville, Lord

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Brooke and, perhaps, also, Shakespeare. In 1585 Bruno returned to Paris, and then passed through Germany and Austria, resting finally at Frankfort. While there, the treacherous scheme which led up to his martyrdom was being devised at Venice. Gregory XIV was then Pope. Mocenigo, the infamous tool of the more infamous Inquisition, was the Judas who betrayed him with a kiss. Inviting Bruno to Venice, he treated him with every mark of esteem, while secretly plotting his betrayal and murder. One morning Mocenigo threw aside the veil, and Bruno was cast into the dungeon of the Inquisition. Before the Inquisitors the full nobility and grandeur of his character came out. Instead of weakly pleading for pardon, he boldly, and yet calmly, faced his torturers in their tribunal.

Being interrogated, he gave details of his life, and expositions of his philosophy. He spoke of the universe, of the infinite worlds in infinite space, of the divinity in all things, of the unity of all things, the dependence and interdependence of all things, and of the existence of God in all.

He was carried to Rome, and there he passed eight years in dungeons and torture chambers. On 17 February 1600, the fiendish engine of the Inquisition finally struck its victim. Hearing his sentence of death, Bruno said:

You, O Judges! feel perchance, more terror in pronouncing this judgment, than I do in hearing it.

Rome was full of pilgrims from all

parts, come to celebrate the jubilee of Pope Clement VIII. Bruno was hardly fifty years old at this time; his face was thin and pale, with dark, fiery eyes; the forehead luminous with thought, his body frail, and bearing the signs of torture; his hands in chains, his feet bare, he walked with slow steps in the early morning towards the funeral pile. Brightly shone the sun, and the flames leaped upwards and mingled with his ardent rays; Bruno stood in the midst with his arms crossed, his head raised and his eyes open. When all was consumed, a monk took a handful of the ashes and scattered them in the wind. A month later, the Bishop of Sidonia presented himself at the treasury of the Pope and demanded two scudi [gold or silver coins] in payment for having degraded Fra Giordano the heretic!

Not less remarkable than the purity and heroism of his life, were the grandeur and nobleness of his philosophy.

He taught that everything in Nature has a soul, one universal mind penetrates and moves all things; the world itself is a sacrum animal. Nothing is lost, but all transmutes and becomes.

The primal idea of Pythagoras, which Bruno worked out to a more distinct development, is this: numbers are the beginnings of things; numbers are the cause of the existence of material things;¹ they are not final, but are always changing position and attributes; they are variable and relative. Beyond and above this mutability, there must be the Immutable, the All, the One.

The Infinite must be one, as one is the

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absolute number; in the original One is contained all numbers; in the One is contained all the elements of the Universe.

One is the perfect number; it is the primitive monad. As from the One proceeds the infinite series of numbers which again withdraw and are resolved into the One; so from Substance, which is one, proceed the myriads of worlds; from the worlds proceed myriads of living creatures; and from the union of one with the diverse is generated the Universe. Hence the progression from ascent to descent, from spirit to that which we call matter; from the cause to the origin, and the process of metaphysics, which, from the finite world of sense rises to the intelligent, passing through the intermediate numbers of infinite substance to active being and cosmic reason.

From the absolute One, the sum of the sensible and intellectual world, millions of stars and suns are produced and developed. Each sun is the centre of as many worlds which are distributed in as many distinct series, in an infinite number of concentric centres and systems. Each system is attracted, repelled, and moved by an infinite eternal passion, or attraction; each turns round its own centre, and moves in a spiral towards the centre of the whole, towards which centre they all tend with infinite passional ardour. For in this centre resides the sun of suns, the unity of unities, the temple, the altar of the universe, the sacred fire of Vesta, the vital principle of the Universe.

That which occurs in the world of stars

is reflected in the telluric world; everything has its centre, towards which it is attracted with fervour. All is thought, passion, and aspiration.

From this unity which governs variety, from this movement of every world around its sun, of every sun around its centre sun — the sun of suns, which informs all with the rays of the spirit, with the light of thought, — is generated the perfect harmony of colours, sounds and forms. That which in the heavens is harmony becomes, in the individual, morality, and in companies of human beings, law. That which is light in the spheres becomes intelligence and science in the world of spirit and of humanity.

Through the revolution of the worlds through space around their suns, from their order, their constancy and their measure, the mind comprehends the progress and conditions of men, and their duties towards each other, the Bible, the sacred book of man, is in the heavens; there does man find written the word of God.

Human souls are lights, distinct from the universal soul, which is diffused over all, and penetrates everything. A purifying process guides them from one existence to another, from one form to another, from one world to another. The life of man is more than an experience or trial; it is an effort, a struggle to reproduce and represent upon Earth some of that goodness, beauty, and truth, which are diffused over the universe and constitute its harmony. Long, slow, and full of opposition is this educational process of the soul. Through struggle is

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man educated, fortified, and raised. Through the midst of cataclysms and revolutions humanity has one guiding star, a beacon which shows its light above the storms and tempests, a mystical thread running through the labyrinth of history the religion of philosophy and of thought. The vulgar creeds would not and have not dared to reveal the Truth in its purity and essence. They covered it with veils and allegories, with myths and mysteries, which they called sacred; they enshrouded thought with a double veil, and called it Revelation. Humanity, deceived by a seductive form, adored the veil, but did not lift itself up to the idea behind it; it saw the shadow, not the light.

Speaking of the Immortality of the Soul, Bruno maintained that nothing in the universe is lost, everything changes and is transformed; the soul transmigrates, and drawing round itself atom to atom, it reconstructs for itself a new body. The spirit that moves all things is one; everything differentiates according to the different forms and bodies in which it operates.

In place of the so-called Christian perfections (resignation, devotion, and ignorance), Bruno put intelligence and the progress of the intellect in the world of physics, meta-

physics, and morals; the true aim being illumination, the true morality the practice of justice, the true redemption the liberation of the soul from error, its elevation and union with God upon the wings of thought.

This idea is fully developed in *Gli Eroici Furori*, to which, in the present translation, we refer our readers.

In the works of this noble philosopher and hero we find all that is vital in the Secret Doctrine of the ages; and more, we find a divine harmony with the one truth, forever eternal in the heavens. When Bruno's courage and dauntless bravery in the face of danger, torture, and death, are more clearly reflected in the present generation of mystical thinkers, when they are more ready to emulate his earnestness, sincerity, and unflinching resolution, then we shall have less hesitation than at present in calling this martyr-hero a "Theosophist".

Reviewed by CHARLES JOHNSTON (Feb.17.1867–Oct.16.1931), theosophist, author, linguist, translator of the Upanishads, *Gītā*, *Yoga Sutras*. Reprinted from H. P. Blavatsky's *Lucifer* Magazine, Oct. 1888. See: <universaltheosoph.com/cj/giordano-bruno-martyr-theosophist/>. ✧

Endnote:

1. See "Stanzas from the Book of Dzyan" in *The Secret Doctrine*.

It is proof of a base and low mind for one to wish to think with the masses or majority, merely because the majority is the majority.

Giordano Bruno

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