

‘FREEDOM FROM THE SELF’

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(Summary of the Public Lecture delivered on 1.1.2020)

There are two parts to the consciousness of a human being: the Universal and the Personal. We are born with the universal which includes the body, the biological instincts and the capacity for awareness, memory, thinking and imagination. The personality develops subsequently, depending on where we are born, in which family, country and culture. Since the human child is extremely dependent on its parents for a very long time, it naturally develops an attachment to its family and culture since it feels secure in that environment. That identification produces a feeling of being a separate self: the ‘me and the mine’. This process may be necessary initially for the survival of the child but if it continues indefinitely it tends to act as a prison in which the mind gets trapped. The mind is then confined mainly to concerns for the security, prosperity and the welfare of the ‘me and the mine’ and becomes self-centred. This ego process colours all thinking and creates division between groups labeled as ‘us and them’. It

weans us away from the universal and therefore from the divine. The mind starts functioning as a personal lawyer, justifying and defending the me and the mine and is therefore no longer capable of perceiving the truth.

All sages have therefore talked of the need to free ourselves of this ego-process. Indeed the central purpose of the religious quest is to come upon freedom from the self and re-establish contact with the divine. It has been called by various names: realization, moksha or nirvana. It is important to realize that there is no ego anywhere in Nature, other than in the human consciousness. It is thus the creation of our own thinking which when identified with the ‘me and the mine’ creates the illusion of being a separate self. Since it is an illusion, it can be ended by perceiving what is true and what is false. Such learning is called self-knowledge since it cannot be obtained through the transmission of ideas from a book or a teacher.

The difficulty is that the brain acquires

several illusions from the environment in which it grows and is not aware that it has illusions. They are held in memory as truths unless it discovers them to be false. All thinking is coloured by these illusions and such thinking further strengthens them. These illusions lie at different depths in our consciousness. At the most superficial level they are what we call superstitions. Each culture has its own. These can often be gotten rid of even with intellectual inquiry and scientific thinking. Deeper than these are the cultural illusions specific to the beliefs in one's culture: the concepts about God, sin, heaven and hell, gender roles, casteism and so on. They produce a lot of discrimination and cruelty that is excused as 'our culture' and therefore not seen for what it is.

Deeper still are the psychological complexes caused by the memories of past fears and hurts, which psychologists struggle to unravel. And deepest of all is this feeling of being a separate

individual, a separate self. Sages have pointed out that that is also an illusion created by thinking and identification and can be seen through. In the Buddha's words at the end of his search, 'Thinking exists, but the thinker is not found.' Science is now corroborating his finding as they do not find any part of the brain corresponding to the ego.

Such a learning mind is the true religious mind. Self-knowledge is this learning which discerns what is true and what is false, thereby ending the illusions in consciousness. It is different from the accumulative learning of knowledge, skills and experience. It can be considered as unlearning the false in our consciousness. All real transformation in consciousness is a by-product of such learning. Self-knowledge is the key to wisdom and is therefore the essence of Theosophy since the latter is meant to be the wisdom-religion. That is why the motto of the TS is: 'There is no religion higher than truth.'



ANNIE BESANT SCHOOL (ABS)

Annie Besant School, came into existence in the year 2005 as a result of merging 'Shishu Vihar' and 'Annie Besant Primary School'. Initially this English medium, co-educational school was run from Prep to class 5 but from the year 2015 it was upgraded upto class 8. Since its incorporation it was under the control of Besant Education Fellowship (BEF) but from 1st April 2018 the Theosophical Society (Indian Section) took direct control of it. The Annie

Besant School follows the CBSE pattern curriculum. In the last session 2018-19 the total strength of the school was 281. In this current session 2019-20 the total strength of the school is 334. At present there is a Principal, fifteen teachers, two office staff and five subordinate staff members. Apart from academic studies several extracurricular activities such as exhibition cum fete, handwriting competition, rakhi-making, rangoli and diya making, debates on

current issues, and so on are held from time to time. Besides these activities several functions are also celebrated in the school such as Basant Panchami, Holi, Independence Day, Diwali, and so on. Last year we celebrated 'Umang' the annual function of the school. The school encourages its students to take

part in these activities which contributes to the overall development of the personality of the students. Last year a new conference hall 'Anusmriti Hall' was constructed in the new building ground floor to encourage and host the various in-house functions organized by the school from time to time.



INAUGURATION CEREMONY OF RADHA BURNIER AMPHITHEATRE

The Dr Radha Burnier Amphitheatre at Varanasi was inaugurated by international President Tim Boyd on 31 December 2019 prior to the start of the 144th International Convention of the Theosophical Society. This dream project has been built at a cost of Rs 35 lakhs largely contributed by the Indian Section and collection from donations. The main donor was Mr Ashwinbhai C. Shroff from Mumbai who donated Rs 15 lakhs for the project from his personal account. His wife Mrs Ushaben A. Shroff who passed away last year, was an active theosophist and will be feeling very happy to see the realization of the project from wherever she is now.

In addition to its use for conferences and conventions of the Theosophical

Society, the Amphitheatre will also provide a forum to all the institutions located in the Indian Section Headquarters campus at Varanasi, namely Annie Besant School, Besant Theosophical School, Vasant Kanya Inter College and Vasant Kanya Mahavidyalaya to hold functions and other activities. Its capacity to accommodate 1500 people will enable these institutions to hold functions jointly and create stronger bonds among the students. This will help to spread the light of love, friendship and harmony among the students, teach them the true meaning of universal brotherhood, and provide them glimpses of the theosophical teaching of which they are a part.



OPENING OF THE CONVENTION

The 144th International Convention was attended by about 1487 delegates on the opening day.

The venue of the Convention this year was the brand-new Dr Radha Burnier Amphitheatre at the Headquarters of the Indian Section at Varanasi. The international President Tim Boyd inaugurated the Amphitheatre at 9:30 a.m. on 31 December 2019 (see separate report). Then Prayers of the Religions were conducted by the school students in succession, one student representing each religion, concluding with the Universal Prayer recited by all, led by the President. This was followed by the welcome address by Mr Pradeep Gohil, General Secretary of the Indian Section, which is hosting the Convention. Subsequently, greetings from the dais were given for the Convention by General Secretaries and other representatives of the various Sections and other groups on behalf of their members as follows:

Mr Douglas Keene, USA	Mr Marcos de Resende, Brazil
Mrs Jenny Baker, England	Mr Bousoulengas Alexandros, Greece
Mrs Linda Oliveira, Australia	Charlton Jules P. Romero, Philippines
Ms Birgitta Skarbo, Sweden	Mr Narendra Shah, Africa, East & Central
Mr John Vorstermans, New Zealand	Mr Ebrony Peteli, Africa, West
Mr Wim Leys, Netherlands	Mrs Svitlana Gavrylenko, Ukraine
Ms Tran-Thi-Kim-Dieu, France	Mr Andreas Isberg, Norway
Mrs Manuela Kaulich, Germany	Ms Isis de Resende, America, Central
Mr Antonio Girardi, Italy	Rev. Olande Ananda, Sri Lanka
Mrs Sabine Van Osta, Belgium	Mr B. L. Bhattacharya, Bangladesh
Mr Matius Ali, Indonesia	Mr Gerard Brennan, Indo-Pacific
Mr Esteban Langlois, Argentina	Ms Nancy Secrest TOS International

The international Secretary Ms Marja Artamaa then read summaries of the greetings received from many countries and individuals, thanking them all for the encouraging words, which are an important part of setting the tone of the Convention. There is a field beyond where brotherhood is true and united. It is revealed in wordless beauty, and it touches everyone beyond. After the greetings the President addressed the audience and presented his report in a video format, including the theosophical work that happened around the world during the year. 'Faces of Adyar' was a novel feature in this edition of the report.



THEOSOPHY AROUND THE WORLD

It is heartening to note that on 30 September 2018, the transition from 'association' to 'charity' status was finalized and the Charter handed over to the new TS **England** (TSE) Charity. While the regular activities continued the main activities of the Section were the North-West Federation Weekend Conference in May with the theme 'Esoteric Teachings: A Path to Wisdom' and the week-long Summer School in August on 'Reality, Illusion, and Life'. Both events were productive and the participation was large and encouraging for all. At the TSE Headquarters several international speakers including Isis Resende from Brazil and Kurt Leland from America were hosted to give lectures on important and interesting topics. Some of the important theosophical books were studied this year. Courses were offered on sacred geometry, *The Yoga-Vāsishtha*, *Sermons of Meister Eckhart*, Vedic astrology, after-death states, and meditation. The 24 Lodges and centres continued their activities in reaching out to the wider community. Many of the lodges concentrated their studies on the Three Objects of the Society. Training courses for new speakers have been introduced. The diploma course on Theosophy has been well received. It is good news that a higher diploma course has been introduced this year. These courses have attracted around 150 students. The merger of the Welsh region with TSE is progressing well. They are producing a bi-annual magazine, *Esoterica*, which is

widely distributed to members and the public. The national President releases a bi-monthly newsletter particularly in order to be in touch with the members independent of groups.

The activities of TS **Finland** covered many special programmes of immense interest on important theosophical themes. A silent retreat was held in Kreivila in August. The annual convention of the Finnish Section was held in Oulu on 27 April. The important function of the year was the Summer School in Kreivila during 7–11 June. The course with the theme 'The Foundation of Theosophy' was conducted by Tràn-Thi-Kim-Diêu from France. On White Lotus Day, the special guest was Tim Wyatt from England who spoke on 'The Extinction Myth'. The Lodges are active providing courses in basic Theosophy and related subjects using different study methods. It is interesting that TS organized two big fairs in Southern Finland selling books and holding interactive sessions. Estonian Lodges also held a winter seminar in January 2019 and *The Secret Doctrine* study classes in May both in Tartu. An autumn study camp in Aegvidu was conducted in August. The Finnish Section has 21 lodges and one study group. Total membership is 345.

It is heartening to note that all the main targets were met by the **French** Section during the year, in terms of meditation meetings, silent retreats, improving Internet presence, et al. Unfortunately, the activities in Paris, though they continued steadily, were

adversely impacted due to social unrest and hacking of the website. A new website has now been set up. The Lodge meetings, discussing important topics, were held monthly. Courses were held once in two weeks, free of cost. Silent retreats for only members were also held as planned, attracting many new members. A regular meditation group was formed early this year and continued to meet every two weeks. Outside of Paris, theosophical activities were organized regularly. Lodges in Marseille, Orleans, Toulouse, and Brittany were regular and active. The National Convention was held in Paris on 22–23 June 2019 on ‘Animal to Human Evolution of Consciousness’. The programme included a public lecture, symposium, and discussion on the theme. The magazine *Le Lotus Bleu* was published ten times during the year.

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

Spiritual Life’.

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

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

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

Covenant Lodge, Israel, in Tel Aviv, reports that a monthly public lecture continues to be held throughout the

year. Two weekend and three one-day seminars were organized and proved to be a good channel for study. Five study groups are active and meet twice monthly. YouTube has been explored to upload 45 films on theosophical subjects for public use.

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

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

At the **International Headquarters**, renovation work started on the **Lead-beater Chambers** and is expected to be completed by September/October 2020. The **Archives and Museum** department is being shifted to the newly built extension to the Adyar Library building and will be named 'Surendra Narayan Archives'. During the year, 20 research scholars used the facilities, either in person or requesting scanned materials by electronic media. During the inter-

national Convention, archival exhibitions on 'The Mahatma Letters' and 'Prominent People Associated with the Theosophical Movement' were inaugurated by me on the first day of the Convention. The Archives team consisting of V. Vedavathi, Mohan Mani and Jaishree Kannan was supported by Bernd Jesse, whose contribution as a volunteer was very much appreciated. In 1886 Col. H. S. Olcott established the reputed **Adyar Library and Research Centre (ALRC)**. T. Narayanan Kutty is the Director and C. A. Shinde the chief Librarian, with 14 supporting staff. In January, on behalf of the Society, I signed an important co-operation agreement with Sree Sankara University in Kerala for joint publication of books, and for research scholars to better utilize the contents of the ALRC and revive Sanskrit. A new system was introduced for the arrangement of the books considering the Library's closed nature and to facilitate space for the Archives. The changes took about two months. Digitization and automation activities continued to progress; catalogue digitization has been completed.

The School of the Wisdom conducted four courses during the year. Pablo Sender gave a comprehensive presentation of H. P. Blavatsky's teachings, both philosophical as well as practical, with his course 'Higher Consciousness — Its Nature and Awakening' in November 2018. In December, Jacques Mahnich offered 'Living Theosophy in the 21st Century', emphasizing the role of the timeless wisdom as the guiding light of our lives in a science-and-

technology-centered world. In 'Meditation in the Light of Theosophy' conducted in January, Trần-Thi-Kim-Diêu guided students in the practice of Madame Blavatsky's 'Meditation Diagram' for a much-needed transformation of awareness. The **Olcott Education Society (OES)** runs the **Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School**, which has been giving importance to the academic as well as co-curricular activities such as sports, cultural events, social issues, educational tours, and so on, for the overall development of the students. Speaking in English is emphasized as a tool for global communication. Upgrade of teacher skills is also given equal importance. The **HPB Hostel** is also run by OES with a resident warden and eight boys staying. OES's **Vocational Training Centre** has 3 teachers, and 24 students undergoing free training in tailoring, weaving, embroidery, and other crafts. The **Social Welfare Centre** looks after 46 young children with food and play activities. Parents are also involved during social and national celebrations.

The Theosophical Order of Service exists in 36 of the 59 countries where the Theosophical Society is active. The

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



Number of delegates registered as on Wednesday, 1 January: 1490

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