

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

VOL. 145 NO. 6 MARCH 2024

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Note: Articles for publication in *The Theosophist* should be sent to: <editorialoffice@gmail.com>

Cover: White calla lily flowers are commonly used in Easter Sunday services, representing resurrection and rebirth. They also symbolize holiness, purity, and, as they have only one large petal, the unity of Life. This image was the 36th in a series titled “Fifty-two Flowers”, showcased as an installation during a solo show, “Radiance + Reflection”, at Tibet House in New York City by artist David Orr <david-orr.com>.

This journal is the official organ of the President, founded by H. P. Blavatsky on 1 Oct. 1879. The Theosophical Society is responsible only for official notices appearing in this journal.

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.

Universal Intelligence and the Human Condition

TIM BOYD

ONE of the wonders of the theosophical endeavor is that people find their way to it, their meaning in it, then expand on that according to their own understanding and needs. There are people for whom the Theosophical Society (TS) and its work are related to history, the work of tracing the thread of wisdom that runs through the complex tapestry of humanity's unfoldment — identifying it as it appears and expresses in different times and cultures, and through different people.

It is always good to keep in mind that Theosophy and the TS are two things, not one. In her book, *The Key to Theosophy*, H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) describes Theosophy as “the shoreless ocean of universal truth, love, and wisdom, reflecting its radiance on the Earth” and the TS as “only a visible bubble on that reflection”.

Often during meetings such as this I encounter affirmative statements of what Theosophy is — HPB's writings, the Mahatma's statements, the Ancient Wisdom, and so on. I am encouraged by our founders, who in their wisdom and humility, never gave a fixed definition of what Theosophy is. There are a number of suggestions and hints, but there is no definition that states its boundaries. We, on the other hand, are quick to say

what it is, based on our studies and preferences. The more correct approach might be to simply state that “my understanding of Theosophy is...”. Perhaps we feel that our understanding exceeds HPB's, but she herself could not define it.

Some degree of humility is called for in these matters. If you were to give me ten minutes, I could walk out of this room, go down to the river and bring back a bottle full of water from the Nile. I could give that to any scientist who is sufficiently versed in such matters to examine. In their examination they would find that in every aspect it is in fact identical with the Nile. The same microorganisms, chemicals, minerals, components in this water that was drawn from the Nile. But to make another extension and to say, “based on my research this *is* the Nile though I have never seen the river, because the limits of my knowledge confirm it”, is a jump that takes it out of touch with the deeper reality: the water from the Nile is not the Nile; its shores, its bed, are not the Nile. The Nile has been here for thousands of years, the waters from this river have grown civilizations, deep people have been nurtured by this river. The mighty Nile which has birthed civilizations and

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nurtured millions over time ultimately flows into the ocean where it is like a drop of water.

There is a universal aspect to the Ageless Wisdom tradition. It is not specific to any one place, person, or time. For anyone who is involved in a spiritual pursuit, whether along the theosophical line or any other, it involves a deepening interaction with it. When rightly approached, ultimately an alignment occurs where one becomes identified with this universal intelligence. In that identification, the personality or the self is not lost, but the view is expanded.

In the little book, *The Idyll of the White Lotus*, Three Truths are enunciated that form the basis for a genuine pursuit of a deepening connection with the universal intelligence. In the second of these Truths it 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 those who desire perception.” It expresses the idea that universal intelligence not only inhabits us, but is also omnipresent around us; that any person can suit themselves to be available to that intelligence. It can be perceived by those who “desire perception”.

Don't we all desire perception? Of course! We all want peace, illumination, deep understanding, but “I have an appointment for lunch today, so maybe I can get around to it later”, or “I have emails, deadlines”, or a thousand things commanding our time and focus. Yes, we desire, but the *nature* of that desire for

perception is all important. What does it mean to desire perception? There is a story given to illustrate this point. A person comes to a spiritual teacher and says: “Teacher, I desire perception.” And the teacher asks: “Do you? How deep is your desire?” And the answer is: “Yes, I do! I'm serious and sincere.”

So the teacher says: “OK, well, come with me down to the river.” They wade into the water together then the teacher pushes the head of the questioner down into the water and holds him there while he struggles. When at last the teacher lets the student lift his head, the student is angry and calls the teacher a fake, as he has been told that this teacher was a gentle person. So the student is asked: “When you were underwater what were your thoughts?” And the answer is: “My only thought was the desire to breathe.” Then the teacher's response: “Come back to me when that is the nature of your desire for perception of reality.”

Sooner or later, for each of us there comes a time where, much like our need for air, or food, we need a deepened association with wisdom, truth, reality. We require a sense of connection. In the story of *The Idyll of the White Lotus* a little boy comes into a temple and very briefly sees the Lotus Goddess, and is uplifted. The problem with seeing something, anything, is that once we have seen, we cannot unsee. We can spend a lifetime trying to cover it with denial, but we cannot unsee it. And once we have a sense for what is lightened or illumined, we suffer in its absence — like living in a shadow or darkened world.

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What is the relationship of the Theosophical Society to this experience of wisdom, truth, enlightenment. In *The Key to Theosophy* HPB states that the TS was formed for a reason: To make it known “that such a thing as Theosophy exists”. I used to think of this as a strange explanation for the formation of an organization. The question for me was, “What benefit is conferred by the mere knowledge of the existence of Theosophy?”

We all know the expression “knowledge is power”, and it is true, within the limits of knowledge. To make it known that the possibility for an expansion, not just in our personal field, but in our effect and influence on the world, is the point of the TS. So how do we do that? What does the TS do is a question I am often asked! So what do we do? How do we impart this empowering sort of knowledge that is of the wisdom? No, the way that it is done is, again, according to me, by any and every means available. It is not only in the spoken word, the written word, in history, or in the various ancient wisdoms. Any and every means that can connect the universal with our particular temperaments is the approach.

My view of the TS headquarters in Adyar is that it is a laboratory, a place to experiment along those lines that can reach and touch people and enliven the sense that there is a greater life in which we all participate. In talking about the TS I am speaking of an organizational approach to experimentation. The process is no different at the personal level. At birth each of us have been gifted an unparal-

leled laboratory for experimentation — the laboratory of the human body and consciousness. During the course of a life we must explore, try, fail, and develop more expanded ideas of our possibilities — the main possibility being our capacity to see and reflect the love, and compassion, and understanding that seem to characterize the Universal Intelligence.

This is the second time I have been in Egypt. I must admit that having been here as a two-year-old, I have no memories of that visit. In 1955 my father had taken on the role of Mission Chief in a humanitarian organization called CARE, and brought his young family along. The organization was very active, particularly after World War II, when hunger was widespread in war-ravaged Europe. He was in Egypt in the aftermath of the Palestine War. The same war in Israel is described as the War of Independence.

As the result of that conflict hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were displaced, many of them to Egypt. There was a housing crisis, a food crisis, and my father was tasked to organize primarily the housing aspect. That is what brought me here to Egypt the first time, but it makes me think that here I am, 68 years later, and what has changed? The human-created problems that fill our daily news today, are the same problems that were filling the daily news then. It has not changed.

Since arriving here in Luxor, each morning has been wonderful. In our room we are fortunate to have a little balcony. I get up early, step out onto the balcony, and I listen to the morning

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prayers — hundreds of voices being raised in prayer all around the city. I find myself trying to imagine the experience of the Mahatmas, the Masters, in their effort to uplift what must be to them our very childish humanity. I hear the multitude of voices in this prayer, rising as a drone-like sound — to the ear of the Master, asking for some relief from suffering, for an end to war, to the inequalities creating hunger, disease, displacement; asking for an answer, for some intervention.

And what is it that we are asking for? Basically we are asking for what has been given to us, time and time again by the great Teachers who have lived among us and tried to pass on the message that it is all in our hands. Before he died Buddha

encapsulated his life of teaching in eight words: 1. “Do no harm.” 2. “Do good.” 3. “Purify your minds”. That is the teaching we have heard, received, repeated, yet refused to act upon.

We are praying for interventions in the climate, an end to war, but who is causing the wars? Who is polluting the atmosphere? At some point in the future the history of this time is going to be written. It will be written in one of two ways: either as “Humanity at that time woke up”; or, our moment in time will be written as “They did not wake up”.

The purpose of the TS is to try to align ourselves on the side of awakening. It may not be comfortable, but each one of us has to do it for ourselves. ✧

I've known rivers:

**I've known rivers ancient as the world and
older than the flow of human blood in human veins.**

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

**I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.**

**I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.**

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Langston Hughes

Virtue

M. M. SUNDRESH

When its identity is lost a race is destroyed, taking along with it its cultural ethos and values. But it is not the race that suffers, but humanity as a whole. The Theosophical Society (TS) not only re-created pride in the Indian way of life but also contributed to the development of the world through the exhibition of dharma. At times it requires a third party to re-invent and rejuvenate one's own culture.

Dr Annie Besant (1847–1933), second international President of the TS, was more Indian than anybody else. She not only restored the vision of ancient India, but created a space for its leadership. Therefore, I would like to extend my hearty congratulations to the Society for continuing its service, which words cannot possibly describe.

The concept of dharma (*aram* in Tamil) has a wider connotation than “virtue” in English, as understood by the great philosophers like Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. Their understanding could at best possibly be some facets of dharma and *aram*. Even an exhaustive attempt made by Benjamin Franklin in defining virtue, perhaps might not fit into the concept of

dharma, which is a way of life. Plato dealt with various concepts of dharma about what constitutes virtue, and therefore his understanding of it was very narrow. While disagreeing with Plato, Aristotle went ahead and made an attempt to define virtue through human excellence. He considered both sides: what is not virtue on the one side, and what is the extreme side of virtue on the other. He did the middle part and then defined virtue as excellence of human conduct.

Now, there is a clear distinction between knowledge and character. What is knowledge? It is acquired, while character is formed. Knowledge creates I-ness, facilitating the mind to think in the right way. Now, when knowledge is in place it gives birth to opinion. Such opinion creates desire, and these two create action. If you add this action and fill it up with moral and ethical value, the end-product would be dharma. Now, how do we acquire knowledge? It can be acquired through different ways: by experience, the teachings of others, reading books, and so on. There has to be a combination of character and knowledge.

Justice M. M. Sundresh serves at the Supreme Court of India. He was previously a Judge of the Madras High Court. Besant Lecture given at the International Convention of the TS on 31.12.2023.

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Let me give you an example to show how having the right knowledge will create virtue. This is a real incident. In a sleepy village in Bihar there was a woodcutter named Dashrath Manjhi. He had a small hut, obviously without electricity, and his tools for cutting wood. His family consisted of his sick wife, mentally deranged son, and a widowed daughter with a young child. One day he returned home after work and found his wife full of sorrow and agony. On enquiry, she said that the water pot she was carrying while crossing the nearby mountain to get water from the next village was broken by a jutting stone.

Manjhi spent the entire night thinking about the incident. The next day he took his crowbar and pickaxe and walked towards the mountain. Villagers out of curiosity asked him what he was doing and he told them he was going to the mountain to carve out a road connecting the two villages. He was ridiculed and laughed at relentlessly. Manjhi went on with the job for 22 continuous years, at the end of which he completed creating a path connecting the two villages. Within three years of his starting the effort, his sick wife passed away. After completing the work, he dug thirty-three wells all by himself. He died in the year 2007. The government of Bihar woke up thereafter and gave some money to his son. This is knowledge, character, and virtue.

Now, if a person like Manjhi could transform the world, this is a transformation which is required. All religions talk

about this transformation. As beautifully said by the Indian philosophers, water from above comes to the ground as rain, and after partaking the character of the soil, flows into the river, then joins and becomes the sea. Religions speak about virtue and dharma. The problem lies in our limited understanding. Khalil Gibran has beautifully described this in his poem, "Fear": He just transforms himself as the river water. The water shudders while flowing towards the sea, worrying that it is no longer going to be part of the river and will be consumed by the sea. And then it dawned upon it that it is actually becoming the sea. This is wisdom created by knowledge, and exactly what is required.

Virtue in Indian philosophy has many facets. Being a way of life, it is not confined to a particular activity. Therefore, in every human activity one is expected to show the characteristics of virtue, be it in the family, relationships, vocation, administration, and war. It is inbuilt in every human contact, meant to be followed among all other living beings, including animals, plants, and trees. If man is endowed with six senses, it is his primary duty to take care of other living beings, which all of you are doing, by learning to share. This quality of an individual assumes more importance than any other characteristic that he could possibly acquire.

Dharma says that what you possess is not meant to be used by you alone. It has to be shared. It is like a fruit tree. The tree does not take the fruit; but it facilitates

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its fruits to be shared by all other living beings. Indian philosophy says it is the bounden duty of a human being to share what he has with every other living being. It does not confine itself to humans alone. If we apply this principle, then we can certainly create a better world.

The *Bhagavadgītā* describes different types of virtues such as fearlessness, purity of mind, steadfastness, knowledge, charity, control of senses, sacrifice, study of sacred books, austerity, straightforwardness, truthfulness, compassion towards all living beings, absence of covetousness, gentleness, modesty, forgiveness, cleanliness, and absence of vanity. Therefore, all these characteristics put together constitute virtue. Unless one acquires these ingredients, a good deed will not attain its desired result.

What do we mean by a good deed? It cannot be understood from a mere societal understanding, as the concept of virtue transcends it. There are different types of virtue which we see applied in different walks of life. Of all the virtues, Indian philosophy lays importance on a virtuous heart. It starts from the thinking; it is the purity of heart. I have told you of the story of Manjhi. It is the purity of heart which drives the knowledge. Therefore, of all the virtues, we need to evolve and inculcate purity of our own heart. What is happening in the world is the lack of purity; therefore, this understanding of the concept of virtue will make us create a better world on this principle.

Let me share two stories with you. There lived a saint who apparently was

very pious, dedicating himself to the service of God, performing pujas, chanting mantras, and so on. His neighbour was a good-hearted woman who made a living as a prostitute. She was always having virtuous thoughts and contributing to the betterment of others, to the extent that even while practising her profession she was thinking about goodness and God. On the contrary, the saint, even while performing pujas and chanting mantras, was always thinking of what the next-door lady was doing at that time; so, he was not associating himself either with God or virtue. After death, he was surprised to see the lady already in heaven, while he was struggling to get an entry himself. When he questioned this seeming injustice, he was told: “Between you and her, she was more virtuous.”

Another story involving a saint: A young lady was struggling to cross a river which was in spate. She requested a saint, an excellent swimmer, to help her to cross the river due to an emergency. He declined saying that as a saint he cannot touch her. A young man who was standing nearby volunteered to carry her across to the other side. The saint met the young man after a couple of days and, out of curiosity, asked him what he did with the pretty girl. The young man said: “What do you mean?” The saint said: “No, no, since you carried her, tell me what you did after.” The young man said: “I dropped her two days back; unfortunately, you seem to be still carrying her!” Carrying the elements of virtue in our own mind is what is of utmost importance.

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Religion can sometimes destroy happiness. Is it correct? Both yes and no. Yes, but it is not religion that destroys happiness; it is our understanding of the religion which destroys virtue. We have had religious wars; we have them even now. We have seen religious practices which a rational mind, a virtuous mind cannot accept, therefore the concept of virtue that is spoken about in the religion goes beyond it; it may be because of the understanding of the religion. For example, *sati* (the Hindu custom or act of a widow burning herself to death or being burned to death on the funeral pyre of her husband) is not a part of religion. Religion speaks very highly of women. Religious wars are only based on man's understanding of his religion. Both killing and charity can be done in the name of religion.

Here again let me tell you a story. A pigeon and its chick were living in the roof of a mosque. There was a communal riot and they were forced to leave the place. They found shelter in a church where the same thing occurred. Then they moved on to a temple and again there was a fight among the people. In all the three places they were living with other pigeons. The chick asked the mother: "Wherever we go, we live in peace with the others, but why don't the humans do the same?" The mother said: "We believe in harmony as we do not have any religion. That is why we stay over and above them!"

Understanding virtue from a restricted vision is a serious cause for concern. The world suffers from the lack of virtue of those who can make an impact. Greed,

arrogance, and aggression, being enemies of virtue, determine decisions and actions. Nationalism and regionalism are without virtue and against humanity. Any form of power should be subject to virtue. This is not exactly what is happening on the ground. A virtuous man seeks happiness for himself and others. It is created by giving and sharing, and not by receiving and withholding. This applies to individuals, leaders, and nations. It is this happiness which connects the world and the provider gets connected to God. God is happy when He sees happiness created through good deeds.

Unlimited possession is a burden which destroys happiness. Indian philosophy speaks about this concept at length. St Thiruvalluvar aptly says that one should create happiness with compassion and charity, as possessions being temporary are obviously meant to be lost. You bring happiness to someone else and that feeling of that person creates happiness in you. It is said that it is written on the tomb of Alexander the Great: "Here lies the man to whom the world was not enough." He was buried with his hands pointing towards the sky, a stark reminder that all of us leave empty. Love and happiness are the eternal concepts driving dharma. One can see the constant reiteration of this concept in most of the thinking of Indian philosophers and also remnants can be seen both in the Holy Quran and the Bible.

Once, Emperor Akbar asked his close friend Dadu: "What is the color of God? What is his creed? What is his language?"

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And what does he like the most?" Dadu answered him with a single word: "Love." We do not understand the power of love which a great mind like Einstein understood beautifully. Einstein in one of his letters to his daughter spoke at length about the power of love. After he penned the letter, he cautioned his daughter not to open the letter during his lifetime. Later, when she opened it, she found to her astonishment that he had said that love is more powerful than the atom. Why did he say that? Love can create happiness and a better environment, but also it can destroy both.

Indian philosophy deals beautifully with it. It says love is the cause for happiness and also sorrow. It can cause both good and bad. How can that be? If you do charity, have compassion, and help somebody out of love, that is goodness. On the other hand, if you destroy others for the love of your own people, countrymen, family members, self-interest, and so on, that is bad. That is why I say regionalism and nationalism, even if they are born out of love, are dangerous; they are not facets of virtue, they are elements which destroy virtue. We have a situation today where nobody bothers about what is right or wrong. Standing up and saying what is right is also part of virtue. Nations taking sides, groups fighting with each other on different segments — the reason is we have forgotten the concept of love, the concept of virtue.

There is an interesting English poem, written by William Blake:

I sought my God and my God I couldn't find.

I sought my soul and my soul eluded me;
I sought to serve my brother in his need,
and I found all three;
My God, my soul, and thee.

This is the concept of love. In love we give. But we understand that in love we take. In love when you give, even if you lose, the satisfaction creates happiness for you. Let us take the example of our own family. If you lose to your mother, the motherly love will increase, if you lose to your father, the fatherly bond will increase, if you lose to your sibling, you will become a better brother or sister, if you lose to your wife, she will love you more. Why don't we extend this concept to others? When we are said to be losing, we need not look at it as a conflict; instead, we can consider it as a kind of cooperation — we give in some and we get satisfaction which is the payback we get for facilitating someone. When we play a game of tennis if we appreciate our opponent, it is a sign of love. We may lose a game but actually we gain the love of our opponent. It is a fundamental mistake we all make by ignoring love.

Shakespeare put it beautifully in *Romeo and Juliet*:

My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep. The more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite.

Thus, when you give more love, you get more. Therefore, he says both are infinite.

In one of the Sangam literature works, *Puranamuru*, there is an interesting conversation between a king and a poet. The king asks the poet: "Why is it that I'm

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the king today, having everything, and why is it that all other human beings are different?" The poet replies: "I'll explain it to you. Let's go out to the forest tonight." The king does not understand why, but simply follows him.

They go to the forest and see a poor hunter waiting for prey sleeplessly for days together. Finally, he manages to find a deer, shoots it and takes it away singing happily. The king asks the poet: "I don't understand, what is the message you want to convey?" The poet says: "Look, at the end of the day, you are a human being and so is he. All the elements of Nature, earth, water, air, all are the same for both. You breathe, he also breathes. You eat, he also eats. The food may be different, but you dress, he also dresses. You have emotions, he also has emotions. Fundamentally there's no difference between humans. The only difference is that you have something which he doesn't have. And the reason is that you should learn to share. It's a heinous crime if you think that you are here only to enjoy, and not to share it with others. Then, it would only mean that you don't understand the laws of Nature. You're going to die just like him. Death and birth are two facets of life and

the question is how you manage in between, applying the principle of virtue."

It is beautifully said by the philosopher: "We have two lives, and the second one starts when we realize we have only one." And that realization does not come to most of us. Once we have that realization, then it will have the effect of changing the entire world, because ultimately one person takes a decision on behalf of his business, or a community, or a group, or a state, or a country. The time has come for us to stand up and exhibit the principle of virtue. As Napoleon said: "The world suffers not by the violence of bad people. But by the silence of good people."

Being virtuous, we can certainly create a better world filled with happiness and love. Karma reinforces the need for adherence to virtue. Whoever you are it is your duty to stay on course in the path of virtue. As beautifully said by St Thiruvalluvar, such a person lives, even after his mortal disappearance, in the heart of others. Rumi has beautifully said: "When you are dead, seek for your resting place, not in the Earth, but in the heart of men." Let us all make an endeavor to try to live in the heart of others after we depart. ✧

**Virtue consists not in abstaining from vice,
but in not desiring it.**

George Bernard Shaw

Do Fictional Characters Have Minds of Their Own?

CHIDAMBARAM RAMESH

SIMILAR to Pygmalion, who breathed life into a statue, many authors bring their characters to life through imagination, endowing them with a sense of reality and autonomy. Crafting a character from scratch allows the subconscious to manifest a genuine form of creativity. Consequently, the characters within a writer's mind take on a thought-based existence. Over time, these thoughts can solidify, acquiring distinct attributes.

The amalgamation of imagination and reflection breathes life into these mental constructs, intertwining them with the writer's being and the necessary elements for their existence. In a literary work, characters are not confined to the pages; they possess the capacity to influence and even reshape reality itself. It is not unusual for them to transcend fiction and seep into the author's personal experiences. This dynamic relationship between characters and the writer is intriguing and finds substantial support in various instances, despite initially seeming far-fetched.

A century ago, Dr Hereward Carrington, the foremost psychic researcher of his time and an eminent American Society for Psychical Research member, recorded a curious case that sheds light on this subject. A clairvoyant was asked to access a writer's home from a distance and to describe the individual she found there using her psychic powers. She described the person in detail — hair, eyes, build, and so on.

When the psychic had finished and recovered full consciousness, she was told that her description was entirely wrong, that no such person existed in the house, and that her report was erroneous throughout. When the facts were stated to the writer whose home the psychic examined, he replied that although he did not resemble the clairvoyant's description in any way, it corresponded precisely and in minute detail to a character he was creating and writing about in his book. In other words, his thoughts had taken form and were visible to the clairvoyant.¹

Chidambaram Ramesh, who holds an engineering degree, is also an independent researcher and writer dedicated to reviving and integrating scientifically valuable concepts lost to history into modern science, and has authored various notable works. His present focus lies in the realm of consciousness studies.

Do Fictional Characters Have Minds of Their Own?

C. W. Leadbeater makes similar assertions, claiming that whenever someone imagines a tangible thing, such as a house or a book, he creates a miniature replica of it in his causal body. Images hover about the man's upper body, often at eye level and right before his face.² The basic idea behind this is that clairvoyants can perceive mental images of this type, but they may also be rearranged and moved by others outside the creator.

Do Fictional Characters Have Their Own Identities?

In her widely acclaimed book, *Big Magic*, Elizabeth Gilbert delves into the mystical essence of creativity and imagination. Gilbert views creativity as a captivating force that transcends mere human origin. She perceives our world not only as home to animals, plants, bacteria, and viruses but also to ideas — ethereal, energetic life forms existing independently from us, yet capable of engaging with us in peculiar ways. She underscores that ideas lack physical bodies but possess consciousness, enabling them to have desires and intentions. Gilbert analogizes creative energies to elusive house-elves, visiting individuals they believe can bring their ideas to fruition and attempting to capture their attention. If one person rejects an idea, it may seek another collaborator to manifest it. Gilbert supports her perspective by recounting an instance where an idea veered towards her friend, Ann Patchett.

Gilbert's fascination with a novel set in the Amazon jungle was sparked during

a conversation with her partner, Felipe, about a 1960s Brazilian incident involving a colossal highway construction project. This incident initially ignited her interest in crafting a narrative centred in the Amazon, featuring a plot where a spinster from Minnesota falls in love with her married boss, entangled in a wild business scheme. Despite this inspiration, other priorities diverted Gilbert's attention, causing her to momentarily set aside the idea.

The narrative took an intriguing turn when Gilbert met fellow author Ann Patchett. The two developed a close friendship and engaged in thoughtful correspondence. In a letter, Patchett revealed her current project — a novel set in the Amazon rainforest. This revelation reignited Gilbert's interest in her initial idea. However, Gilbert had previously contemplated a similar concept but chose not to pursue it. Both novels focused on a middle-aged Minnesota spinster embroiled in the Amazon jungle due to a convoluted business situation, presenting disappearances of both individuals and money while exploring themes of love. Upon learning of Patchett's project, Gilbert was taken aback by the striking similarities in their plots. The coincidences led them to believe that Gilbert had inadvertently passed the idea along to Patchett, who was eager to breathe life into it.

Gilbert's theory echoes Carl G. Jung's concepts on archetypes, suggesting that they possess a unique energy and autonomy, attracting appropriate content from the conscious mind. Jung emphasized

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that these archetypal energies exhibit distinctive characteristics, manifesting as personality traits within an individual.

Moreover, Gilbert delves into the intriguing phenomenon where characters in a story may deviate from the creator's original intent, forming their distinct identities and behaviours. Ideas, especially those residing in the depths of the unconscious, have the ability to manifest their own physical reality autonomously. This phenomenon is prominent in fictional characters who, contrary to the author's intentions, assert their own consciousness and navigate their lives according to their internal motivations, posing the intriguing question: *Do fictional characters have minds of their own?*

The Gorilla That Came off the Book

Doug Moench is a renowned figure in the world of American comics, particularly known for his significant contributions to Batman and the creation of iconic characters like Black Mask, Moon Knight, Deathlok, and Bane. Back in 1974, Marvel Comics published a black-and-white magazine featuring adaptations of *Planet of the Apes*, where Moench wrote the stories and various artists illustrated them. During the creation of *The Planet of the Apes*, he devised an intriguing fictional character named Brutus, a gorilla adorned with a black hood. However, Moench had a chilling encounter involving this imaginative character.

On a particular day, after completing the scenario for *The Planet of the Apes* comic featuring Brutus, a disquieting event unfolded. In the scenario, Brutus

infiltrated the hero's home, grabbed the hero's wife by the neck, and menacingly pointed a gun at her to manipulate the hero. Strangely, right after finishing this scenario, Moench heard his wife's distressing cries from another part of the house. Alarmed, he rushed to the living room, only to witness a person wearing a black hood with an arm around his wife's neck and the other arm brandishing a pistol at her. Moench vividly described the uncanny resemblance between the real-life event and what he had just written, leading to an immediately altered state of consciousness. The atmosphere in the room seemed to change, becoming dense like fog, yet he could perceive details with heightened clarity, even down to the individual threads of the black hood.

Following this harrowing incident, Moench grappled with difficulties in his writing process. The fear of his fictional words manifesting in reality, weighed heavily on him, making him question whether he was foreseeing the future or creating an alternative reality through his writing. He contemplated whether such an experience should prompt him to abandon writing altogether. The black-hooded invader haunted Moench's thoughts for an extended period, causing an emotional turmoil that impacted his ability to write. Dr Jeffrey Kripal, interpreting this sequence of events, viewed Moench's emotional response as a natural reaction. Additionally, Kripal pondered whether fictional writers might inadvertently be shaping reality through the events they depict in their narratives.³

Do Fictional Characters Have Minds of Their Own?

Exploring Beyond the Confines of the Mind

Humans perceive the unfolding world within the sensory projection areas of their brains. Conversely, imaginative elements that solely exist in one's mind are not visible to the naked eye, but clairvoyants and trained minds may perceive them. Ernesto Bozzano (1862–1943), a distinguished Italian parapsychologist, highlighted in one of his significant parapsychological works that intense contemplation of oneself or others can manifest concrete images externally. Individuals sensitive to such phenomena can observe and capture these forms in photographs. Remarkably, these images often persist in their original surroundings even when the creator is absent.

Is there any sensible explanation for these purported interactions with disembodied beings? In their book *Thought*

Forms, Besant and Leadbeater write, “Every thought gives rise to a set of correlated vibrations.” They argued that thought forms are generated from thoughts and emotions. A thought form arising from the mental body is a living entity of intense activity animated by one idea that caused it. They write:

Some novelists have been dimly aware of such a process, and have testified that their characters when once created developed a will of their own, and insisted on carrying the plot of the story along lines quite different from those originally intended by the author. This has actually happened, sometimes because the thought-forms were ensouled by playful nature spirits, or more often because some “dead” novelist, watching on the astral plane the development of the plan of his fellow author, thought that he could improve upon it, and chose this method of putting forward his suggestions.⁴ ✧

Endnotes

1. Carrington, H. (2007), *Your Psychic Powers and How to Develop Them*, Cosimo Classics, p. 232. On another occasion, when Dr Carrington was about to fall asleep, he tried to project himself into a young lady's bedroom as a part of his thought experiment. But, he had no way of knowing if he had achieved his goal. On the other hand, the young woman claimed that he had not only “appeared” to her but also prompted her to exercise “automatic writing” and produce a poem. The “poetry” turned out to be the opening few words of a song called “When Sparrows Build”, which she had never heard but was a Carrington favourite and which he had promised to give her on an earlier occasion.
2. Leadbeater, C. W. (2017), *A Textbook of Theosophy*, Jazzybee Verlag, p. 23.
3. Kripal, J. J. (2011), *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal*, 1st ed., University of Chicago Press, pp. 2–3.
4. Besant, A. and Leadbeater, C. W. (2022), *Thought Forms* (3rd Reprint), Theosophical Publishing House, p. 27.

The Nature of Theosophical Meditation

PABLO SENDER

THE Theosophical Society (TS) played a pioneering role in introducing meditation to the Western world. During the early 1880s, the TS started presenting the idea of meditation through publications in theosophical journals. Meanwhile, H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) privately trained a small group of individuals in meditation, particularly her pupils in the Inner Group. This was decades before Hindu swamis and Buddhist monks began to talk about meditation in the West. In the second generation of Theosophists, individuals such as Annie Besant, C. W. Leadbeater, and others began to present this subject more systematically and extensively in their talks and books.

Today, meditation has gained widespread recognition. However, as something becomes popular, it often tends to become more superficial. Simplicity has its merits, as it can appeal to a broader audience, but it also poses a challenge — deeper approaches may get overshadowed by the popular understanding.

One consequence of this popularity is that when we use the term “meditation” today, it is not always clear what we are

referring to. Meditation is often marketed as a method to relax the body, alleviate stress, or boost productivity. Some companies have now embraced this practice for purely materialistic ends. Moreover, meditation can also refer to techniques intended to generate positive emotions, enhance concentration, or improve memory. Additionally, there are more specific applications of meditation centred around developing psychic abilities, manipulating subtle energies, or exploring past lives.

While these various approaches may have their merits, the purpose of theosophical meditation is different. It seeks to lead the aspirant to a direct experience of the Real within ourselves and the cosmos. In this approach, more immediate goals like improving concentration or generating a state of inner peace serve as either means to the ultimate transcendental aim of realizing Truth, or as natural byproducts of this practice.

It is important to keep in mind these differences because the results produced by the practice of meditation depend on the methods used and the underlying approach. Consequently, a lack of aware-

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ness of this will likely lead to disappointment because the methods used may not yield the expected results. Moreover, certain meditation techniques can be positively dangerous if practiced without proper guidance or in an unsuitable environment. For instance, some methods traditionally used in India or Tibet were originally reserved for individuals who had withdrawn from the hectic world and were practicing in a protected setting, away from the stresses of modern life. But when these methods are practiced amidst the turmoil of modern life, they can produce undesirable psychological and psychic outcomes.

There is another important reason for the need of a more sophisticated understanding of meditation. If the goal is to achieve simpler outcomes such as increased concentration or relaxation, basic methods can be followed in a rather mechanical way. However, this is not the case when seeking lofty goals such as realizing our true nature. Merely following a method is insufficient, since a mechanical practice cannot produce deep insights. For a practice that seeks higher goals to be successful, we must actively involve both intelligence and creativity.

To achieve these deeper outcomes, our motivation plays a vital role. If our intention is to discover a dimension of our being that is beyond our personal ego, any selfish motivation will obviously be a hindrance. This is why the theosophical tradition presents the whole spiritual journey in the context of service to humanity. When aspirants develop a

genuine desire to help reduce suffering, they engage in these practices not primarily motivated by personal gain, but because of a recognition that the power to help depends on their degree of wisdom and compassion. Until this motivation is dominant, preliminary results of the practice of meditation can be achieved, but not the more transcendental ones.

Right understanding is also necessary. For example, if we are seeking to realize our true self, it is important to have a good grasp of the features of the higher nature. Holding a mistaken idea of the kind of state that we are aiming for may lead us to focus on or reinforce certain aspects that are really features of our lower nature. This typically happens when people focus on desires they want to fulfil or personal goals that lead to self-aggrandizement and strengthening the identification with the personality.

For instance, one may use a meditation technique to cultivate positive emotions. While this can be advantageous from a psychological standpoint, it can also prove counterproductive if our intention is to realize our true selves. If our motivation for practicing this technique stems from an attachment to feeling good, the meditation itself will reinforce our identification with our emotional nature and our dependence on pleasure.

However, the cultivation of positive emotions can be part of our quest for the Real when we have the correct understanding and right attitude. In order to access higher states of consciousness, we must first attune our personality with

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those states. For example, if we find ourselves in a state of anger, it will be challenging to experience feelings of love. Love cannot be experienced until the anger subsides, as this emotional state is not aligned with the nature of love. Similarly, if our goal is to discover our true nature, we must gradually attune our body, emotions, and thoughts with it. This may entail generating feelings of peace, harmony, and the like. However, the mature aspirant will engage in this practice not to wallow in the pleasant feelings, but rather to be able to move beyond the personal self toward the higher nature.

Theosophical techniques

One of the most well-known meditation techniques today is the practice of watching our breath. This method can be beneficial in several ways and, yet, HPB refers to it as “the tedious and useless practice of the counting of inhalations and exhalations as a means to produce absolute tranquillity of mind or meditation”.¹ It seems evident that this method can be helpful in training our minds to focus, inducing a sense of inner peace and balance, and so on. However, HPB thought that it could not lead to a state of “absolute tranquillity”, where all the layers of our psyche are profoundly quiet. J. Krishnamurti also shared this perspective, frequently emphasizing that no mechanical technique can produce more than a superficial calmness. Both Krishnamurti’s viewpoint and the theosophical approach share the understanding that achieving a state of profound

stillness requires the active engagement of our intelligence.

In fact, attempting to quiet the mind through methods that do not involve the participation of higher emotions or thoughts can yield undesirable effects. Examples of these methods would be fixating our gaze on a single point, constantly repeating a mantra without contemplating its meaning or cultivating a feeling of devotion, and similar methods. This approach, Krishnamurti would argue, can only result in a state of self-hypnosis. Early theosophical literature referred to this as a “mediumistic” state of consciousness in which we may become susceptible to the influences emanating from the lower planes. These influences may entail non-physical entities, or astral and mental forms reflecting the sorrow and unrest prevalent in the world.

So let us explore the theosophical approach to meditation. In 1882, one of the earliest published articles on meditation in a theosophical journal defined it as “the inexpressible yearning of the inner Man to go out towards the infinite”.² The term “inexpressible” indicates a kind of yearning that is not driven by mental or emotional impulses, but rather stems from our spiritual nature, which lies beyond concepts and words. And this intuitive attraction is directed towards “the infinite”, that is, that which transcends our limited world and being. As such, the goal of theosophical meditation is transcendental.

This same article suggests that meditation is practiced by means of reasoning

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from the known to the unknown. Thus, the exploration into the Real begins in the realm of the known, that is, our current understanding of the world, our concepts of who we are, our present mental and emotional state, and so forth. From there, we endeavour to transcend these boundaries and venture into the unknown. By “unknown”, we do not simply refer to something that we do not know in concept, but rather, in experience. For instance, we may hold a theoretical notion, such as “I am a spiritual being”, but until we directly experience this aspect of our nature, it remains within the realm of the “unknown”.

As previously emphasized, theosophical meditation is not merely following a technique; it requires a creative search for new insights and realizations. While suitable techniques aligned with this lofty goal can be helpful, the true value lies in the transformative journey of uncovering deeper aspects of whatever the subject of our meditation is. Although the article mentioned above highlights an approach where reasoning serves as the tool to move from the known to the unknown, there exist other methods that engage various faculties. These methods may involve cultivating uplifting feelings of aspiration, devotion, and love; a progressive deepening of our attention and awareness, or the direction of willpower towards the higher realities.

Stages of meditation

Traditionally, theosophical literature has described this journey into the unknown as consisting of three stages:

1. *Concentration*

Our minds are often restless, constantly shifting from one thought to another. However, in order to explore the realm of the Real, we must be able to direct our attention unwaveringly towards the inner realities. Thus, the initial phase of this process is referred to as *concentration*. As the term suggests, it requires us to make an effort to quiet our mind and emotions and focus on the object of concentration.

Perhaps because this is the first stage of the process of meditation, practitioners often regard it as a mere preliminary exercise to be quickly surpassed. The truth, however, is that unless we master the art of concentration, we will be unable to reach higher states of consciousness.

Numerous concentration techniques exist, and each individual must find the approach that suits their personality. The supports for concentration may range from concrete objects, to bodily functions such as our breath, a divine incarnation, or an interesting concept. Ernest Wood’s book, *Concentration*, offers a wealth of interesting exercises that aspirants may find valuable.

2. *Meditation*

Once we have acquired the ability to sustain a focused attention effortlessly, we pass on to the stage of meditation. This is the stage in which we endeavour to move from the known to the unknown, that is, from the personal to the spiritual levels of experience and insight. Theosophical literature provides a range of methods to help us in this exploration. They involve evoking higher emotions,

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such as devotion; utilizing the mind to grasp spiritual realities; making an effort to perceive subtler aspects of our being; or employing our will to elevate our consciousness.

Aspirants are encouraged to explore the different methods in order to find one that aligns with their temperament. Once a technique is chosen, it is advisable to dedicate several months or even years to its practice, allowing the necessary time for it to affect our nature.

3. Contemplation

After the work that we've been doing in our meditation has led us as far as possible while using our emotional and mental faculties, we arrive at the final stage, commonly referred to as "contemplation" in the theosophical tradition. During this stage, all mental and emotional activities associated with the specific method of meditation are abandoned, and we remain in a state of quiet receptivity in the atmosphere generated by the practice. The attitude is one of silent attention and awareness, as if trying to perceive something very subtle, coming from beyond the personal realm. At the beginning, it may be difficult to maintain this attitude for more than a few seconds but with persistent practice one becomes able to rest in this silent awareness for a while.

As our meditation practice becomes firmly established, it is vital to cultivate this contemplative attitude, which gradually opens the door to higher realms of perception and insight.

We can now grasp the entire process

of this meditative journey towards the Real more comprehensively. In the concentration phase, we strive to harness the activities of the lower mind and emotions, directing them towards a spiritual object or meditative process. Once we achieve a state of steady attention, the meditation method helps us raise our consciousness from the lower to the higher nature. However, thoughts and emotions can only carry us to the threshold of the higher nature. Once there, a leap is necessary. In the stage of contemplation, we remain in the highest state that we are able to reach, supported only by a silent awareness that is attuned to the higher nature. The "leap", then, occurs through the agency of the higher nature itself. This is why this event has been described in mystical traditions as the grace of God.

Stillness

In the popular understanding, meditation is often associated with emptying our minds. However, this notion is not entirely accurate and can actually be dangerous. When we assume a passive attitude, we become open to the influences surrounding us. But if we do not make an effort to raise our consciousness, we remain anchored at the level of mundane thoughts and emotions. Therefore, emptying our minds in this condition will make us susceptible to negative influences such as fear, anxiety, intolerance, and similar energies that abound on the lower planes.

As mentioned before, Blavatsky and other early theosophists warned that this practice, over time, can result in a

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“mediumistic condition”, in which aspirants become vulnerable to lower influences within their vicinity. This eventually undermines their willpower and ability to maintain control over their own personality.

For this reason, the theosophical approach aims to reach complete stillness only when we are in the appropriate state of consciousness. Through the threefold

meditative process previously described, we gradually elevate our consciousness to more spiritual states and attune our bodies with the higher nature, akin to a radio tuning into a particular broadcast. This process ensures that we enter a state of profound stillness in a condition in which we are receptive only to the influences coming from the higher planes. ✧

Endnotes

1. H. P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 14, p. 434.
2. Godolphin Mitford, “The Elixir of Life”, *The Theosophist*, March and April 1882.

To comprehend what is contemplation the student must identify himself with Nature. Instead of looking upon himself as an isolated being, he must learn to look upon himself as a part of the INTEGRAL WHOLE. For, in the unmanifested world, it can be clearly perceived that all is controlled by the "Law of Affinity", the attraction of one to the other. There, all is Infinite Love, understood in its true sense. . . . The first thing to be done is to study the axioms of Occultism and work upon them by the deductive and inductive methods, which is real contemplation. To turn this to a useful purpose, what is theoretically comprehended must be practically realized.

Damodar Mavalankar,
“*Contemplation*”, Feb. 1884,
from *Damodar and the Pioneers
of the Theosophical Movement*,
Quest Books, 1978

The Wheel of Sacrifice

JOSEPH MILLER

THE “wheel of sacrifice”, or *yagna chakra*, is a rich metaphor presented in the third chapter of the yoga classic, the *Bhagavadgītā* (*Gītā*). The rhythmic turning of this wheel circulates cosmic influences, blending the higher and lower worlds in harmony and interdependence. An archetypal symbol, it is reflected at various levels and scales: microcosm and macrocosm, Nature and environment, culture and society. Above all, the metaphor speaks to the inward spiritual life of the individual.

The circle abides in eternity, but the wheel, its reflection, is a creature of time. The wheel symbolizes cycles and balance. In actual expression the wheel is essential to industry and transportation. A lopsided wheel or an imprecise gear produce noise and instability, akin to the jarring discontinuities that hinder an unbalanced life. The circle is the most obvious analogue for cyclic time, as any clock face shows. If time is the moving image of eternity, according to Plotinus, then the cycle is the moving image of unity, and the wheel spinning upon its still axis

symbolizes the ultimate oneness of time and the timeless.

In the *Gītā*, the context for the presentation of the idea of the wheel of sacrifice is a discourse on the nature of action (karma) and its right performance (karma yoga). In yoga philosophy selfish action binds the soul. “All action performed other than as sacrifice unto God binds the actor.” The karmic effects for narrow thinking and contracted feeling are painful. Such karma limits perceptions and reinforces ignorance.

Karma is not “punishment” levied by some supernatural law enforcement agency, but an inherent tendency in the universe to restore equilibrium. Bondage is self-forged: “Each man his prison makes.” The real plane of action is the mind plane; physical action reflects and expresses thought. As the thinker becomes enmeshed in ignorance, prejudice, and habit, karma compels a terrible train of disease, conflict, and suffering. The sleep of reason produces monsters. The Buddha praised mindfulness as the path to life, while heedlessness he identified as death itself.

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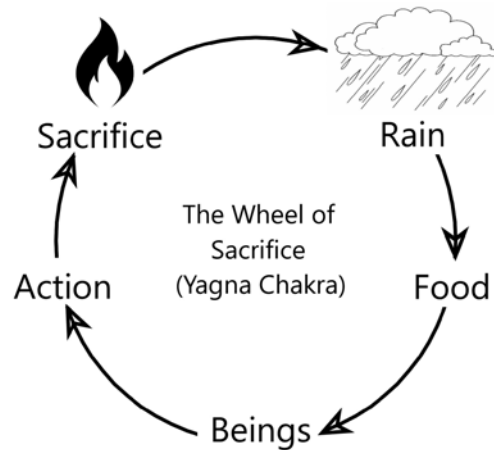
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But action is not inherently bad, only its misuse. This is the dilemma that Arjuna is struggling to resolve. Within the Hindu system of his time, there were pandits who taught that only total renunciation of the world, and a life of absolute inaction, would liberate the soul from the bonds of matter. Krishna, arguing as a realist, simply points out that no one ever rests for even a moment inactive. This world subsists in universal motion. The ascetic who pretends to do nothing is, in fact, active within, and is known as “a false pietist of bewildered soul” (*Gītā* III.6). He is to be pitied for his puerile ignorance. “Children only and not the wise speak of renunciation of action and of right performance of action as being different.” (*Gītā* V.4). To communicate to Arjuna the true nature of action, Krishna paints a universal perspective. The wheel of sacrifice illustrates a grand, impersonal, benevolent vision that comprehends all action.

Krishna tells Arjuna that he is merely resuscitating an ancient teaching first bestowed on infant humanity by its progenitor, Brahma-Prajapati (*Gītā* III.10). This teaching of sacrifice (*yagna*) is a precious trust, to be protected and treasured as a “cow of plenty, on which ye shall depend for the accomplishment of all your wishes. With this nourish the Gods, that the Gods may nourish you; thus mutually nourishing ye shall obtain the highest felicity.” (*Gītā* III.10–11). What is more, this wisdom gives the key to “karmalessness” (*nishkāma karma*), and a framework for a philosophical understanding of bondage. It is not through cessation of action that

one finds freedom from karma, but by discharge of *right* action.

The wheel of sacrifice that Krishna then presents names five elements arrayed in interdependence on a metaphysical perimeter: beings, food, rain, sacrifice, and action.



Beings are nourished by food, food is produced by rain, rain comes from sacrifice, and sacrifice is performed by action. . . . He who, sinfully delighting in the gratification of his passions, doth not cause this wheel thus already set in motion to continue revolving, liveth in vain, O son of Pritha. (*Gītā* III.14,16).

All action must be framed in this universal context to be rightly regarded. Wisdom begins with this selfless scope, and discharges all actions as offerings to the universal Spirit. From a theosophical perspective, motion is a symbol for deity, and therefore all action is sacred. The all-pervading Spirit is at all times present in every action. The appropriating and isolating character of selfishness is “*māyāvic*”. Selfishness does not in fact wrest action away from the Supreme Spirit, but only

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separates *one's awareness* of action from its true context. This manufactures and reinforces a confining notion of selfhood that has no existence in reality. The mis-purposing of action forms a distorting wrinkle in the fabric of the universe, which includes a person's subtle vestures, and the karmic correction of that distortion is what we experience as suffering.

How can we tell the difference between action that is sacrificial and action directed towards self? Selfish action short-circuits the cosmic pattern. Krishna contrasts those who "dress their meat but for themselves" with those who act in the spirit of sacrifice and who obtain their sustenance from the remnants of the sacrifice. (*Gītā* III.13)



We can picture a bar drawn through the diagram of the *yagna chakra*, separating the upper elements, fire and rain, from the lower earthly elements of beings, food, and action. When human beings are blinded by selfishness, they erect a barrier of ignorance between themselves and the context of universal duty. A curtain is drawn *within* the mind between innate intuitive wisdom and an illusory image

of self. Yet, because of the inviolable unity of the inner and outer worlds, and the impossibility of sequestering the effects of thought, this mental barrier results in dire external consequences.

An urgent contemporary illustration is carbon pollution. Human beings currently "sacrifice" 95 million barrels of oil per day worldwide, transferring 110 million tons of underground-sequestered carbon to the relatively thin atmospheric skin surrounding the globe. In only 60 years atmospheric carbon dioxide has increased 33%. Despite foreknowledge of this catastrophe, timely warnings to lawmakers and the public went unheeded, or worse, were blunted by disinformation. The barrier of willful ignorance, dividing consumption from conscience, extraction from conservation, has produced an actual atmospheric barrier, a blanket, that hinders the natural escape of heat from the planet.

In the prior normal condition of balance, a state that had prevailed for hundreds of thousands of years, the Earth enjoyed energetic equilibrium. But within only a century, the frenzy of industry under the delirium for mass profits has proven deaf to any wisdom challenging greed and complacency. Thus, privileged human beings, those who put the greatest environmental demands on the planet, and who alone can make a difference, have chosen to "dress meat for themselves" alone.

We seem to have fallen under the glamorizing spell of a carnival Ferris wheel with its tin-whistle calliope music, dazzling the night of ignorance with blinking

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neon lights. We have shunned responsible citizenship within an evolving galaxy that majestically rotates to the music of the spheres. You cannot nourish the gods with noxious fumes. These are exhalations from the altar to self — where the rule is “take all the profit and dismiss all the cost”. The very fact that rain cycles today *are* disrupted underscores the poignancy of the *Gītā*’s illustration.

Sacrifice is associated with the element of fire, and connotes heat, intensity, purification, aspiration, elevation, and light. Rain symbolizes grace, compassion, generosity, and benevolence. The graces of the inner life — authentic advances in virtue, insight, and power — are never forced. If we light the fire of the inner *yagna*, and faithfully tend it, we are assured that Krishna will bear the responsibility for our happiness. Action that is sacrificial is disinterested, its aroma advances beyond any specific object, just as incense is dispersed through the air. Sacrificial action nourishes and fertilizes the cosmic field, the womb of Nature, and thus supports the general welfare. In the metaphor of the *yagna chakra* the fire of sacrifice lifts offerings into the sky, clouds form, and the sky spontaneously produces rain. Rain, in turn, graces plants and soil with life, which then nourish animals and humans.

The human *manas*, reflecting this cosmic cycle, elects to consciously participate in the sacrifice, and joyfully *becomes* the sacrifice. For it is not possible to truly know the sacrifice without *being* it. “Thou canst not travel on the path before thou

hast become that path itself.” Man is that organ in Nature where the *yagna chakra* becomes self-known and self-affirmed. And thus, through man, all beings, the heavens, and the Earth, are most fully arrayed in the circle of life.

The *Gītā* teaches that *sannyās*, or renunciation, is misunderstood and materialized by the ignorant. It is not the renunciation of action itself, but renunciation of *interest* in the fruit of action that wisdom enjoins. This alone leads to spiritual freedom. Interest in the fruit of action is driven by desire, and desire is inflamed through discontent. An old sales adage has it that first you must plant discontent in a prospect, and then sell relief in terms of your product. The Buddha taught that the discontented mind is vulnerable to disordered desires, and vainly seeks for satisfaction in outward objects. “Rains pour into an ill-thatched house; desires pour into an ill-trained mind. Rains wet not a well-thatched house; desires enter not the disciplined mind.” The *Gītā* portrays the Logos as established in spiritual self-sufficiency. “There is nothing, O son of Pritha, in the three regions of the universe, which it is necessary for me to perform, nor anything possible to obtain which I have not obtained; and yet I am constantly in action.” (*Gītā* III.22) The wise man, following this example, cultivates inward contentment.

But the man who only taketh delight in the Self within, is satisfied with that and content with that alone, hath no selfish interest in action. He hath no interest either in that which is done or in that

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which is not done; and there is not, in all things which have been created, any object on which he may place dependence. (*Gītā* III.17–18.)

For many perhaps, in the West especially, this will sound like a recipe for inertia. It is hard to imagine powering the engines of industry and enterprise absent a self-seeking motive. And yet, if we really think this through, we discover the opposite is true. It is the person who has opened her inner sight, gaining steady access to compelling ideals, who is the more reliable in action and relationship.

On the other hand, the selfish gaming of the economy and stock market is notoriously unstable, exacerbated all the more today by advances in computer trading and machine learning. Loyalties, like magnetic polarities, turn on a dime when dictated by the flickering voltage of flighty desire.

Krishna identifies three avenues for karmaless action: *dāna*, *tapas* and *yagna*. “Deeds of sacrifice, of mortification, and of charity are not to be abandoned, for they are proper to be performed, and are the purifiers of the wise.” (*Gītā* XVIII.5). *Dāna* means generosity, and may in fact share an Indo-European root with the word “donate”. *Tapas* is aus-

terity, and refers to the self-correction, self-denial, and endurance required by the inward life. The word *tapas* literally means “heat”, and earnest (but not cruel) self-discipline heats up our mental-emotional life and burns out impurities. *Yagna*, in Hinduism, denotes ritual sacrifice, but in the context of the inner science of yoga, suggests the cultivation of meditation, which includes thought, will, and feeling; head, hands, and heart.

Whatever thou doest, O son of Kunti, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou sacrificest, whatever thou givest, whatever mortification thou performest, commit each unto me. Thus thou shalt be delivered from the good and evil experiences which are the bonds of action; and thy heart being joined to renunciation and to the practice of action, thou shalt come to me (*Gītā* IX.27–28).

Yagna includes, too, the study and sharing of wisdom with other seekers. Anyone who studies the sacred dialogue of the *Gītā* is engaged in what Krishna identifies as *jnāna yagna* (wisdom-sacrifice). “I shall consider that I am worshipped by him with the sacrifice of knowledge.” (*Gītā* XVIII.5). Through *yagna* we cultivate and guard an open, trusting, and fruitful intercourse with the divine. ✧

To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. . . . Is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with woman.

Mahatma Gandhi

Renunciation

S. RAMKUMAR

THE king asked the minister: “What is renunciation? Who is a renunciate?” The minister without batting an eyelid told almost immediately what he knew; he said: “A renunciate is one who does not have any desires and attachments.” To impress the king further with his thorough knowledge on the subject he continued: “As a matter of fact we have many renunciates in our kingdom.”

“Then,” said the king, “please take me to one such renunciate this coming Sunday.”

The minister was bewildered, he did not expect this answer from the king. Just like many adulators and sycophants, the minister’s primary objective was to please the king. Without thinking he had blurted out something which he now deeply regretted. But what to do? He had to find a way to save his face and do something about it.

The minister thought about the situation. Just showing how cunning and insidious a mind such people have, he thought about creating a situation that would save him from his outlandish revelation. He approached a man called Ramu, a casual laborer, who had a large family

and was always in need of more money. He told him that there is a way that he could get a bag of gold coins in return for a small favor. Ramu was quite naturally inclined to ask him what he had to do. The minister explained the situation and told Ramu that all he had to do was to dress in ochre-colored monks’ attire and sit under the banyan tree in the corner of the village.

The king and his entourage would come on Sunday and would offer many things, and all he had to do was to say: “No, I don’t desire it and I have no need for it!” That evening after the show was over the bag of gold coins would be handed over.

Saying this, he gave a token advance to Ramu who was delighted, yet at the same time apprehensive. He asked the minister: “What would happen if things go wrong?”

The minister, a very optimistic person said confidently: “Trust me, nothing will go wrong.”

On the appointed day Ramu was sitting under the banyan tree wearing the ochre-colored robes and closed his eyes when

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Renunciation

he saw the king's entourage coming. Fear gripped him and he started sweating inside, which was absorbed by his cotton robes. The king, the queen, the prince, and the princess, along with the minister and several others, arrived. Ramu appeared to be in deep meditation. The king told the others to be silent, not to disturb the meditation of the great sage. After a while the sage opened his eyes and saw the king and the entourage.

The king motioned to his minister and the minister brought a lot of colorful precious stones, gold, and cash. The king collected several trays and placed them in front of "sage" Ramu and prostrated before him. Ramu wanted to accept all this but then he remembered that all this was after all a drama and playing his part replied: "No king, I don't desire it and I have no need for it." The queen was the next. She brought delightful looking delicacies and bowed before sage Ramu. Ramu's mouth started watering and he had trouble keeping his mouth shut. Like a trained parrot he said: "No, I don't desire it, I have no need for it."

It was next the prince's turn followed by the princess and then the minister. The minister did not like prostrating to the newly appointed sage Ramu! Still, he prostrated and slowly the entourage started going back to the palace. Although everything around Ramu remained the same, something within Ramu changed. In the evening the gleeful minister appeared in front of Ramu and handed over to him the bag of gold coins as promised. Ramu refused to accept it and said: "No, I don't

desire it, I have no need for it!" The minister told Ramu, "Cut the crap, the show is over!"

After the turn of events and a long reflection after that, Ramu had had a realization. He replied: "Just by acting like a renunciate I could get so much reverence and respect from a king and his entire clan. Imagine what would be the case if I really turn into a renunciate?" Saying this he blatantly refused to accept the bag of gold coins leaving the minister speechless!

Is Ramu a renunciate? In this context the answer is "Yes", but not quite. It was a good start. One does not become a renunciate by choice. It is a natural progression — an egg does not become a chick overnight; similarly a pupa does not turn into a butterfly overnight.

So, what is renunciation? Is it just shunning materials and worldly possessions and running into a forest and hiding in a cave, or wearing an ochre robe or a frock, or sporting a beard, or growing hair on the head, or having marks on the forehead? The answer is no. So, who is a renunciate?

The *Bhagavadgītā* says that action is always better than inaction. Lord Krishna also says to Arjuna that although a *sannyāsi* (a renunciate) abstains from action, a *karmayogi* who does all his work in a selfless manner, surrendering the fruits of his action to God, is any day nobler. So, going to the forest, abandoning the family, and running away from problems is not renunciation, that is not spirituality. "That is not your dharma" — (Arjuna is a *kshatriya* and is trained to fight and kill people

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in wars) — Krishna advises Arjuna when Arjuna said that he would turn into a *samnyāsi* and not fight his own kith and kin.

Does it mean that one should not have wealth, prosperity, business, and luxury. No, it is not so. Anyone can have all the riches in the world, but he should not get attached to it. He should be ready to give up and let go of all he owns materially, without batting an eyelid. Krishna has mentioned non-attachment in the *Bhagavadgītā* eighty-seven times. Even so, seeing Arjuna cry when his son died made Krishna shed a tear. This was because even after passing on the wisdom of the *Gītā* to Arjuna about non-attachment, seeing Arjuna cry made Krishna feel that he had failed as a teacher; Arjuna had not mastered renunciation fully.

King Janaka was an exemplary renunciate who was a *raja* as well as a *rishi*. He lived in opulence but what differentiated him from many was that he was totally detached from the material world.

Another story to make it clear: A king invited a monk who was a renunciate and practising austerities in a forest to come and stay with him in the royal palace for a month. The monk agreed and spent the month with the king. The king told the monk after a month: “I was just testing you about your attachment to an opulent life. You have got hooked, right?”

The sage smiled, excused himself, went inside, and was back in his robes and *kamandalu* (a gourd used for water by

ascetics), and told the king: “No king, I am not attached to this opulence.” Saying this he walked off to the forest. It was not the outer material stuff, it was his ego that the sage had let go long before. That is true renunciation. It is cultivating mental strength and not to give in to attachment. *Samnyāsis* generally do not stay in one place for more than three days!

Renunciation is like a drop of water on a lotus leaf. It stays without getting attached and is ready to fall off any time.

Renunciation means not grasping, clinging, and craving for sensory materials. Swami Vivekananda says: “If we give up our attachment to this little universe of the senses and of the mind, we shall be free immediately.”

King Rama was a prime example of a person with non-attachment. On the day of his coronation as king, Kaikeyi, his stepmother, who had received two boons from King Daśaratha (Rama’s father), decided to ask that Bharata be king and Rama be exiled. Without batting an eyelid Rama changed from the coronation dress to normal clothes and together with Sitā, his wife, and Lakshmana, his brother, went to the forest for 14 years. That is non-attachment.

Renunciation means you can have possessions, but not be possessive. It means renouncing all the bad qualities like ego, lust, craving, greed, jealousy, comparison, and cultivating good qualities like selflessness, living a life with morals and ethics, benevolence, being non-jealous, detached from the results, keeping the

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mind and senses under our control, and so on.

The word “*Gītā*” can be split as “*Gi*” and “*Tā*”. The reverse is “*T(y)āGi*”, meaning “Renunciation”, which is the central theme of the *Gītā*. Sri Ramakrishna says: “‘My-ness’ is the root of all bond-

age and the one who has renounced this is a true renunciate.”

We as householders, who work in the outside world, have to do our best in whatever our duty is; the universe will do the rest. In the meantime we need to relax. ✧

United to the Reason (Buddhi), purified, controlling the self by firmness, having abandoned sound and the other objects of the senses, having laid aside passion and malice, dwelling in solitude, abstemious, speech, body and mind (Manas) subdued, constantly fixed in the yoga of meditation, taking refuge in dispassion, having cast aside egoism, violence, arrogance, desire, wrath, and covetousness, selfless and peaceful — he is fit to become the ETERNAL.

Becoming the ETERNAL, serene in the SELF, he neither grieveth nor desireth; the same to all beings, he obtaineth supreme devotion unto Me. By devotion he knoweth Me in essence, who and what I am; having thus known Me in essence he forthwith entereth into the Supreme (TAT). Though ever performing all actions, taking refuge in Me, by My grace he obtaineth the eternal indestructible abode. Renouncing mentally all works in Me, intent on Me, resorting to the yoga of discrimination (Buddhi-yoga), have thy thought ever on Me. Thinking on Me, thou shalt overcome all obstacles by My grace: but if from egoism thou wilt not listen, thou shalt be destroyed utterly.

The Bhagavadgītā, XVIII.51–58
Fourth Ed., 1914; Nineth Reprint, 2002
Translated by Annie Besant

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Adyar Theosophical Academy (ATA) Annual Report From 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023

As reported by ATA Director, Mrs Sonal Murali, ATA began its new academic year in June 2023 with 185 students from Nursery to Grade 6, ushering in its fifth year, and looking forward to creating more unique learning experiences. Three new classrooms with glass up to the ceiling on the eastern side create a beautiful setting of learning in the midst of Nature. On the outer walls there are beautiful murals, there is a lotus pond in the north-east corner, and there are many outdoor learning spaces. A new site called Kirby Gardens in the southeast corner of the main campus has been identified for expansion of the school up to Grade 12. The plans are ready and the work is afoot. The design has respect for and incorporates the green spaces, including trees and water features and has an organic feeling. There is no massing of structures and there is provision for substantial natural light inside buildings.

ATA continues with its immersive and participatory activities providing divergent experiences to its young learners, brimming with curiosity, questions and discoveries. The year is filled with outdoor learning experiences, Nature journaling and other mindfulness activities, meditative assemblies to start the day, and numerous field trips as well as celebrations of vibrant Indian festivals and events. A

two-day event for celebrating science, titled “I Spy Science”, was held on 16–17 November 2022 that had student exhibits and interactions featuring fun inventions.

The delegates from the International Convention visited ATA on 2 January and engaged in the ATA learning environment by going through displays on the ecological importance of the Pallikaranai marshland, the solar system and space technology inventions and many other science and art models by students. Two workshops were held on 2 and 3 January, “Learning and Growing through Transformative Education” and “Education for Life: A Theosophical Perspective”.

To celebrate the agility of body and sportsmanship, the Annual Sports Meet took place on 21 January with International President Tim Boyd, an avid sportsman himself, as the chief guest. Amidst applause and cheers, many displays, vibrant Zumba drills, and sporting events of obstacle courses and flat races made the day a memorable one.

The Republic Day celebrations on 26 January featuring the theme, “India, a Beautiful Country”, involved children in a vibrant discussion on the Indian constitution. They put their thoughts down on paper via poetry, leaf art, drawings, and even a rap song by the in-house ATA band, “Rhythm & Beats”.

“Umang”, ATA’s Annual Day was celebrated on 25 March 2023 with Mrs Uma Shanker, Director, Indian Montessori

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Training Courses, as the chief guest. Held at Adyar Theatre, a stunning outdoor venue, it was the second Annual Day post-pandemic, making the stage come alive with the sound of music, dance, drama, colourful performances, and children committed to every act with unwavering enthusiasm.

On 24 June, ATA rang in its fifth year, with poetry, music, puppetry, a skit titled “A Day in ATA”, and a school-wide art project illustrating the beauty of the campus and their hopes for the future. Grade 5 penned a poem, titled “A Little School amidst the Green”. To celebrate India’s 77th Independence Day, Ms Nancy Secrest, International Treasurer, hoisted the National Flag on 15 August. The morning had songs, dance performances, poetry recitations, and skits, all revolving around India’s rich textile heritage — a marvellous and diverse aspect of Indian culture.

“Ganith Charcha”, or Math Day, was celebrated on 30 September, aimed at exploring in depth the diversity of mathematics. Often confined to books and abstract forms, it came alive through interactive games and practical demonstration. In the lead-up to Math Day, students immersed themselves in various activities — from unravelling the Italian mathematician Fibonacci’s series during Nature studies, to tracing the historical use of math worldwide. The classrooms became hubs of creativity as students crafted mathematical models, spanning from intricate Sierpinski triangles to inventive, 3D chessboards. Mr Tim Boyd enjoyed interacting with puzzles, games, activities and

models set up by each and every child, alongside other members of the TS.

A treasured memory was the presence of Erika Chavez, a passionate theosophist and educator from Argentina, with a vision to start a theosophical school in Argentina. For six months, she immersed herself in the classrooms of Grades 1–6, spending dedicated time with each grade, understanding the teaching practices and learning methods along with their nuances.

A special feature this year is morning assemblies to start the day which consist of group singing, presentations by students, educators, and resource people. A notable one was an interaction with Dr P. V. Venkitakrishnan, Retired Director, Indian Space Research Organization, who gave an inspiring speech and explained the making of Chandrayan 3 and the entire process up to its landing on the south pole of the Moon. This was followed by a lot of questions, both technical and naive, as students wanted to know more and more, and were literally over the moon!

Morning assemblies also had periodic interactions by Dr Shankar in the series “Know your Indian Wildlife” and mangrove forests; Mr Arun Krishnamurthy, Founder of Environmentalist Foundation of India, on Urban Chennai, its local habitats, the importance of water bodies and how to restore them; Mr Samraj, Tamil writer and cinema director on how to write a story; Dr Richard Muller, a PhD student from London, on “Beyond the Compound Walls”; and Ms Erika Chavez on “Mindfulness in Breathing” and on the “Art of Listening”; and Ms Lucrezia Maniscotti from Milan on “Exploring

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Western Theatre Techniques: A Creative Journey for Children”, merging Bharatnatyam and Western Drama. There were monthly sessions of STEMGYM, science workshops, by Mr Nirmal and Ms Gurpreet, to practically explore different aspects of science. Various guests from Japan, New Zealand, Spain, New Guinea, Colombia, and Finland visited and spoke about diverse cultures.

Student assemblies consist of sharing their learning, experiences, and passion, be it a trip to Mount Everest, Naarden, “Our Universe”, “Waste Segregation and Recycling”, “The Sky and Beyond — Biography of Galileo”, or “Experience and Learning Music Composition”.

Field trips to Marine Kingdom to learn about ocean animals; VTC and Kalakshetra to learn about the weaving process; the Snake Park to build awareness on what reptiles are and their classification; and Adyar Poonga, an ecological reserve, to observe Nature and insects before the monsoon were other enriching experiences. Grade 6 visited TS Museum and were enthralled by the rich TS legacy. Visits to Birla Planetarium, Lotte Choco Pie Factory, and a trip to Kanchipuram to learn Kattakuttu, a traditional drama form, were among the few.

One of the special field trips was to witness and gain inspiration from the rocket launch of Aditya L1 satellite at the Indian Space Research Organization, learning about how a rocket launch proceeds and to experience the thrill of the launch. Organic farming was one of the cherished activities starting with planting, nurturing, harvesting, and having yummy

dishes prepared from them. Grade 6 was also involved in composting. Another feature for an ATA child is regular Nature walks to observe and absorb its silence and be in communion with it, and to observe it in its different seasons, colours, and messages.

Educators enriched themselves through sessions of Waldorf philosophy; an energy healing workshop by Ritu Mittal; “A Relook at Education” by Shivkumar, based on Aurobindo’s “Integral Education”; Ms Rama on “How to Bring About Creative Thinking Based on Six Thinking Hats” by Edward De Bono; Ms Kamini on “Lesson Planning”, a creative tool to integrate multidisciplinary approach; “Understanding Krishnamurti’s Educational Philosophy”, a day spent at Vasanta Vihar, the Krishnamurti Foundation in Chennai.

A series of math workshops were held by Shiv Gaur, an educator from Tashkent. Workshops by Aavishkar exploring how to develop a mathematical mindset, by exploring concepts and pedagogy; and by Mr Bijith on the IB approach to math were also held.

ATA continues its onward journey with insightful academic interactions, delightful experiences set in Nature, and a multitude of cultural and educational engagements.

World Federation of Young Theosophists (WFYT) Gathering at Adyar

Elena Bessie Camplone, from Italy/Adyar, and member of the Board of WFYT, reports that the WFYT members gathered in the Blavatsky Bungalow from 27 to 30 January, transcending into a profoundly

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enriching experience. This historic milestone added depth to the experience, uniting all in the legacy of a century of engagement and spiritual exploration.

The days were filled with profound moments of connection and sharing among the participants. At the heart of the gathering lay a focused exploration of Annie Besant's illuminating work, *The Spiritual Life*. Each chapter was carefully analysed and discussed by different groups, and then informally presented to the entire assembly. This dynamic approach fostered a profound understanding and an exchange of diverse perspectives on the spiritual journey. Elena adds that in addition to these enlightening discussions, they also immersed themselves in various workshops, including the transformative practice of chanting, storytelling, and the arts. These activities became not just outlets for self-expression but gateways to creative exploration, deepening their spiritual understanding.

The collective journey, marked by the centenary, prompted reflections on the rich tapestry of the past and the promising threads of the future that they, as the youth, weave into it.

Elena continues: Throughout the gathering, we had the privilege to absorb wisdom from esteemed theosophists, once young participants themselves and now holding significant roles within the TS. Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu, Marja Artamaa, Isis de Resende, and Marcos de Resende shared their personal experiences and insights with us. Their wisdom and guidance were truly inspiring.

Marcos de Resende, in particular, not only shared his experience and know-

ledge of the TS and the ES but also emphasized the importance of spiritual growth in our lives. His teachings left a lasting impression on all of us. Of course, amidst all the intellectual pursuits, moments of leisure and relaxation became threads weaving the fabric of newfound connections. We enjoyed spending time together on the beautiful beach nearby, creating bonds and lasting friendships.

The culmination of our gathering unfolded with a captivating trip to Mahabalipuram, immersing us in the rich cultural heritage of the region. This excursion provided a perfect blend of learning and enjoyment, leaving us with cherished and unforgettable memories. The bond among participants strengthens with each gathering, weaving a tapestry of shared experiences and profound connections. Some of us composed and performed a song in Spanish titled "Somos Uno" during the international convention, a testament to the enduring spirit of togetherness.

We encourage all young individuals who come across this text to consider participating in future gatherings, as they offer a unique platform for both personal and collective growth. The spirit of unity and sharing stands as a beacon, guiding and inspiring us along our spiritual paths.

Recent Appointments

The TS in Russia was upgraded from a Presidential Agency to a Regional Association on 17 November 2023. On 13 January 2024 Mr Svyatoslav Lipsky was elected as the Organizing Secretary, succeeding Alexey Besputin as Presidential Representative. Our best wishes for the new status of the TS in Russia. ✧



A group of the WFYT members visiting the International Headquarters building of the TS Adyar, with international President Tim Boyd in the center (white shirt) and his wife Lily Boyd in front of him. Slightly behind him, to his right, is international Secretary Marja Artamaa. There are 5 out of the 7 members of the WFYT Board in this photo. Next to Marja, (from r. to l.) are 3 of them: Catalina Isaza-Cantor (Colombia/Adyar), Elena Bessie Camplone (Italy/Adyar), and behind Elena is Merike Martsepp (Estonia). The other 2 are (from r. to l. of the photo): second, Sara Ortega (Spain/Adyar), and sixth (blue shirt), Christopher See (the Philippines)

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Members of the youth gathering visiting the coastal resort town of Mahabalipuram on the last day of their get-together. This town, which is 1.5 hours' drive south of Chennai, has a group of religious monuments dating back to the 7th and 8th century CE

Theosophical Work around the World



Circle time in Library



Celebration of learning — a still from Math Day



Tim Boyd and Marja Artamaa in serious engagement with students



Little hands busy making 3-dimensional shapes



Nature walk



Starting on a field trip

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Outdoor learning



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THE THEOSOPHIST

Statement about Ownership and Other Particulars

1. Place of Publication	:	The Theosophical Publishing House, The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai 600 020
2. Periodicity	:	Monthly
3. Printer's Name (whether citizen of India?) Address	:	V. Gopalan, Manager, Vasanta Press : Yes : The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai 600 020
4. Publisher	:	S. Harihara Raghavan The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai 600 020
5. Editor's Name (whether citizen of India?) (if foreigner, the country of origin) Address	:	Tim Boyd : No : United States of America : The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai 600 020
6. Name and addresses of individuals who own the newspaper and partners or shareholders holding more than one percent of the total capital	:	The President of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai 600 020

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: US \$ AND RUPEE (₹) RATES

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	ANNUAL		5 YEARS		ANNUAL		5 YEARS	
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THE THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE, ADYAR, CHENNAI 600 020, INDIA

Some issues of *The Theosophist* are now available online and can be read and/or downloaded from:

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Edited by Mr Tim Boyd, 'Olcott Bungalow', The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai (TS),

Published by Mr S. Harihara Raghavan, 'Arundale House', TS, and Printed by Mr V. Gopalan, 'Chit Sabha', TS, at the Vasanta Press, TS, Besant Garden, Besant Avenue, Adyar, Chennai (Madras) 600 020, India, on behalf of the President, The Theosophical Society.

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