



THE THEOSOPHIST

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Cover: “A Mountain God” is one of the many paintings of Nature spirits in Geoffrey Hodson’s *The Kingdom of the Gods* (plate 11). The book illustrator was Ethelwynne M. Quail (1903–1947), from South Africa. Her work is noted for its ethereal, birdlike renderings of spiritual figures. Her contributions were integral to the theosophical tradition. (See related article on p. 10.)

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THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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The Theosophical Society is composed of students, belonging to any religion in the world or to none, who are united by their approval of the Society's Objects, by their wish to remove religious antagonisms and to draw together men and women 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 human beings to know the Spirit as themselves and the mind and body as their 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.

A Pause

TIM BOYD

ST AUGUSTINE wrote: “For most people complete abstinence is easier than perfect balance.” Although it was a comment he made related to his personal experience, it has a broader application. For those for whom some attempt at a deeper understanding of life has become a necessity, balance becomes a formidable challenge. Given the substantial daily responsibilities required to sustain oneself in today’s world, how do we find the time and energy to meet the consuming demands of a spiritual life?

Once, while attending a weeklong retreat, a Tibetan Buddhist lama came to speak to the group. He was a man who since childhood had lived a monastic life. His scriptural knowledge and his spiritual practice were impressive. The people attending the retreat were all Buddhist practitioners born and raised in the West. While talking about the requirements of an effective practice he commented that, making allowances for the demands of Western life, an effective practice could probably be reduced to a mere five or six hours a day! Needless to say, this did not go down well with the attendees, most of whom had husbands, wives, children, aging parents, jobs, friends, community service, sleep, and other activities claiming their time.

In Tibetan Buddhism, as in many other traditions, there are two linked ideas:

1. The road to enlightenment / liberation /self-transformation is extremely long and demanding, and,
2. An individual’s lifetime is extremely brief.

In the *Viveka Chudamani* (*The Crest Jewel of Wisdom*) Shankarāchārya makes the statement that one who is “fortunate to have attained this rare human birth”, but who is “foolish enough not to strive for Self-realization . . . verily commits suicide”. The takeaway from such an understanding is “The clock is ticking. Get busy, and stay busy”, in the right way.

The Stages of Life

In response to this view the various wisdom traditions have developed approaches suited to different stages of life and differing life responsibilities. In the Indian tradition the Four Āshramas designate the appropriate activities and attention for each stage of life. Youth is given to the Brahmacharya, or learning/listening phase. The Householder phase is for maturity, and centers on family and wealth creation. Next is retirement, which in the classical system meant retirement from the world. It was also termed the Forest-Dweller phase because it was the stage for the man (it was always focused

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on the man) to leave the family (now secure due to his fulfillment of his Householder duties) and pursue spiritual aims. The final stage was the Renunciant, where all worldly aims were forsaken, and the man became fully dependent on God.

At twenty-nine years of age when Prince Siddhārtha Gautama became fully aware of the inevitability of sickness, old age, and death, he determined that he would leave his palace life and not be content until he found an antidote to human suffering. In his initial search he sought out the counsel of the wisest men of his time — the philosophers and realized beings. In every case they advised him to return to the palace and complete his family and princely life as a Householder; that his efforts were out of alignment with the stages dictated by the Āshramas, and so also with the social order. Fortunately for the world, although he listened to the wise men, he took his own advice and became the Buddha.

The Question of Time

How important is time in this process? There is a view, expressed in numerous enlightenment traditions, that the heights of enlightenment are not merely always present, but can be attained in this very moment. This was the teaching of the Buddha — “In this very life, in this very body, attain enlightenment.” This urgency of attainment is the basis for the Vajrayāna path in Tibetan Buddhism — a system of development described as the Swift Path to enlightenment. Whether we call it “swift”, “gradual”, or “slow”, the constant feature is time.

One thing we all know about time is that it is relative. A child at play with friends complains to their parents about having to leave so early, even though hours may have passed. That same child when asked to perform some “boring” household task will complain that the time seems to be moving so slowly. The attention and awareness that we bring to a moment in time affects our sense of time’s movement.

When I was ten or eleven years old, I was hit by a car. It was evening and I had gone out to walk our dog in the park. Stepping out into the street there was a car whose driver was speeding through the intersection, trying to keep from being caught by the changing stop light. In the middle of the street, I turned and saw the car. What was funny was that I did not really see the car, the driver, or anything else. All I remember was the car’s headlights. I remember how big they seemed, glowing with a yellowish light. In those days cars’ headlights were made of glass, there was glass ribbing inside the headlight to strengthen it. I saw the big, round, yellowish lights. I saw the filament glowing inside and the ribs in the glass so very clearly. They seemed huge, filling my entire visual field, and then nothing — no memory of being struck. The whole episode could not have lasted more than three to five seconds, but to my sense of time it didn’t happen quickly, or slowly. It would be accurate to say that for me in that moment time stood still. When I awakened on the curb there were people surrounding me, some

neighbors were sending for my mom and dad, the driver of the car was there, a knot of witnesses to the event. All of them had descriptions of what they saw, of how quickly it happened, of the angle and point of view from which they saw it unfold, but only I saw what I saw; only for me did the relentless rush of time stop, allowing for the depth of my experience.

Beyond Ordinary Time

One of the hallmarks of profound spiritual experience is its fluidity when it comes to time. Expressions like “the eternal now”, “to see eternity in a single hour”, “desire is time”, and countless others give an indication of the flexibility, insubstantiality, even the irrelevance of time when perceived beyond the personal element. St Paul says that “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” a state of being beyond death, beyond normal living, beyond time can be our experience.

At the level of contemporary physics, time remains a subtle and sometimes perplexing concept. Depending upon the theoretical framework being used, it can appear as a background against which events unfold, as something relative to the observer, or perhaps even as an emergent feature of a deeper reality.

H. P. Blavatsky presented a challenging view of time that distinguished between the illusion of perceived or conditioned time and “duration”, the universal background out of which our experience of time arises. “Time is only an illusion produced by the succession of our states of consciousness as we travel through

eternal duration, and it does not exist where no consciousness exists in which the illusion can be produced; but ‘lies asleep’.”

Our sense of time includes everything from a linear, personal sense of movement — past to present to future; to the psychological perception of time, like my car accident, to the ineffable eternal now of mystical experience. What does this variety of ways that time can be experienced tell us about time and our attempt at self-transformation?

The Capacity to Pause

Anyone who has devoted some time to meditation practice can refer to personal experience in these varied aspects of time, and is aware of the powerful potential we have to affect it. The idea that comes across is that even though our present degree of unfoldment allows for a strong linkage to time and its effects, we are not necessarily inescapably bound to it. We do have some agency. Down through history the spiritual traditions of the world have given strong guidance and training in freeing oneself from the dominance of time. They point to spaces, openings, “dwelling places” unaffected by time, to the power of our capacity to pause.

Our ever-present computer and mobile screens have a “Pause” button that allows us to choose to halt the demanding flow of sounds and images. Internally we have a similar capacity. Depending on our need and development, a number of options are always available. Breath, fasting, meditation, solitude, presence in the natural

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world, focus on gratitude, beauty, joy, creative endeavor — art, music, dance — are some of the ways to allow ourselves a pause. Retreat is a word that captures the sense of it. Whether for a moment, or an extended period, we learn to withdraw our uncontrolled participation in producing “the succession of our states of consciousness”. We choose. we act, and in that process new possibilities, hidden powers, emerge. The pause is temporary, but so powerful, awakening us to the possibility of a life outside of time.

Buddhist monks retreat in the forest or caves for two, three, five years and more. Indigenous and shamanic traditions have vision quests where the person withdraws to some sacred place in the wilderness for deeper insight. Jesus retreated to the desert and fasted for forty days. The point of it is to pause, to step outside of the pressing flow of normal life, and step into a space emptied of personal desire and thought, to create the conditions for a deeper awareness to find us. The author G. K. Chesterton wrote: “A dead thing can go with the flow, but only something living can go against it.” We might add: “Only something truly alive can pause, see, and choose.”

Becoming Aware of Spaces

It begins with becoming aware of spaces. The spaces between each breath, between the leaves and branches of a tree, between thoughts, between hunger and fullness. Rumi made the statement that “Fasting blinds the body in order to open the eyes of the soul” — the power of spaces. We look at a painting and see

the image as whole and complete. Never giving a thought to the hundreds, maybe thousands of individual brush strokes that comprise it. Each one purposefully placed by the artist over an extended period of time. We listen to a symphony and follow the flow of emotion and thought, feeling each movement as a full expression, without thinking of the countless individual notes, phrasing, and articulations that the composer required to convey their meaning.

When it comes to a deeper understanding of ourselves, a similar process applies. An approach to the age-old question of “Who am I?” begins with finding some space from which to examine what appears as the seamless, undeniable unit of self. We tend to see ourselves as an amalgam of unbroken streams of sensations, feelings, and thought. It is one of the functions of the brain to knit together our experiences and reactions into a seemingly unbroken stream.

The Space Between Thoughts

One of the things that happens with the practice of meditation is that one discovers that there is a gap in the stream of thoughts. Much like the painting or the symphony one finds that what appears to be a continuous flow is actually composed of many isolated thoughts. Our rapid jumping from one thought to the next, then the next, gives it its flowing appearance. It becomes possible to see the thought process as it is, like individual clouds moving across the sky of the mind. Discovering this space is empowering. Whereas before we had

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no choice but to be swept along in the alternating currents of thought, shifting from one stream to the next. Now we can pause the stream, give attention to an individual thought, or simply focus on the open spaces of sky, the mind, upon which all thoughts appear as passing phenomena.

This pause, and the awareness that accompanies it, has a liberating effect. It is common to feel that our thoughts and the directions they take us are not fully under our control. Having clearly seen the process, we recognize that what we call control is really awareness and

the choice that comes with it. Thoughts do not suddenly go away, any more than light goes away when we close our eyes, or air disappears when we hold our breath. What might be called thought control is simply the choice of which of the ever-present thoughts we give our attention to — or whether we give our attention to any of them at all, preferring instead to rest in the open, uncluttered sky of the mind. We pause.

With an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

William Wordsworth

**Between stimulus and response, there is a space
— and in that space lies our freedom and power
to choose our response.**

Rollo May

The Incarnation of the Angels

LAURENCE J. BENDIT

THE word “science” means “knowledge”. Hence, anything which adds knowledge to our minds is, literally and exactly, “scientific”, “knowledge-making”. It is only by degradation that the word science has come to be applied only to certain methods of learning. In much the same way, we see “Catholicism” or “universality”, used only in the restricted sense of the encircling and limited theology emanating from the Vatican, or “Theosophy” for the system of ideas set out by H. P. Blavatsky in her own idiom.

With the new, emerging mentality, it seems reasonable to propose that the field of science be enlarged, so that it will include much which is nowadays considered as “unscientific” because it does not fall within a framework dictated by the intellect and excluding the parallel function, namely, feeling. Feeling, at a certain level, is the opposite of intellect in that while the latter separates the knower from what he wants to know, emotion (*ex*, “out” and *movere*, “to move”) means a reaching out from oneself towards the object. So, while intellect “objectivizes” (*ob*, “away” or “apart” and *jacere*, “to throw”), the result of emotion is to “confuse” — to melt together. Hence, emotion and science as at present understood are

incompatible, and, so far, the upstart, modern science has strenuously pursued objectivity and tried — with limited success — to avoid the confusion which feeling brings.

We are, however, moving into a new mental age and if we are really concerned with science in the larger sense, we must gradually find that we cannot ignore the feeling aspect of our minds in order to concentrate only on the aspect which thinks, is logical, and has all the virtues which the emotional person lacks. In Vedantic philosophy *vairāgya* or emotional objectivity is the first quality of the would-be yogi, and leads on to discriminative understanding, or *viveka*. Scientists, or those who have the scientific attitude without necessarily being trained in any particular branch of technical science, should by now have developed this power of mental objectivity sufficiently to be able to carry it with them out of the womb of intellect into the wider field which includes feeling. The feeling needs to be similar to that we have as emotion, but without the “movement-out” of emotion, which identifies us with the object to which our feelings are directed.

This higher octave of feeling is doubtless that which is sometimes known as

Dr Laurence J. Bendit (1898–1974) was an English theosophist and psychiatrist who practiced in London, England, best known as a researcher, writer, and lecturer on parapsychology, working in collaboration with his wife, clairvoyant Phoebe D. Bendit. From their book, *The Mysteries Today and Other Essays* (1973).

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Buddhi. But Buddhi can also be seen in another aspect where it is the climax of the thinking function when it reaches beyond logical, step-by-step building. It then becomes what L. L. Whyte has termed “pattern-thinking” as distinct from “atom-thinking”, Teilhard de Chardin, the quality of the “noosphere”, the psychologist, “intuition”, and others, “true perceptivity” as distinct from ordinary perception. It is also the difference between intelligence and mere intellect.

If this contention, that we are now in need of a widening of the idea of science is correct, who should be more apt to work in it than the student of Theosophy? His qualifications are not of necessity a high IQ, though he should be able to think clearly; but he should also be able to feel deeply, yet unemotionally. For only so does true intuitive perception and evaluation of the world in which he lives develop, and give him understanding and that inner experience which makes of him a theosophist in the true sense.

This introduction was written with a particular subject in mind which cannot fall directly into study from the viewpoint of intellect-science. For the latter requires to be able to measure, weigh, and in other ways to compare object with object, effect with effect, and so on. And this subject of study cannot be fitted into this framework. I refer to the whole question of what in India is called the kingdom of the *devas*, in the west, of the *angels*. I will even suggest that, just as we study animals under the heading of zoology, and the physical earth as geology, we should now use the term *angelology*. And since we are dealing with entities which (so it seems at first) are non-physical and hence non-mensurable,

it becomes futile to try and discuss — as it is said was once done — how many angels could sit in comfort on the point of a (physical) needle: there is no connection between such a physical object as a needle and the angel, who has no physical organism to sit with. On the other hand, as I shall try and explain, feeling-science could have much to say about this kingdom, both in the positive sense of trying to understand it and in the negative of “debunking” the often sickening sentimentality, as well as the anthropomorphism of what is said about them.

First, however, we must try to find some premises from which to begin our study. Of prime importance is *whether angels or devas actually exist*. And here we find a diversity of views. Intellect-scientists of the old school would categorically say that they do not. More modern ones, less dogmatic, might be a little more open; though the tendency today is to think in more general and impersonal terms, of a “life-stream” behind biological forms rather than of intelligent and more personalized entities.

Depth psychology offers us a viewpoint which in some ways is two-edged. For the analyst of the non-materialistic schools knows that, at a certain point in individual self-discovery, he will dream and see visions of angelic and other mythological figures which are of great importance to him. They convey “messages” from somewhere beyond his ordinary, personal mind. They tell him about himself and the state he is in, and in that sense, they are “divine messengers”. But it is usually assumed that these images are created by the mind of the dreamer, emanate from within himself, not that they

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represent self-existent entities of any kind. Yet the more intelligent psychologist allows for the point of view of the clairvoyant who tells us of angels or devas in terms of independent beings which they see or which, sometimes, seem to “visit” them and teach them. Indeed, I myself once asked Professor Jung the question whether he thought that mankind would have the use of images of angels, “elementals”, centaurs, unicorns, and the like if they did not, somewhere, somehow, exist in the universe in their own right.

I may, of course, have misunderstood him, but the impression he left in my mind is that he replied that if they did not so exist, we should not have model images to use for our own purposes: we should not be able to use them as symbols, characters in the drama created by our minds to teach us about ourselves and our spiritual needs.

The “opposite number” to the psychologist is the clairvoyant, often deplorably ignorant of the powers of dramatization of the mind, and more concerned with his attempts to observe the psychic world outside himself than with what his own mind is doing. He often professes to despise psychology, believing that his visions give him a position superior to the mere mortal who has not got his psychic powers of direct observation, however flawed these may actually be. Books appear, supposedly relating teachings given to such a chosen individual by an angel — though whether the latter is supposed to speak English or to use words is usually not made clear. Occasionally these “teachings” have the quality of true inspiration, repeating the profound truths of the Perennial Philosophy, though some-

times they degenerate into pure fantasy.

Both the psychologist who insists on pure subjectivism where angels are concerned, and the clairvoyant who takes the opposite view, miss half the theoretical possibilities: the first is not accepting at least the idea of the actual existence of angels, the latter in repudiating the creative and inventive powers of his own internal mind. So both may be wrong, while both may be half right: which leaves us with the question of how to make use of any dream or vision we may have of a denizen of the angelic kingdom.

This question is of considerable importance to the true student and can be resolved only in a pragmatic manner. For whether or not we see an angel objectively or “invent” it with our mind is, for this angle, unimportant except in theory. What matters is that, at this moment of time we have seen something with the value of myth. Myth has been said by Dr Besant, as well as by depth psychologists, to be in effect truer than so-called fact: that is, fact at the physical level. For it goes deeper and has more true meaning to the individual who experiences it. So the student needs to consider *what his vision means to him, in terms of his state of mind when it occurred*. That is, what “message” it brings to him from the spiritual or divine Self within.

This, of course, applies principally to the kind of angelic visitation which makes serious impact on the individual. But it also applies to all other kinds of observations, at all levels, physical, psychic, or psycho-spiritual. For, if there is any validity in clairvoyant reports, there is a population of entities in the psychic worlds which are not particularly exalted, however

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large they seem to be in terms of physical space, however fascinatingly beautiful — or ugly — and however interesting. Their impact is comparable to that of watching bird or plant or animal life in the physical realm, and the effect they have on us depends on what they show us or make us feel: the level of our being on which they impinge; a matter to which we shall return a little later.

We have not yet answered the question we started with, as to the actual and real existence of the angelic kingdom. What seems like a digression, above, was, however, a necessary first step: to observe, one has to determine the view-point from which one is observing, as well as the mechanism for doing so — that is, on minds — and how we use them. Now, we come to two important points with regard to evidence in favor of angelic reality. One is that mankind in every part of the globe and at all times in history — save perhaps for a small minority of modern, skeptical sophisticates in the so-called civilized world — has believed and still believes in angels, devas, fairies, gnomes, leprechauns, sylphs, centaurs, fauns, satyrs, and local gods of trees, rocks and streams. Intellect-science tends to denounce such ideas as superstition and then, perhaps later — as in the case of ESP — it may discover that when the superstition is discarded there remains a solid basis of reality at the core of a popular belief.

Then we have the evidence — which can only really be assessed in terms of feeling, “Does it ring true?” — of endless people, both educated and illiterate, who claim to have seen and experienced for themselves the reality of “the little people” or of greater and more important

beings such as we call angels. Some of these observers, of course, are hysterics, unbalanced people; others, may be glamourised by moonlight in woods and on hills, perhaps assisted by having taken alcohol or other drugs which loosen the solidity of brain-consciousness. But some are sober, perceptive individuals who are not likely to be merely self-deceived.

If we take the latter into account, we find a certain consistency in what they have to tell us; from which we can go further in trying to understand what it is all about.

Let us assume, at least for the present, that there actually exists a kingdom of Nature which is that of the angels, or devas. They are not incarnate as humans and animals are incarnate, and for the most part are invisible to the eye, inaudible to the ears — existing outside the range of our senses. It is not difficult to make this assumption if we can rid ourselves of the idea that life and consciousness can only function through bodies like our own, largely made up of molecules of carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen; and also of the idea that Mind can only operate in the same terms as our ordinary, workaday mentalities.

God, the Creator, is surely not limited to such a pattern, and must be capable of other kinds of organic structures. He may be able too to originate minds in which the world-picture (the *maya* by which we live and learn and evolve) would be quite other than our own. I have elsewhere suggested that if our perception of space-time were different, so that time was the element fixed, as to us space is fixed, and space flowed through time, we should be so different from what we are that two

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humanities might meet and mingle without either being aware of the very existence of the other — except when consciousness rose to the level where space and time as we know them ceased to exist. (I shall come back to this detailed point: it is significant.)

On this basis it is reasonable to postulate that the devic kingdom, which is said to live on earth alongside of man, really exists, not so much parallel with him in having a similar mind and consciousness, but, as it were, at right angles to him. The devic mentality would “cross” the mental track of the human being, each one working in its own particular direction as ships on different courses cross one another’s wakes.

This alone would account for angel and man remaining unaware of one another as we are today. But there seems to be a further side of the matter: that the devic realm covers a wide range from the highest and most transcendental to the densest and most material aspects of what we call Nature. It runs from Super-nature which we scarcely know, through Nature as we know it, into Sub-nature which, again, we do not know, and is concerned with everything which is manifest in the whole universe. Its function is to build — and destroy — everything which is formed or formulated, at every level from the highest spiritual down or out to the most material. And it does this because it exists as a hierarchy in which different grades or steps may be indicated. Yet it needs to be seen as a whole. In much the same way, the advanced intellect-scientist of today views things less as separate packages of life than as an integral process running, to use Teilhard’s phrase, “from Alpha to

Omega”, with the whole alphabet between: a single vast evolutionary process which needs to be understood as a mathematician understands an integral equation which includes an infinite number of differentials.

So we can speak in one breath of arch-angels, angels, and the whole traditional nine orders of the angelic hosts (of which the Christian Churches speak, but about which they have no knowledge or eschatology) down to the tiny, evanescent in our garden; and doubtless further, into the level of atoms and subatomic particles; and perhaps beyond into realms of which we human beings have no cognizance whatever, if for no better reason than that they lie outside the range of ourselves as earth-mankind.

In common parlance the word “angel” has come to mean not merely a messenger but a messenger from God. This specialization in the sense of the word is not without significance. We may take it to point to the “crossing point” of the human with the angelic kingdoms at a level beyond that of the personal mind, in the realm of Being as against that of workaday existence. In other words, when one of us perceives an angel, he does so at the level of the peak experience, hence the vision brings with it something of a numinous quality, a sense of the divine presence.

But if both tradition and what clairvoyants tell us is correct, the angelic kingdom extends well “below” that of the divine or numinous; and here the Vedantic division of the multiple worlds into *rupa* and *arupa* levels is of great help. “Rupa” means “form”, “Arupa” means “formless”: or, extended in space-

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time versus unextended. This division corresponds in our own world-image and our image of ourselves, respectively to the spiritual and the psycho-physical levels. In the same way we may think of *rupa devas* and of *arupa devas* — the word *deva* being of course, Sanskrit for our Greek-based word “angel”.

The “divine messenger” perceived at peak moments seems to be an image projected from the *arupa*, spiritual, or unextended levels, and stands for the “higher” ranks of the whole devic kingdom, as man stands for the higher rank in the biological. From this we can postulate that this kingdom devolves into the *rupa*, or form worlds, first as the *devas* that clairvoyants and other sensitives know about as covering a valley or a range of mountains, to more localized foci of natural energy such as give rise to the idea of local gods, and then on into the still less developed forms of the various traditional kinds of “fairy” life, naiads, kelpies, undines, sylphs, gnomes, leprechauns, and even smaller creatures.

Maybe someday these may be classified into species and varieties and so on, much as we classify animals and plants today: but that would require a perceptivity far beyond that of almost any human being as yet in existence. And even then problems might arise because, if what some sensitives tell us is true, one would have to account for the disappearance of the “fairy” life which appears when snow falls and try and determine what happens to it when the snow melts. A hypothesis on this matter may be that in reality many of these lowest denizens of the great kingdom of invisible Nature which includes great angels as well as tiny “fairies”

do not have permanent form at all, but, *at all levels* represent vortices of energy, not in any human form; and that the shape in which we human beings see them are projected by our mind, clothing these vortices in forms with which we are familiar.

So, when these vortices take on a particular character as in snow, ice, water, fire, air, when the physical state which they represent changes, they fade back into the pool of more or less undifferentiated energies which lie behind all natural phenomena. When circumstances allow, this sea of energy becomes active in the manner appropriate to these circumstances; whirlpools, as it were, become manifest, and we have a show of a particular order of “nature spirits” which lasts as long as they are needed.

It is we, or at any rate, those with less differentiated vision, and with preformed pictures, in our minds, who then dress these vortices up, give them more or less man-like bodies, faces and clothes. The human shape is not intrinsic to the *devas* although, it seems, certain levels of kingdom have the power of mimicry of the things they perceive, and so produce strange figures in imitation of actual people or things. All this, of course, is quite unscientific, even from the angle of feeling-science: but it makes interesting speculative material nonetheless.

Two matters arise out of this discussion: first, what is the role of the devic kingdom, on this planet at least? And how can we human beings come closer to them in consciousness? These two questions seem to be interrelated. For the angelologist even at this beginning stage suggests that the role of the devic kingdom

The Incarnation of the Angels

comprises the carrying into effect of natural law — a term which some prefer, with justification, to that of “the will of God”. Their minds are such that they are simply agents of those laws, just as man’s mind is such that his function is less simply to carry out the laws than to develop variations in what automatic Nature would do.

In this sense the devas can be considered as representing, incarnating Nature and its laws at all levels, physical and mental, perhaps spiritual too. Continuing this line of thought, it would then appear that the rupa level of the devic kingdom is, as I have said, represented in everything having form, or every idea or feeling formulated, within our scope — and perhaps beyond it. In other words, every physical object, every feeling, every idea or “thought form” is *the incarnation of the devic life at some level of its hierarchy*.

The human being hammering a piece of iron, digging in the ground or writing a poem is, whether he has any sense of it or not, acting or reacting in conjunction with the angelic kingdom. He may try to “conquer” Nature, opposing what the angels are trying to do; he may cooperate with them; he may misuse them; but in all cases he is in contact with the angels! In the same way the scientist weighing and measuring some physical object is weighing and measuring a devic “body” but he does not realize it in those terms. And when we non-scientists look at the world around us even in the most casual manner, we are in the presence of the devic kingdom itself, embodied in the things we see. When we think, the form taken by our thoughts, the form of feelings we have, are equally devic “bodies”. So that we

need not be clairvoyant or have any other kind of developed ESP to make contact with the angelic kingdom.

On the other hand, to appreciate its nature we need to have something else, something of the quality of the real artist. This is the higher octave of feeling which is not in any way emotional, let alone sentimental. It is difficult to define this quality save that it goes with the sense of mystery, of wonder which leads on to that of the livingness of all things. Even “dead” bodies are alive, for by that we merely mean that a lower form of devic life has taken over an organism in order to dissolve that body. Truly perceptive people are aware of the living quality of a common pebble, a piece of metal, and what have you, let alone of growing things like plants, animals and human beings. The sky, a rainbow, a shower of rain shows them *life* just as much as does a man, though in a different form. This is why “peak experience” can occur at any time and in any place when the busyness of the mind is stilled for an instant and the individual *perceives*, in quietness and silence.

Is this difficult? Yes, because it is too simple, and our lives are usually lived in action and complexity. What we need is not to do but *to stop doing*, and find the wonders of the quiet mind. Then, as H. P. Blavatsky tells us, we shall hear the “Voice of the Silence”, which is that of the gods or angels among whom we dwell. Maybe this essay merely reflects the fantasy in my own mind: but I suggest that the basic idea is one worth pondering on in quietness. It may bring much richness to our lives. ✧

Perceiving the Illusion — I

An Exploration of Illusion According to the Writings of H. P. Blavatsky

JOE HASIEWICZ

Through hearing, understanding, and wisdom, one should so comprehend the nature of all things as not to fall into the error of regarding matter and phenomena as real.¹

Introduction

The aim of this series is to explore how three very short, but very powerful articles by H. P. Blavatsky² (HPB) may help us to perceive some of the illusion that surrounds us and possibly see past it. These articles are titled “Self-Knowledge”, “Will and Desire”, and “Desire Made Pure”. All three of HPB’s articles ask us to examine aspects of ourselves, and hopefully they will help us to better understand our own nature and, along with that, the nature of others. This in turn will help us be more tolerant, and more compassionate and perhaps see the world around us more clearly, and hopefully, dispel some of the illusion.

HPB was both editor of and a contributor to the monthly journal called *Lucifer*, which was published from September 1887 to August 1897 in London. Volume 1, No. 2, the second issue, which was published on 15 October 1887, contained

these three short, unsigned, and unindexed articles. Unindexed, because the titles of these particular articles did not appear in the index of that issue of *Lucifer*, and they were interspersed between other articles which were indexed. Additionally, the three articles were also unsigned, so their authorship is somewhat uncertain, but presumably they are by HPB, or at the very least, she as editor, would have had a hand in their inclusion. These articles are however referred to in the index as well as listed in the table of contents of HPB’s *Collected Writings*, and many of the lines also appear in another collection compiled by her titled, *Gems from The East — A Birthday Book of Precepts and Axioms*.

Before we begin our study of HPB’s three articles, we will examine what is meant by the term illusion from the theosophical viewpoint.

Illusion as a Form of Mental Bondage

When we are under the “spell” of illu-

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sion, we can think of it as a form of *mental bondage*, where the mind is subject to some force, power, or influence which prevents it from seeing things as they “truly” are.

In the years 1871–72, HPB lived in Cairo, where she first met Dr Albert Leighton Rawson,³ who was then a young art student from the United States. Rawson described his meeting with HPB in Cairo in an article written after her death. She had revealed to him that she was engaged in a work that would someday *free mankind from mental bondage*. He also commented that “her disinterestedness in her mission was sublime, for she frequently said, ‘This work is not mine, but his that sent me.’”⁴

In keeping with HPB’s intention to free mankind from mental bondage, the aim of this study is to explore some of her writings that pertain to illusion, as well as those of other authors, alongside the three short articles mentioned above, to help us, through our own experiences, to begin to perceive, even if in the smallest way, that the world that we live in is “illusory”. Illusory not in the sense that the world perceived by our senses does not exist, it does, but in a more philosophical sense, that we and the world we live in, are but a small and transitory part of Nature’s greater scheme.

The concise wording of HPB’s articles challenges the reader to enquire into the meaning behind the words, and in particular, the article titled “Self-Knowledge”, seems to challenge us to try and perceive the veil of illusion that surrounds us and

to see beyond it. We will examine how “self-knowledge”, at any level, can play a role in helping us to perceive the nature of illusion; how awakening the *higher will* can clear, or the *lower desires* cloud our perception of the world around us, in hopes that we can then better understand *why* we are living in this illusory world, *what* our role is, and *how* we might respond and interact with it as well as those around us.

There are two perspectives from which our enquiry into illusion may be approached, one being external to us, objective, which looks at phenomenal existence, which can be perceived by the senses, is measurable, but is also subject to change. The other being internal and subjective, which is how we view, think, and feel about what we have perceived. Is it clear or cloudy? How will we know if that which we have internalized, is accurate with respect to the “reality” that we have perceived?

The Space Inside of an Atom

If one considers our earlier conceptions of an atom, between the late 1800s to the mid-1920s, it has, a nucleus consisting of protons and neutrons with electrons orbiting it like planets around the sun. Then when we consider the space that exists between the electrons and the nucleus, the textbook ratio that we got was that the atom itself is approximately 100,000 times larger than its nucleus.

To help us get a sense of scale, consider the relationship between 1 day and 274 years, or the diameter of a marble to 1.5 kilometers, (nearly a mile) or a golf

ball to 4.2 kilometers, and we realize that this relationship is impossible to accurately represent on a standard computer screen. So, then, what occupies the space in between? Until the mid-1920s, the space inside an atom was described as a vacuum or an atomic void.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, HPB told us: “Nature abhors a vacuum.”⁵ She even poked fun at the admirers of the scientists of her day (the late nineteenth century) saying: “If there were such a thing as void, a *vacuum* in Nature, one would find it produced, according to a physical law, in the minds of [the] helpless admirers of the ‘lights’ of science.”⁶

In the post-1927 view, the space is described as occupied by probabilistic “electron clouds”, which may extend all the way to the nucleus itself, the electromagnetic forces that attract the negatively charged electrons, the positive protons, and a continuous bubbling and shifting of energy, called quantum fluctuation where pairs of virtual particles constantly appear and disappear.

The following observation made by N. Sri Ram in 1970, speaking to the depth of scientific discovery, still seems very relevant today.

No doubt science is engaged in the quest for truth, but it is truth of a formal nature — concerned with the appearance of things. All that can be discovered by science, by the methods which it pursues, is merely knowledge with regard to the outer casing of Nature, not the inner kernel.⁷

The notion that a significantly greater part of the composition of the universe

remains unperceived, may make one wonder if the world that we *do* see — is illusory.

Two Words — *Māyā* and *Avidyā*

Māyā — The Illusion

According to theosophical teachings, everything that is *finite*, that is, the universe and everything in it, our thoughts, our feelings and ourselves included, is called *māyā*, a Sanskrit word which is synonymous with “illusion”. This perspective seems to oppose the conventional view where we don’t usually think of that which is beyond the physical world to be “real”.

HPB tells us that there are two deeply significant words, that we will need to understand — they are *māyā* and *avidyā*, and she defines the first word thus:

Māyā: Illusion; the cosmic power which renders phenomenal existence and the perceptions thereof possible. . . . That alone which is changeless and eternal is called *reality*; all that which is subject to change through decay and differentiation and which has therefore a beginning and an end is regarded as *māyā* — illusion.⁸

Note the two aspects of *māyā* mentioned in the first sentence, “the perceptions thereof possible”, which relates to mind, and “phenomenal existence”, which relates to matter. In *The Secret Doctrine*, HPB describes the idea of *relative reality*:

Māyā or illusion is an element which enters into all finite things, for everything that exists has only a relative, not an absolute, reality, since the appearance which the hid-

den noumenon assumes for any observer depends upon his power of cognition.⁹

Here we can think of *cognition* as the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge through the senses, understanding it through thought and in reference to past experience, and the *noumenon* as: “The true essential nature of being as distinguished from the illusive objects of sense.”¹⁰ The relativity of the illusion depends on the observer’s ability to perceive and their ability to process or comprehend their observation. An example of this may be a scientist’s ability to detect or “see” into atomic structure. But they may not be able to fully perceive what is in that “space” between the electron and the nucleus of an atom, so for now their power of cognition ends there. From this perspective, the scientist only perceives the finite or the relatively real, or illusory part of Nature — *māyā*.

Avidyā — Illusion Produced by the Senses

HPB, in the short article titled “Self Knowledge”, says: “The first necessity for obtaining self-knowledge is to become profoundly conscious of ignorance.”¹¹ This brings us to the second significant word that she mentioned, *avidyā*:

Avidyā: Opposed to *Vidyā*, Knowledge. Ignorance which proceeds from, and is produced by the illusion of the Senses. . .¹²

For a being immersed in *māyā*, the deprivation of the knowledge of “reality” is called *avidyā* or ignorance. The word “ignorance” is not used here in its ordi-

nary sense, that is, the condition of being uneducated, unaware, or uninformed, but rather in a higher philosophical sense, which takes knowledge of realms beyond the physical, and knowledge of the invisible aspects of ourselves into consideration. Ignorance, in this context, has nothing to do with the knowledge which we acquire through the brain’s intellect, and which concerns things in the phenomenal worlds. For example, a person may be a great scholar, know about the movements of atoms and galaxies, the properties of various substances at the physical level, or have an encyclopedic memory, and yet they may still be in a state of ignorance, completely immersed in *avidyā* and the illusions created by the mind and senses.

Avidyā — Ignorance of Occult Science

To give additional perspective, HPB writes that *avidyā* is “the absence of knowledge, in the sense of esoteric science, and not ‘ignorance’ as generally translated”.¹³ She defines the Sanskrit word, “*Vidyā* [as] Knowledge, Occult Science”,¹⁴ and the “Occult Sciences [as] the science of the secrets of Nature — physical and psychic, mental and spiritual; called Hermetic and Esoteric Sciences”.¹⁵ It is worth noting that HPB equates Esoteric Science with Occult Science in the *Theosophical Glossary*. Also, that the word “esoteric”, derived from the Greek *esotericos* meaning hidden, secret, inner, or concealed and is very similar in meaning to the word “occult” which is derived from the Latin *occultus*, meaning hidden,

that which is undisclosed, concealed, or not easily perceived.

Vidyā

HPB proposes the idea that seeking understanding of the hidden aspects of Nature which exist beyond the perceivable physical world has pervaded various cultures since the beginning of humanity, she writes that:

The search after man's diviner "self", . . . was the object of every mystic, and belief in its possibility seems to have been coeval with the genesis of humanity — each people giving it another name. Thus Plato and Plotinus call "Noetic work" that which the Yogis and the Śrōtriya¹⁶ term *vidyā*.

"By reflection, self-knowledge and intellectual discipline, the soul can be raised to the vision of eternal truth, goodness, and beauty — that is, to the Vision of God — this is the *epopteia*", said the Greeks.

"To unite one's soul to the Universal Soul", says Porphyry, "requires but a perfectly pure mind. Through self-contemplation, perfect chastity, and purity of body, we may approach nearer to It, and receive, in that state, true knowledge and wonderful insight".¹⁷

Why Does Illusion Exist?

Spiritual Evolution

The primary reason illusion exists is to provide the "Spirit" with a mechanism to achieve self-conscious wisdom through *experience*. HPB writes that:

Eastern wisdom teaches that spirit has to pass through the ordeal of incarnation and life, and be *baptized with matter* before it

can reach experience and knowledge. After which only it receives the *baptism of soul*, or self-consciousness, and may return to its original condition of a god, *plus* experience, ending with omniscience. In other words, it can return to the original state of homogeneity of primordial essence only through the addition of the fruitage of Karma, which alone is able to create an absolute *conscious* deity, removed but one degree from the absolute ALL.¹⁸

Universal consciousness or Spirit must descend into dense materiality, in other words, immersion of Spirit into physical life to gain experience, and struggle through physical existence to gain self-awareness. The resulting awakening of individual self-consciousness allows the entity to eventually transcend matter as a fully realized, divine being.

So, what does the word "experience" mean in this context?

One way to think about it is in terms of the kingdoms of Nature. The Divine Spark (or Monad) must pass through every form in the phenomenal world, processes referred to as "inmetallization, inherbation, and inzoization". So, it is through this "baptism of matter", that the spark gains experience in the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms before reaching the human stage.

HPB writes in *The Secret Doctrine* that:

To become a Self-Conscious Spirit, the latter [Divine spark] must pass through every cycle of being, culminating in its highest point on earth in Man. Spirit *per se* is

an unconscious negative ABSTRACTION. Its purity is inherent, not acquired by merit; hence, as already shown, to become the highest Dhyāni-Chohan it is necessary for each Ego to attain to full self-consciousness as a human, *i.e.*, conscious Being, which is synthesized for us in Man.¹⁹

Inclusion of Noble Aspirations

In the human stage, the Higher Ego serves as the repository for the spiritual fruitage of various incarnations. At the close of each life, the Higher Ego culls the “aroma” of the personality — the quintessence of its noblest aspirations, unselfish deeds, and undying affections. These are the only experiences that are “indelible” and can be impressed upon the divine Ego for eternity.

Exclusion of the Mundane

Experiences related to purely physical functions, selfish deeds, or material needs (such as eating, drinking, or business transactions) are not assimilated by the Higher Ego and have no place in the “eternal memory”.

We Have Free Will and a Choice to Make

This is where we, who have incarnated in earth life and live in the physical world, have the opportunity to play a conscious role in this process. We who act primarily through our lower mind, have what can be called “free will” in how we will interact with the illusion on our journey through it. HPB writes of free will saying that:

The “Higher Ego” [composed of the three highest principles in man] cannot act

directly on the body, as its consciousness belongs to quite another plane and planes of ideation: the “lower” *Self* does: and its action and behaviour *depend on its free will and choice* as to whether it will gravitate more towards its parent (“the Father in Heaven”) or the “animal” which it informs, the man of flesh.²⁰

Karmic Experience and the Recognition of Responsibility

Karma, the law of cause and effect, is the “sum total of our acts both in the present life and in the preceding births”.²¹ It is the unerring law that adjusts every effect to its cause across physical, mental, and spiritual planes. As we saw in HPB’s quote above, the entity returns from the cycle of manifestation with the “fruitage of Karma”, which alone is capable of creating an “absolute conscious deity”. As the Ego progresses through births, it learns to recognize its own responsibility through suffering, and eventually gains the consciousness of all Egos in the Universe.

As the Ego in its cycle of rebirth becomes more and more individualized, it learns more and more by suffering to recognize its own responsibility, by which it finally gains Self-consciousness, the consciousness of all the Egos of the whole Universe. Absolute Being, to have the idea of sensation of all this, must pass through all experience individually, not universally, so that when it returns it should be of the same omniscience as the Universal Mind plus the memory of all that it has passed through.²² Illusion is coexistent with the mani-

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fested Universe and exists as an inherent consequence of manifestation and differentiation. It is not a “nothingness”, but rather a relative reality that arises the moment that the ONE homogeneous Absolute Existence reflects itself into the heterogeneous world of forms. While the Absolute is permanent, its periodical manifestations are but temporary shadows or reflections cast upon the infinite

depths of space. While the physical world is “unreal” from the standpoint of the Absolute, it is both a vivid and possibly happy or sad reality for the beings living within it.

In the next section, we will explore where and how we can become conscious of the illusion and how we may begin to dispel it.

(To be continued)

Endnotes:

1. *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines: Or Seven Books of Wisdom of The Great Path*, according to the Late Lāma Kazi Dawa-Samdup’s English rendering. Arranged and edited with introductions and annotations to serve as a comment-ary by W. Y. Evans-Wentz, §The Twenty-Eight Categories of Yogic Precepts, §§ II. “The Ten Requirements Come Next”, No. 10.
2. *Lucifer*, Volume 1, No. 2, 15 October 1887: “Self-Knowledge”, p. 89; “Will and Desire”, p. 96; “Desire Made Pure”, p. 133. In HPB’s *Collected Writings*, Vol. 8: “Self-Knowledge”, p. 108; “Will and Desire”, p. 109; “Desire Made Pure”, p. 129.
3. Rawson also saw HPB two or three years later in New York, and then again there in the late 1870s.
4. Sylvia Cranston, *The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky*. HPB’s comment seems to be a reference to the *Gospel of John*, 7:16.
5. H. P. Blavatsky (HPB), *The Secret Doctrine (SD)*, vol. 1, p. 64.
6. HPB, *SD*, vol. 1, p. 668.
7. N. Sri Ram, *The Real Work of the Theosophical Society*, “An Address Delivered to the Australian Section Convention in March 1970”.
8. HPB, *Theosophical Glossary (TG)*, “Māyā”, p. 211.
9. HPB, *SD*, vol. 1, p. 39.
10. HPB, *TG*, “Noumenon”, p. 234.
11. HPB, *Collected Writings (CW)*, vol. 8, “Self-Knowledge”, p. 108.
12. HPB, *TG*, “Avidyā”, p. 45.
13. HPB, *CW*, vol. 12, “The Last Song of the Swan”, p. 115.
14. HPB, *TG*, “Vidyā”, p. 364.
15. HPB, *TG*, “Occult Sciences”, p. 237.
16. *Śrotriya* (also spelled Srotriya or Shrotriya) is defined as a Brāhman who practices the Vedic rites he studies, and the term is used to distinguish a practitioner from a *Vedavit*, who is a Brāhman that studies the Vedic rites only theoretically.
17. HPB, *CW*, vol. 2, “What is Theosophy?”, p. 92.
18. HPB, *CW*, vol. 8, “The Origin of Evil”, p. 117. Italics around the words “baptized”, “baptism” are by this author.
19. HPB, *SD*, vol. 1, p. 193.
20. HPB, *CW*, vol. 12, “Psychic and Noetic Action”, pp. 366–367.
21. HPB, *CW*, vol. 11, “Thoughts on Karma and Reincarnation”, p. 144.
22. HPB, *SD*, vol. 3, p. 580.

From Study to Action: Theosophy and Compassionate Care of the Dying

CHITTARANJAN SATAPATHY

THE Theosophical Society has always placed before its members a vision of human life that makes compassion and selfless service not merely desirable virtues but practical expressions of spiritual understanding. The teachings associated with the Mahatmas, Madame Blavatsky, and Dr Annie Besant repeatedly point beyond the separate personal self toward the unity of life. If all beings are expressions of One Life, then the suffering of another cannot ultimately be regarded as someone else's suffering. To respond to it with intelligence, tenderness and selflessness is therefore a natural consequence of Theosophical insight.

This has an important contemporary application in the care of people who are approaching the end of life. The number of people living with advanced cancer and other life-limiting illnesses is increasing, while modern medicine, with its extraordinary powers of diagnosis and treatment, is not always equally successful in effecting a cure. There is consequently an important field in which theosophists could make a

distinctive contribution: compassionate palliative care, including its spiritual dimension.

The opportunity is especially significant because palliative care is not simply about treating symptoms. It is about caring for the whole person when cure may no longer be possible. The modern hospice movement, pioneered by Dame Cicely Saunders, arose precisely from the recognition that the dying person suffers in many dimensions. Saunders's concept of "total pain" included physical, emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual suffering. For theosophists, this holistic understanding should feel familiar.

Theosophy must become practical

There is a danger in every spiritual movement that profound teachings may remain largely within the sphere of study, discussion, and meditation. Theosophy should not become an intellectual philosophy about consciousness, karma, reincarnation, planes of existence and the evolution of the soul, while the immediate suffering of human beings remains outside its practical field. Dr Annie Besant

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herself strongly resisted such a separation between knowledge and service. The Theosophical Order of Service (TOS) was founded in 1908 with the purpose of bringing together those who wished to serve “all that suffer”. She insisted that a Lodge should not be merely a centre of lectures and classes but a centre from which service flowed into the world. This is particularly relevant to the care of the dying. To sit beside a frightened cancer patient, to listen without judgment, to hold a hand, to help reconcile a broken relationship, to relieve loneliness, or simply to remain quietly present when there are no words left, may be a more profound expression of Theosophy than another hour of theoretical discussion.

The Mahatmas similarly emphasized the importance of selflessness. The theosophical literature describes those who work sincerely and unselfishly as capable of becoming instruments of the Masters’ work, even without any conscious connection with them. The practical implication is striking: service performed without personal motive is itself spiritual work.

From curing disease to caring for the person

Modern medicine quite properly seeks to cure disease. Surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, immunotherapy and other treatments can save or prolong lives. But there comes a point in some illnesses when cure is no longer realistically possible. At that point the question must change. Instead of asking only “How can we defeat the disease?” we must also ask: “How can we help this person live as

fully as possible now?” And eventually: “How can we help this person die with dignity, peace, and as little suffering as possible?”

Cicely Saunders’s great contribution was to insist that the answer could not be found by treating physical symptoms alone. Her experience with dying patients led her to understand that physical pain was intertwined with mental distress, social problems, family concerns and spiritual needs. Palliative care therefore represents not a failure of medicine but an enlargement of medicine. When cure is impossible, care remains possible. Indeed, care may become more important than cure. This distinction is crucial for theosophists. They need not approach the dying person with the idea that spiritual practices will necessarily cure cancer. Such an approach would be both medically inappropriate and spiritually presumptuous. The contribution is of another order: not necessarily curing the disease, but helping to heal the person.

Healing is more than cure

Michael Kearney’s work is particularly illuminating here. In *Mortally Wounded*, he explores “soul pain” and the possibility of healing, in people facing serious illness and death. In *A Place of Healing*, he develops a psychospiritual approach in which healing means movement toward greater integration and wholeness, rather than simply removal of symptoms. This distinction between cure and healing is of enormous importance. A patient may remain physi-

cally ill while becoming inwardly more peaceful. A person may be unable to stop the progression of cancer but may come to terms with fear, forgive someone, ask forgiveness, resolve unfinished relationships, discover meaning in life, experience gratitude, or become reconciled to death. In such circumstances, the disease has not been cured. The person has nevertheless been healed in some deeper sense. Kearney has described palliative care as a “place of healing”, where the caregiver creates a safe space in which transformation can occur. The caregiver is not responsible for controlling the entire process; rather, the caregiver accompanies the patient and makes possible an environment of trust, openness and wholeness. This is remarkably close to the spirit of Theosophical service.

Listening to the dying

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross transformed the culture surrounding death by listening to dying patients themselves. Her *On Death and Dying* brought the experience of the dying person into the centre of medical and public attention. She described denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance as important responses to approaching death. She did not intend these to be a rigid sequence through which every person must pass; patients may move backwards and forwards, experience several simultaneously, or not experience them all. The deeper lesson is not the famous five-stage model but the importance of **listening**. The dying person needs someone who can hear questions such as:

“Why me?”

“Why did this happen?”

“What was the meaning of my life?”

“Have I done enough?”

“Can I forgive my son?”

“Will my family be all right?”

“What happens after death?”

“Am I going to be alone?”

These questions cannot be answered adequately by a drug prescription. Nor should a theosophist impose theosophical doctrines upon a vulnerable patient. Spiritual care is not an opportunity to convert someone to one’s philosophy. The patient may be a believer, agnostic, atheist, Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or someone who has never thought about religion. The theosophical contribution should be respectful of the individual’s worldview. The theosophist’s task is to accompany, listen and, when invited, help the person explore his or her own deepest questions.

The spiritual dimension of suffering

Spiritual suffering may take many forms. It may be loss of meaning, fear of annihilation, guilt, unresolved relationships, loss of identity, abandonment, loneliness, inability to forgive, or a profound sense that life has become meaningless. Modern palliative care increasingly recognizes this dimension. Saunders’s “total pain” concept explicitly included spiritual suffering, while Kearney emphasizes the existential and soul dimensions of illness. Theosophy can offer caregivers an especially spacious framework for such conversations. Ideas such as the continuity of consciousness, the larger identity

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of the human being beyond the personality, the unity of life, karma, reincarnation and the evolutionary journey can provide a meaningful context for those who already find them congenial.

But wisdom requires restraint. The caregiver should not say, “You have cancer because of your karma”, or claim knowledge about what will happen to a particular person’s consciousness after death. Such statements can create guilt or fear rather than peace. The appropriate theosophical attitude is humility: to offer a window, not impose a conclusion.

Learning to accept death

Stephen Levine’s work provides another valuable bridge between contemplative spirituality and compassionate end-of-life care. In *Who Dies?*, he explores conscious living and conscious dying and emphasizes opening to the reality of death rather than meeting it with denial and fear. The book presents compassion rather than melodrama as the appropriate response to mortality. For Levine, preparation for death is inseparable from learning how to live. If we continually resist change, loss, and uncertainty during life, death becomes the ultimate catastrophe. If we learn to let go, to remain present, and to meet experience without unnecessary resistance, dying can become an extension of the work of living. This has an important implication for theosophical meditation. Meditation should not merely be an inward practice pursued for one’s own peace. The qualities cultivated through meditation — attention, equanimity, com-

passion, freedom from self-centredness and the capacity to remain present — can become precisely the qualities required at the bedside of a dying person.

A theosophist who meditates deeply but cannot sit patiently with a frightened, dying person has not yet brought meditation fully into life.

The caregiver as a compassionate presence

Compassionate care does not always require great knowledge or eloquence. Often it requires presence. A dying person may need someone who is not frightened by silence, someone who can sit beside the bed without trying to escape the reality of death. Someone who does not automatically say, “Don’t worry; everything will be fine.” Someone who can acknowledge, “Yes, this is very difficult.” Such presence can itself be healing.

There is also a spiritual discipline for the caregiver. End-of-life work can produce compassion fatigue and emotional exhaustion. Kearney has emphasized the importance of self-awareness and self-care among those caring for dying patients. The caregiver must therefore learn to serve without assuming responsibility for outcomes that cannot be controlled. This is another area where theosophical practice can contribute. Meditation, self-observation, detachment and awareness of the larger Self can help the caregiver remain compassionate without becoming overwhelmed.

Healing brings peace

The deepest possibility is that compassionate care can change the mean-

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ing of dying. Death itself may not be preventable. But the manner in which a person approaches death can be profoundly influenced by the quality of care surrounding him or her. A patient who was initially terrified may become peaceful. Someone burdened by guilt may find forgiveness. Someone estranged from a child may achieve reconciliation. Someone who feels life was meaningless may discover that love, relationships, or service gave it significance. Someone who fears annihilation may become able to contemplate death without panic. This is not cure. It is healing.

Kubler-Ross observed that people who are dying can reach acceptance when they are allowed to grieve, speak openly and let go, whereas excessive attempts to prolong life or the inability of family members to let go can make peaceful dying more difficult. Levine's contemplative approach similarly invites openness to mortality rather than compulsive resistance. Kearney speaks of integration and wholeness. Saunders provides the clinical framework of total pain. Together they point toward an understanding of dying in which the final stage of life can still contain meaning, relationship, growth, and even transformation. For a theosophist, this has a further significance. Since consciousness is not reducible to the physical body, death need not be regarded as the annihilation of the human being. The physical body may be approaching its end, but the spiritual significance of the person's life does not end there. The caregiver need not prove this proposition. It is enough to create

conditions in which the dying person can approach the mystery of death with less fear and greater trust.

A call to theosophists

The Theosophical Society possesses an unusual combination of resources for this work: a philosophy of universal brotherhood, a tradition of meditation and self-transformation, teachings concerning the continuity of consciousness, and a long-standing ideal of selfless service. What is needed is to bring these resources together.

Theosophical Lodges could cooperate with existing hospice and palliative-care organizations. Members could receive appropriate training in communication, active listening, bereavement support, basic palliative-care principles, boundaries, confidentiality, and spiritual care. Those with professional medical, nursing, psychological or social-work qualifications could contribute their expertise; others could serve as trained volunteers. The aim should not be to create a separate "theosophical medicine". It should be to bring theosophical qualities into compassionate service. A volunteer need not mention Theosophy at all. The patient's needs come first.

The real test is whether the patient's fear is reduced, whether loneliness is eased, whether dignity is preserved, whether unfinished business can be addressed, and whether the person feels accompanied rather than abandoned.

From study and meditation to compassionate action

The Mahatmas, Madame Blavatsky,

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and Dr Besant did not present spirituality as an escape from humanity. The very idea of universal brotherhood implies responsibility toward those who suffer. Dr Besant's establishment of the Theosophical Order of Service was an explicit reminder that Theosophy must become practical.

The terminally ill persons therefore offer theosophists not merely an opportunity for charity but an opportunity to put their deepest convictions into practice. To study the nature of consciousness and then sit with someone whose consciousness is preparing to leave the physical body is to bring philosophy into life. To meditate upon compassion and then listen patiently to a person who is afraid is to transform meditation into service. To contemplate the continuity of life and then help another human being face

death without terror is to make spiritual understanding practical.

Theosophists need not become doctors or nurses to make this contribution. They need to become compassionate companions — trained, humble, spiritually grounded and willing to serve.

For the terminally ill person, compassionate care may not be able to stop the disease or postpone death indefinitely. But it can relieve suffering, restore dignity, heal relationships, recover meaning, and bring a person toward acceptance and peace.

And perhaps this is one of the most beautiful forms of service available to a spiritual movement: not merely helping people to live longer, but helping them to live more fully — and, when the time comes, to make the transition beyond death with greater peace, dignity, and trust.

References:

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4. Michael Kearney. *A Place of Healing: Working with Nature & Soul at the End of Life*.
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**When people respond to the joys and sorrows
of others as though they were their own,
they have attained the highest spiritual union.**

Lord Krishna
Bhagavadgita, 6.32

Theosophy: The Precious Mind

ANANYA SRI RAM

THE Seven Points of Mind Training, attributed to the Indian Buddhist teacher Atisha Dipankara Shrijnana (982–1054 CE), were orally passed down until they were written down by the Kadampa teacher Lang-ri Thangpa (1054–1123). As the teachings became more widely known, they were summarized by Geshe Chekawa Yeshe Dorje (1101–1175). In the book, *Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving-Kindness* by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, one is introduced to the ancient text through a more modern view.

The book, *Training the Mind*, by Trungpa Rinpoche, consists of fifty-nine slogans and is reminiscent of Nagarjuna's *The Precious Garland* as well Theosophy's own *The Voice of the Silence*. Perhaps the similarity is in the simplicity of the teachings themselves which allow anyone from any walk of life to study them. In Trungpa's introduction he writes, "In my own case, having studied philosophy a lot . . . I was relieved that Buddhism was so simple and that you could actually do something about it. You can actually practice. You can just

follow the book and do as it says, which is extraordinarily powerful and such a relief." While this may be inspiring to any student wanting to study such teachings, it is the practice which makes things more difficult.

- The first point mentioned in *Training the Mind* is to maintain awareness of the following preliminary truths:

- The reality of death, that it comes suddenly and without warning;

- The entrapment of karma — that whatever you do, whether virtuous or not, only further entraps you in the chain of cause and effect;

- The intensity and inevitability of suffering for yourself and for all sentient beings.

Contemplating these four axioms, we can see that we have the choice to use these truths as an opportunity for growth within our own personal lives or to ignore them and walk in a state of darkness and despair. Realizing the preciousness of human life — as we are human and have no other example of living as any other species — we slowly come to understand that it is not just human life

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that is precious, but the life of every sentient being, seen and unseen. However, we can only experience this preciousness from the experience of being human, which gives us the unique opportunity to have a brain that can create a concept like consciousness, become aware of it, and even fathom it!

Because of such a capacity, various sages from different walks of life have introduced us to the experience of *bodhichitta*, or awakened mind-heart. To have a glimpse of *bodhichitta*, we must come to understand that the experience we are living at this very moment, not just for ourselves, but all beings, is limited and can come to an end at any time and without warning. The entrapment of karma, is a distraction and often leads us to forget to remember death (*memento mori*).

Karma is inevitable in this physical existence. We ourselves are walking karmic forces, playing out whatever role we need to, and experiencing whatever lessons we need to learn. We lessen the intensity of suffering for ourselves and all beings by being aware of the actions we take, the thoughts we have, and the words we say. This, however, is done by maintaining awareness of the preciousness of life, softening our stance in the world, and living a life of compassion. In this way, there is no beginning and no end to this process. Eventually, cycle after cycle, we come to a place where we live beyond the limits of life and death, and therefore karmic circumstances.

According to Trungpa, *bodhichitta* takes two forms. There is relative *bodhichitta*

and absolute, or ultimate *bodhichitta*:

Relative *bodhichitta* is connected with the *pāramitā* of discipline. It has been said that if you don't have discipline, it is like trying to walk without any legs. You cannot attain liberation without discipline . . . it means having good conduct . . . and the basic experience of realizing you could have a tender heart in any situation. Relative *bodhichitta* is related with how we start to learn to love each other and ourselves. That seems to be the basic point . . . it is very hard for us to learn to love if it means purely giving love without expecting anything in return.

This last statement cannot be stressed enough. We tend to feel that love is a two-way street. That if we love someone or do something for someone because we love them, that there should be love given in return. But love, like compassion, in its truest sense is a quality without conditions. This is why such virtues are compared to the sun. The sun shines on everyone and everything. It does not pick and choose. Nor does it expect anything in return. Can we love in this way?

Many of us would say we do, when it comes to our children or our pets, or even our partners. But then the question arises, why do we unconditionally love only certain people and not others? The very fact that we love some people more than others negates *bodhichitta*. On the other hand, we may feel such immense love for our loved ones that perhaps we can extend that love to others everyday as a form of practice. (There is nothing in our experience that is for naught!)

Ultimate *bodhichitta* “is based on developing the *pāramitā* of generosity . . . the notion of generosity means not holding back but giving constantly. Generosity is self-existing openness, complete openness”. Trungpa goes on to state that there are traditionally three types of generosity — the usual generosity we show to others through material goods and providing comfort to others; the second being the gift of fearlessness: “You reassure others and teach them that they don’t have to feel completely tormented and freaked out about their existence. You help them to see that there is basic goodness and spiritual practice, that there is a way for them to sustain their lives.” The third is the gift of dharma, which is to show others there is a path through discipline, meditation, and wisdom that can “open up other people’s minds. In that way their closedness, wretchedness, and small thinking can be turned into a larger vision.”

The state of absolute *bodhichitta* is attained when we are able to go beyond the consciousness of the senses (hearing, seeing, touching/feeling, tasting, smelling, and mind and the *kleśa* or the energy which ties it altogether and keeps it active) and “rest in the eighth consciousness or *ālaya*.” *Ālaya*, as some may know, means “abode” or “dwelling place” or even “home”. In reality, it is a consciousness where there is no differentiation, because it is beyond the consciousness of the senses, beyond our perceptions and judgments about what we like and don’t like. It is this abode, this dwelling that is

beyond our identity as “I am this and you are that.”

In *The Voice of the Silence*, H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) writes: “Alas, alas, that all men should possess *Ālaya*, be one with the great Soul, and that possessing it, *Ālaya* should so little avail them!” Trungpa writes: “The idea of resting one’s mind in the basic *ālaya* is to free oneself from the sevenfold mind and rest in simplicity and in clear mind and non-discriminating mind.” It would seem to me, based on HPB’s statement and Trungpa’s teaching that *ālaya* is not an actual place, but a state that we all come from. It is not separate for each of us. It is the underlying unity of our consciousness in this material world. Some equate it with basic goodness. It is basic goodness which lies under all our conditioning.

Trungpa encourages anyone wanting to practice mind training to first start with accepting where one is at, instead of running away from ourselves. Is it possible for us to look at the opinions we have or the actions we take and just note them without judgment or evasion? J. Krishnamurti states that when observing our mind, there is a change which takes place just by the very fact that we have observed it. Physics has shown this scientifically to be true. It is also true that the more we become aware of our desires, the less intensity they may have. Slowly we become aware of the emptiness of the nature of desire.

Coming back to the preciousness of human life, we are reminded that using our clearer mind, we are shaping our

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everyday mind. Perhaps we must ask ourselves what kind of mind we want, and work toward it. Meditation is key in this endeavor. Regular practice has shown to slow the mind down. It just takes discipline. Sitting with a busy mind can be incredibly uncomfortable because one begins to feel the pressure of needing to do something to relieve the tension. Is there a way to relieve that tension by allowing ourselves to fall into the field beyond right and wrong and black and white? Is it possible to look objectively at the activity around us and see it is nothing more than energy that has to move? We are the ones who label it and decide whether it is good or bad.

Boris de Zirkoff once wrote:

The test of theosophical interest lies

in the student's ability to lay aside the ties of his personal life for the sake of an impersonal dedication to a Universal Ideal; to renounce the futility of personal interests in favor of selfless labor for a world goal; and to immerse his own personal being in the sense of universal freedom, which comes to all those who can rise above the tumult of worldly affairs, into the boundless spaces of universal concern.

These words are not very different than what is required in the practice of *bodhi-chitta*. No matter what path we follow, the instructions seem to be the same: we need to lay aside our personal desires, work selflessly for all, while continually rising above the chaos that surrounds us lest we contribute to it. The path may be different, but the goal is the same. ✧

**Light must come from inside.
You cannot ask the darkness to leave;
you must turn on the light.**

Sogyal Rinpoche

On the Wisdom of Others and Thinking for Oneself

PAVEL N. MALAKHOV

Is There a Need to Reinvent the Wheel?

In discussions of one question or another, one sometimes hears the following objection: “Why are you making things up and trying to be clever — or philosophizing about them? Everything that needs to be said on the subject was said long ago. Read such-and-such a book or author. There is no need to reinvent the wheel.”

This advice appears perfectly reasonable, even wise, since drawing on the experience of others can save time and allow us to make use of a solution someone else has already found. But how universally valid is this approach? Can it always be applied, or is it useful only under certain circumstances? The correct answer depends on context, for it is context that enables us to determine whether a proposed course of action is appropriate to our particular situation.

When the aim is simply to complete a task as quickly as possible, it is naturally more efficient to read the instructions and follow an established procedure. In ordinary practical matters, it usually

makes sense to rely on a guide that someone has already thought through and prepared. When it comes to our individual development, however, progress is made more quickly through *independent* inner work.

Those who seek spiritual development are therefore advised: “Read for five minutes; reflect for an hour.” Books can do *no more than assist* the process of inner transformation, and even then only when a person has become ready to understand what they contain. Such readiness arises precisely through one’s own reflection and experience.

As the popular saying has it, “You cannot become wise through another person’s mind.” In other words, only our own experience can truly develop us. The external world merely provides the instruments of inner growth. These instruments may be used profitably, ignored, or misused; everything depends on the inner preparedness and maturity of the consciousness.

The saying that “a wise person learns from the mistakes of others, while a fool

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learns from his own” applies not so much to reflection itself as to the ability to observe. Experience can be gained in different ways, and careful observation is one of the most fruitful. Yet here too, the crucial question is how deeply what we observe affects us. Have we drawn any conclusions from it? Have we applied them to ourselves? If witnessing the mistakes of others has changed the way we live, then we have truly *learned* from them: we have made those mistakes part of our own experience. This form of learning is indeed preferable, since it is both quicker and safer, but it requires a well-developed power of observation and a flexible mind.

Reading books, listening to lectures, and watching films all involve receiving information from external sources. Reflection, by contrast, develops our own capacities. In the former case, we use an external stimulus as a means of growth; in the latter, we cultivate an inner faculty. This fundamental distinction enables us to determine when it is appropriate to follow the advice not to reinvent the wheel.

Consider, for example, gatherings devoted to the collective study of texts that those present find important and inspiring. If the purpose is to draw inspiration from elevated ideas and beautiful language, then an expressive, uninterrupted reading will serve perfectly well, with pauses only to mark the structure of the passage or emphasize particular thoughts. This format is well suited to poetry recitals and other literary or creative gatherings.

If the purpose of the gathering is to

study the material, however, the pauses will naturally be more frequent and much longer, depending on the difficulty of the text and the need to consult additional sources in order to understand it as fully as possible. Yet such a gathering may have a third purpose: self-development. In that case, the advice to read for five minutes and reflect for an hour becomes directly relevant, since the passage being read is valued not so much for the information it contains as for the exercise it provides in developing the power of thought.

The same principle applies in a gym. We do not set ourselves the task of carrying every dumbbell from one corner of the room to another. We choose a suitable weight and work with it for as long as our muscles require and allow. Nor is the precise *number* of repetitions or sets important in itself; it follows from our decision to place a particular degree of strain on the muscles. What matters in such a case is the exertion and the training.

Another example is a mathematics lesson, where what matters to the student is not so much the answer to the problem as the ability to think logically and apply formulas and theorems skilfully. Whether the answer is right or wrong merely helps to show whether the reasoning was sound.

The same is true of reading for self-development. What matters is not how many times we have read inspiring texts, but how far we have succeeded in changing ourselves — our worldview, our attitude towards other people, and towards

the situations we encounter. Have we deepened our understanding? Have we strengthened our intuition?

In this kind of reading, the aim is not simply to find out what the text says. It is to try to anticipate the author's thought, reconstructing it from a few sentences, and then, once that attempt has been made, to continue reading in order to test our insight. Another useful exercise is to develop the same idea in several different directions and place it in contexts other than the one given in the book.

An important qualification is needed here. The reflections above concern *spiritual* self-development in particular: the unfolding of our inner potential and the strengthening of conscious awareness. They do not refer to another sense of self-development often promoted by contemporary lecturers and mentors, who provide large quantities of information on psychology, sociology, forms of education, information processing, financial strategies, methods of acquiring wealth, and similar subjects. In such contexts, *self-development* often means *becoming better informed* and more capable of *making the best available choice*. This too is a legitimate use of the term, but only within that particular context.

To know, to understand, to know how, and to act are four distinct stages in the acquisition of experience. *Full* self-development requires us to pass through all four and reach the final stage, at which our knowledge and abilities begin to be applied to the transformation of ourselves — and necessarily for the benefit of others.

At this stage, the quantity of information is no longer important; what matters is its relevance to the particular case. Spiritual development may therefore proceed both rapidly and successfully through the study of a single text. It must, of course, be a special kind of text, written precisely for such a purpose.

There are many such texts, and they are not difficult to recognize. They are the books that attract spiritual seekers. These naturally include the sacred scriptures of all religions, as well as the writings of teachers who continue to find followers and inspire people long after their death.

Thus, whenever our aim is self-perfection, we really *do* need to reinvent the wheel — that is, to follow a path that many have already travelled before us. Applied to our encounter with the thoughts of others, this means that our desire to absorb all the accumulated wisdom of humanity should be moderate, even restrained, while our efforts to transform our own inner nature should be far more vigorous. For it is through this transformation that the *same wisdom* can reveal itself within us. We are, after all, an inseparable part of humanity and therefore also of the wisdom humanity has accumulated. Wisdom must become for us not something external, but an inner quality.

The Opinion of Authority and the Power of Our Own Imagination

Our teachers are, of course, an important source of knowledge and inspiration. That is why we are naturally drawn to them, why we gladly read their teachings

and study the legacy they have left behind. At certain stages of our journey, a teacher is indispensable. Yet we must never forget that no one can do our work for us. Every step of the path must be taken by our *own* feet. Respect for authority must never lead to the atrophy of our own powers.

When we ourselves build a coherent and internally consistent picture of the world on the basis of what we have read or heard, we are thinking for *ourselves*.

Intuitive perception is characterized by an understanding that arises without any *apparent external cause*. Authoritative sources can therefore do no more than suggest effective methods, provide material for reflection, and inspire us to act. Yet such external influence may produce no effect at all — which, in fact, is what happens in the overwhelming majority of cases.

In other words, they may give us *knowledge* about intuition and, to some extent, help us *understand* its nature. But we must still acquire for ourselves the ability to *use* it and to *put* it into practice — that is, to manifest intuition in our own lives. To do so, we must awaken our own inner potential, our sensitivity to subtle, almost imperceptible images and movements of thought — in a word, our imagination.

Imagination, of course, may fail to correspond to reality. It may become detached from it, misleading, or even wholly false. Yet this is precisely how we develop the power of *discrimination*. That is why *critical thinking* is indis-

pensable. Our imagination must never contradict reality.

The task of thinking objectively is made even more difficult by our tendency to draw conclusions prematurely and to assume that our own position is the most reasonable and logical. Egocentrism stands in the way of objectivity. We can come closer to it only by applying critical thinking to our own opinions and by sincerely striving to understand those of others.

Purification Through Philosophy

The Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, writing in the second century, observed in his *Meditations*: “If you examine a man that has been well-disciplined and purified by philosophy, you will find nothing that is unsound, false, or foul in him.”¹

To be purified by philosophy means to bring one’s thoughts into order, to find the proper place for every phenomenon, and to understand the purpose of everything that happens. It means to reconcile within ourselves all contradictions, oppositions, and sources of irritation — to attain an *inner state of peace* and harmony without becoming disturbed by the disharmony of the *troubled world around us*.

The *perfection* of the world does not lie in its being ideal, but in the fact that everything has its place within it, everything *comes to pass*, and everything is given the opportunity to develop. Once we understand that the world’s *natural diversity* makes a diversity of experience necessary, we also begin to understand the necessity of differing circumstances and difficulties.

When we *reject* certain difficulties,

we call them *misfortunes*. Yet this is merely our attitude towards what happens. The events themselves are beneficial to us — that is the essence of the law of karma. In short, *misfortunes are beneficial*, even though they are unpleasant.

Philosophy enables us to regard misfortunes as valuable experience and to transform *suffering* into *conscious effort* — effort directed towards transforming ourselves, changing our attitude towards what happens, understanding its meaning, learning its lesson, and applying what we have learned in our lives.

To understand, to accept, and to apply — this is the formula for success on which the method of purification through philosophy is founded. Once we become convinced of the meaningfulness of the order of the universe — and therefore of everything that happens both around us and to us — we shall naturally come to perform, with quiet constancy and without inner resistance, whatever duty the present moment requires. That is what discipline truly is.

Cultivating *acceptance* makes life more *pleasant*. This is more than a play on words: it reflects an understanding of the objective laws of Nature by which the entire universe operates, including our own psyche and mind.

One of the most powerful means of inner purification is reflection upon what is lofty — even upon what lies beyond thought and beyond words. Thoughts directed towards the transcendent refine our mental faculties and prepare them to perceive subtler ideas. What matters

is not the concept of the Absolute itself, however coherent or incomplete it may seem to us, but the process of approaching it. In reaching towards what is higher, we ourselves grow. As we mature inwardly, our moral nature is likewise elevated, and everything “corrupt, false, or base” gradually falls away of itself.

Religion inspires aspiration, *science* investigates, *philosophy* brings order, while *Theosophy* unites all three modes of human inquiry. It explains the distinctive role of each and demonstrates why all three are necessary, showing the proper sphere of activity of each.

The Universality of Law Brings Peace

The laws of the universe are universal: they operate everywhere and without exception. This includes the law of universal justice. Yet in times of hardship we are prone to forget this, and it seems to us that we are being treated unjustly. Karma, however, makes no exceptions. Every event is inevitably brought into balance.

It is true that free will may temporarily disturb the balance, yet equilibrium will always be restored. We ourselves, and those around us, may make wrong choices, disrupt harmony, and act unjustly. Yet it is wiser for us to refrain from seeking retribution, since, through our ignorance of all the causes involved, our retaliation may itself prove unjust.

This does not mean passivity or acquiescence in wrongdoing. Injustice can always be answered from a higher level. The wisest response is directed

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not at the action itself but at its cause. Perhaps this is the approach taken by the Teachers of Humanity. They do not prevent wars, epidemics, or natural disasters; rather, they devote their efforts to enlightening humanity, explaining the fundamental laws of Nature. Among these laws, harmonious human relationships — the principles of living together — are far more important than understanding even the most complex processes of the external universe. Everything is interconnected, and insight into one aspect may help us understand another. Yet it is our aspiration towards higher and

more fundamental causes that ultimately brings order to everything that follows.

The wisdom of the world has been spoken countless times, and yet it must always be spoken anew. Clearly, the essential point lies neither in more or less successful formulations nor in languages that arise and disappear. Rather, in every age and among every people, each individual must not merely *hear* this wisdom but *discover* it within himself through independent reflection and inner transformation.

Perhaps this is the true work of every *thinker* — whether human or cosmic. ✧

Endnote:

1. Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, *Meditation of Marcus Aurelius*, Book 3, item 8. Quoted in H. P. Blavatsky's compilation: *Gems from the East*, under "17 December".

In order to benefit the world, Theosophy should be practical as well as spiritual; it must be a philosophy which transforms every activity in life, every area of our lives. It should enable us to make an impact on the world. As members of the Theosophical Society, we should be seriously and deeply concerned with this; our studies and our endeavours must not be merely for our own satisfaction, but in order that, through them, we may bring about something truly good for our fellowmen and women.

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(15.11.1923–31.10.2013)
No Other Path to Go

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