

SERVICE ABOVE SELF

Kalyan Banerjee

(Summary of Besant Lecture delivered on 31.12.2019)

As I talk about ‘Service above Self’, suggested by Sri Pradip Gohil, President of the Theosophical Society, Indian Section, I am articulating the basic philosophy of Rotary International, the service and friendship organisation I served as President in 2011–12. There is a universal similarity between the principal objectives and purpose of the Theosophical Society and Rotary International, both of which believe in love and friendship.

Rotary annually organizes international conventions in different cities over 3–4 days and these events bring people of different countries, cultures, races and creeds together in friendship. Language difference is never a problem in such gatherings which uphold the Upanishad maxim of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, ‘the world is one family’.

Rotarians are business and professional persons who reinvest their profits for more business in ways such that the entire community prospers. A good example of a follower of this principle is

Bill Gates Jr. Rotarians also believe that those who keep their gains only for themselves lose friends, family and even their business.

Rotarians and Rotary clubs are community based. They invite and listen to the top doers and achievers in a community. They are people who maintain high standards of propriety and integrity and are persons who serve as role models for others.

We follow the Four-Way Test as a measure of choosing the right path to follow:

- 1) Is it the truth?
- 2) Is it fair to all concerned?
- 3) Will it build goodwill and better friendships?
- 4) Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

It is this characteristic that has helped us to almost fully eradicate the polio disease from the world.

We believe in service for a cause without expectations. This follows our own Vedic principles.

We believe too that everything we do

in the world is in service to the Almighty. In serving others, we are serving ourselves as well.

We try to perceive the real truth and not be swayed by Maya. We work best and most when our hearts are free of suspicion and filled with faith. Our aim is to go through life with perfect balance.

The absolute Brahma is an infinite ocean. The *jiva* or individual ego melts

into nothingness in the Brahma. When one has divine realisation, one realises God. One does not then return to the world nor is one ever born again. We humans will do well as we prepare for the end which we all must experience as we go from the world.

O Lord, keep me not in fear of death as my time comes to go. But lead me to immortality.



AWAKENING THE HEART-MIND

Mr John Vorstermans

(Summary of Short Lecture delivered on 1.1.2020)

The exploration of processes to awaken our spiritual potential incorporates the developing of a perception that has a heart-mind focus. Some of the practical steps, as part of this process of awakening, are outlined below.

According to Theosophy, the mind is the soul. *The mind and the soul are the same thing.* The soul is also referred to as our *permanent individuality*, in contrast with our *present personality*. It is this Mind-Soul-Ego which incarnates and reincarnates, from life to life and body to body, on a long journey of progressive evolution and inner unfoldment.

The Doctrine of the Eye is the mind turned outward, the inward-looking mind representing the Doctrine of the Heart. Ultimately we need both developed in balance.

The challenge we face is the battle between the lower, externally focused mind and the higher, intuitive mind. As we move our attention from the outward-turned mind to the awaken-

ing to the inner soul, a more accurate reality is revealed.

The step required is one of simple observation. It is often described as meditation, of reflecting on the thoughts which arise in mind. It is not about trying to inhibit these thoughts; rather, we become aware of them. If we are willing to look openly at our reoccurring thoughts, we begin to identify conditioned thinking, thought patterns or thought forms which filter our perceptions of reality. Once we become aware of these patterns of thinking, we have a choice of giving them energy or letting them go and eventually dissolve.

Meditation, one of our most significant methods of developing self-awareness is invaluable in the development of the right kind of awareness, the observation of the mind and the creation of a mindful awareness which leads us to the understanding of mind-nature and the opening to inner awareness.

We have sacred texts, parables, and

magical stories which we all love to read or see at the movies. Many stories like the biblical parables, the ‘Wizard of Oz’, pilgrimage stories, ‘Harry Potter’, ‘Star Wars’ and ‘Lord of the Rings’ are all allegories for the journey of the soul. For example, the story of Jesus’s or the Buddha’s life can be seen at one level as a historical story, and at another, metaphorical level as the story of our soul’s journey, where everything that happens to us is an opportunity for us to learn something valuable. For example, in ‘The Wizard of Oz’, the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Lion represent the discerning intellect, the heart, and the

courage that we need to develop and require for our inner journey, for opening the heart-mind. ‘Harry Potter’ is the enquiring young man who is ever seeking to find the truth, another quality that is needed.

It is vital to observe, to be aware of what is passing through our mind. Through study of the sacred texts, we need to look at the stories as the journey we are all travelling on. The allegoric view of all this is a fascinating tool we can apply to our own lives along with constant reflection or mindfulness. Meditation is not something we do for 10 minutes a day. It is a 24-hour a day practice.



‘... THOSE OTHER DIVINE FRAGMENTS WHICH ARE STRUGGLING SIDE BY SIDE WITH YOU...’

Mr Pedro Oliveira

(Summary of Short Lecture delivered on 1.1.2020)

Rule 17 of *Light on the Path* encourages us to seek out the way. Rule 20 presents us with a practical itinerary for doing so, involving openness of mind, plunging into the mysterious depths of our own being, and discovering the life beyond individuality. But equally important is for us to understand ‘those other divine fragments which are struggling side by side’ with us. It is a discovery that knows no end. The dictionary meaning of the word ‘fragment’ is ‘a small part broken off or separated from something; an isolated or incomplete part of something’. It is only when we look at ourselves intelligently that we discover that

our sense of self is incomplete for the self amounts to isolation, separation from others.

The ‘way’ suggested in *Light on the Path* is truly to be found in one’s living, in how we approach daily contacts, relationships and choices. The implication is that the way is a perception transformed by other-centredness, by welcoming others into our existence and not by shutting them out. Then, from fragments we become an integral part of humanity, of the wholeness of life. Such realization has depths that cannot be fully fathomed. It transforms the world.



BESANT THEOSOPHICAL HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL (BTS)

Besant Theosophical Higher Secondary School was established by the Indian Section in 1939 as Theosophical Boys School, and acquired its present name in 1954. In 1955 a separate constitutional body of the Indian Section was registered as Besant Education Fellowship (BEF) and the control of the school was handed over to BEF. BTS is affiliated to the High School Board of the Uttar Pradesh government as a grant-in-aid Hindi medium boys' school from class VI to X.

Last year (2018–19) the total number of students was 482 and this year it is 500. The total number of teachers including the principal is 14 and other staff is 10. Last year the class X Board results were 94.19% pass. BTS was also able to establish a modern computer lab at a cost of Rs 5 lakhs. All the classrooms and campus are equipped with CCTV and voice recording system. The old building 'GyanGeha' was renovated

at a cost of Rs 8 lakhs.

In the current year (2019–20), work is in progress to convert and construct six new classrooms costing Rs 16.5 lakhs. This is required as the school is planning to upgrade itself from high school to intermediate college by adding Class XI and XII in Arts, Science and Computer Science groups. An RO, water-purification plant has been installed in the school, as also a water cooler and eight ceiling fans with the help of old students.

Apart from academic studies several extracurricular activities such as scouting, Red Cross, science exhibitions, debates and quiz programmes, sports, and so on are organized throughout the year. Students also actively participate in different programmes and championships organized by the State and Central governments at district level, zonal level and state level. The school actively encourages students to take part in these activities for their overall development.



THEOSOPHY AROUND THE WORLD

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

new website available to all Lodges and Branches.

It is heartening to know that **New Zealand's** effort in creating greater visibility by strategic efforts has paid dividends in attracting the attention of members. All programmes are developed on the basis of language understandable to the present generation; highlighting the usefulness of Theosophy as a prac-

tical tool for providing content and imparting wisdom on the way of life. During the year under report two interesting seminars were organized, namely 'The Process of Self-transformation' and 'The Rainbow Bridge — Searching for the Divine Within' directed by international speaker Dorothy Bell. The programme of developing online introductory study courses exploring Theosophy continued. The videos will be available shortly. It is a pleasure to see the results of strategic planning and the growing attraction of the younger people to modern theosophical explorations in New Zealand.

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

a temporary registration certificate from the Home Affairs Ministry. The TOS conducted dental hygiene awareness campaigns. Three books were translated to the local language. In addition to weekly meetings, meditation sessions are also done. The common website for the region is <theosophyasia.net>.

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

In **the Americas**, the Theosophical Society in **America** (TSA) continued their active and comprehensive activities during the year including outreach to the general public. During the past year, two additional centers were certified and a 12-month course on 'Death and the Afterlife' was designed and mailed to 516 members. It is a matter of pride that the Henry S. Olcott National Library continues to provide quality facilities. Digitalization of film, slides and historic documents continued as a major activity with personalized service. Throughout the year, high-quality study, meditation, service, and public participation continued with success. Apart from workshops, online interactive webinar programs were organized. Large participation is witnessed in online pro-

grams like 'Walking the Theosophical Path' and 'Mahatma Letters Reading and Discussion Group' conducted by Pablo Sender. Online classes are also offered such as Ravi Ravindra's course on 'Learning to Live by Dying Daily'.

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

The annual convention in **Cuba** was organized in January on the theme 'Seeking a Path', which included lectures on 'Kriya Yoga', 'Three Paths of Perfection', and study of the book *At the Feet of the Master*. It is interesting that the Section also organized a theosophical Summer School under the banner 'Theosophical Research, Theosophical Authors and Meditation'. This event was attended by members from Costa Rica, Spain, the US (Hialeah and Ojai), and the Presidential Representative for Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. This

approach needs to be encouraged. The Cuban theosophical magazine was available quarterly online. The studies in the Lodges cover a wide spectrum of themes relating to Christianity, Man, God, the Universe, the Science of Yoga, J. Krishnamurti, and so on. The Havana center hosts the study of H. P. Blavatsky's (HPB) *The Secret Doctrine*. Three courses were held for new members.

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

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

In **Puerto Rico** members meet regu-

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

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

Both the HPB and Verdad Lodges were active in organizing public talks offered free on the Internet, as courses on Theosophy. Activities have been varied and covered a wide spectrum of subjects. Sonia Obando was elected President of Lodge HPB while Rosa Atahualpa was elected President of Lodge Verdad for 2019–20. On 1 June 2019 Lodge HPB celebrated the 95th anniversary of the foundation of the TS in **Peru**, which coincides with the foundation of this Lodge.

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

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

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

In **Africa**, the **East and Central African** Section is comprised of four countries: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia.

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

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

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



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