

## **BEYOND THE BRAIN: THE UNIFYING FORCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

**Dr Sangeetha Menon**

*(Summary of Theosophy-Science Lecture delivered on 3.1.2017)*

The brain is one of the most important parts of the human body, which is today studied to understand the workings of sensation, emotion, and consciousness. The single unit of information and experience that connects sensation, emotion, and consciousness is agreed to be the “self”. Human behaviour, attitudes, and emotions are intricately tied to the neural structures on one side, and the indivisible experiential self on the other. The brain and the self are the common threads that are used by neuropsychiatry, neuropharmacology, and philosophy to have some hold on one of the most intractable problems of humankind, namely, “consciousness”.

A common recurrent issue in the studies of the brain and the self is the attempt to explain the unity, continuity, and adherence of our experience, whether sensory or mental. Philosophically we continue to ask the question about mind-body unity: how the mind and body — with their different natures —

can connect and give rise to meaning and quality to life. The binding problem and the Chalmersian hard problem showcase the age-old mind-body problem in the context of consciousness. Both demand mechanisms and reasons for mutual influence. The interconnections between brain and self have been especially eschewed in the developments in understanding the brain and its functions. The classical idea about the brain with designated cortical areas and assigned functions, though, is not in vogue now; the view that supersedes it is that the brain is an organ with a high capacity to survive even with less cortical areas.

Where and how in the brain is the self housed? How does the self make adaptive changes in the person corresponding to changes in the brain? How does the self influence and alter neurochemical functions of the brain? Can the brain address its structural and functional challenges without

recourse to the self? Can there be a self without interface of the brain and the limbic system? Are the brain and the self constantly challenging each other?

Just as there are neural correlates of consciousness, I suggest there are also self-correlates of consciousness (such as compassion, love, quietude). Self-correlates (both positive and negative) seem to alter the functions of the neural correlates in curious ways. *The Bhagavadgita* could be considered as a foundational text to understand the relevance of “self-correlates”, commencing from the attributes of a *sthitaprajna* (*Gita*, 2.54), and moving on to the values and mental states (*Gita*, 13.8-12) required for a healthy life.

The emergence of Spiritual Psychology as an important discipline will help us to understand the significance of self-correlates which are essential for “inner development”. We need to understand and work towards developing therapeutic tools for assuaging challenges and dysfunctions that

arise due to poor or insufficient abidance in self. Self-abidance is the central feature of spiritual traditions, whether Eastern or Western. It involves mental and physical disciplines, appreciation of culture, rituals, art, and indigenous understanding in medicine and health care.

Greater insights into the nature of the self—neural, psychological, and therapeutic—will emerge if we focus our research on the challenges brought in by spiritual psychology.

“Consciousness” has today become the umbrella term for debating many issues crossing disciplines, yet connecting disciplines. This is interesting, because, given the variety and differences in the themes and ideas for human discourse, to have a common factor in our dialogues seems to be difficult. The studies and dialogues on “consciousness”, one of the most important scientific challenges today, also lead to a force that unifies, harmonizes, and integrates the otherwise divergent human thinking.



## INDIAN SECTION CONVENTION — II

### **Self-Preparation: An Important Aspect for Theosophical Work**

*(Summaries of Talks delivered on 3.1.2017)*

#### **O. P. Aneja**

A great thinker was asked, “What is the meaning of life?” He replied, “Life itself has no meaning; it is an opportunity to create meaning.” Life is a long journey between “Human Being” and “Being Human”. There is a need to cover this distance. Life is a breath-

taking journey, but it is also an experience that we master as time goes on.

Once a person went to Lord Buddha, and said: “I want happiness.” Lord Buddha said: “Please drop the ‘I’, which is a symbol of ego; and then drop the word ‘want’, which signifies desire; you

are left with 'happiness'." Egoless and free from the sense of "mine", one is balanced both in pain and pleasure. Heaven or hell are states of consciousness arising from our right or wrong way of living.

Speak measured words. Words have great power; the power to help, heal, hurt. Use this power carefully. Lust, hatred, anger, arrogance, envy, and so on, lead to evil actions. The only way to retain your peace is to forgive and forget. Do not aspire for worldly glory or recognition. Purify yourself. All havoc starts in the mind. Harsh words and evil deeds originate in the mind. Keep the sources clean. The river of your life will flow clear as crystal.

Motives and desires arise through attachment. Attachment is caused by non-discrimination between the Real and the unreal. This lack of discrimination is the result of ignorance, or

*ajnana*, of the true nature of the Self. Ignorance is removed only through understanding. Renouncing all else one must devote one-self entirely to enquiry into the nature of the *atma*. This can only happen if we first religiously listen to our heart and mind, and discover ourselves and our hidden talent.

When universal brotherhood and compassion for all creatures becomes the law of our life, when our daily life expresses the supreme principle of harmlessness, then grace descends. Real knowledge is not a mental, but a spiritual state, implying full union between the knower and the known.

Let us fill our heart with love and erase all negative qualities. When we have the qualities of unconditional love, such as peace, kindness, joy, or trust, we expand our reality. To be free means to open our heart and being to the fullness of who we are.

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### **Nandita Kuldip**

Self-preparation is an important aspect of the theosophical work because as we are ordinarily, we cannot work towards the objectives of the Theosophical Society. We cannot understand what Universal Brotherhood means, we cannot see the significance of comparative religious studies, we cannot engage ourselves in the investigation of latent natural laws.

At the same time, an engagement with any aspect of the theosophical work pulls one out of slumber to a certain extent, therefore self-preparation remains the underlying purpose of all aspects of theosophical work.

When one is confronted with the demands of self-preparation in the pursuit of a meaningful life, one sees that even having the wish to prepare oneself is not a very consistent impulse. This also addresses the conditions required for arousing this wish so that efforts towards self-preparation can be organized and one does not remain dependent on accidental help given by ordinary life. Therefore belonging to an organization, understanding one's place in the organization, and the role of the organization in relation to self-preparation becomes very important.

## **P. S. P. Sarangi**

Theosophy is a quest for truth and a journey from the periphery to the centre to merge with the beatitude of life. Undoubtedly this quest is a spontaneous self-driven process, perfectly blended with a sagacious self-culture approach to denude the veil of the sensuous panorama that is a product of our ignorance. In fact Theosophy is a deeper quest of self-discovery to distinguish the real from the unreal, to gradually unfold our inner faculties, to immunize our body-consciousness from all negative habits and desires, to see something fundamental in each and every aspect of life and to realize the hidden secrets of Nature which operate below the surface. Self-culture means digging into our consciousness deeply so that from its deepest point we can see the esoteric beauty of the divine and how driven by the self-generated ideas of a sensual mind we have locked our creati-

vity in the confines of our thoughts.

Self culture schools our senses, limits our desires, kills our inhibition for truth and thus prepares the ground for our future spiritual advance. Theosophists instead of arguing, believe in reacting to sensual stimuli by their own inner vision, questioning the imperfections, trying to realize their necessary existence, and all these bring an inner transformation. Slowly but steadily they sail themselves to a vast ocean of silence. Its refreshing quietude answers all their queries much more than any monk or any scripture of the world. At this point all aches, agonies, conflicts and contradictions vanish, heart and mind both vibrate with joy, harmonizing each and every cell of our body and mind, regaining the lost paradise of truth and beauty that was ruined when we consumed the fruit of illusion from the tree of ignorance.

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## **THE THEOSOPHICAL ORDER OF SERVICE**

### **A Union of Those Who Love in the Service of All That Suffers**

*(Summaries of Talks delivered on 3.1.2017)*

### **Ananya Sri Ram Rajan**

Theosophical service is a two-fold path. There is the path we take to serve the highest good of humanity, and then the path we take to serve the manifested world. One depends upon the other, especially in a theosophical context. We cannot serve the manifested world in a theosophical man-

ner if we have not understood and put the basic theosophical principles into action in our own lives. This talk explores how our spiritual practice of Theosophy, the path within, ties into the work we do for the Theosophical Order of Service, the world without.

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## **K. Sivaprasad**

Annie Besant started the Theosophical Order of Service for members of the Theosophical Society who wanted to render humanitarian service. Service is not only limited to suffering human beings but also extended to living beings in the plant and animal kingdoms. The ecosystem is the entity within which all living beings exist for their survival. But, human interventions that overexploit other living beings is the order of the day. A con-

scious presence involving the higher mind and *buddhi* can give wisdom to the human race, which is progressing on the wrong path. The real path to progress is to respect Nature and to maintain harmony and ecological balance. The TOS can help with a call to the brethren to conserve biological resources. TOS groups may also sensitize the public on these issues to create awareness for the judicious use of natural resources.

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## **Nancy Secrest**

In what way is service a path to Unity? What part does the power of love play in the realization of Unity, and how can it be expressed through service? H. P. Blavatsky taught that the Ancient Wisdom emphasized a unity of all life, the Oneness that surpasses all else. The First Object of the Theosophical Society speaks to the actualization of Universal Brotherhood, but it means even more than this. The theosophical

meaning speaks to the Oneness of all life, to Unity, not just in a metaphorical sense but actual Unity. Through selfless service we help to heal suffering humanity. We draw attention to the woes of the world, and lead by example in the effort to ease suffering and right wrongs. In the process, we help ourselves. We grow spiritually as we become more and more open to seeing the unity of life wherever we look.

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## **THEOSOPHY AROUND THE WORLD**

The 11th annual Convention of the TS in **Ukraine** took place in November in Kyiv on “Theosophy in a Changing World” with a varied program. About 50 participants arrived from six other cities. It ended with a round-table meeting with all present on “Service as Spiritual Necessity” directed by Loshchinina Olga. Their membership is steady with 94 members.

The **Belgian Section** reports that a study centre has been formed named “Open Paradigma”, promoting the study of theosophy-science. The Brussels headquarters welcomed lecturers Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu in November, speaking on Dharma, and Muriel Pécastaing-Boissière in April, with a lecture on Annie Besant. Some of their activities include theosophical workshops. The

young are finding their way to their activities and it is hoped this trend will continue. The Section has 85 members.

The **Welsh** Regional Association's 77 members meet fortnightly, except for Conwy Lodge, which has suspended meetings. They have 10 unattached members. At Bangor Lodge Eric McGough gave 4 Lectures on the "Nature of Consciousness" from October to December. These were recorded and are available as CDs and on Eric's website. Gary Kidgell, former Organizing Secretary of Scotland, gave a full-day seminar at Colwyn Bay Lodge which was well attended, on "The Pathway to the Higher Self". In South Wales, Swansea Lodge has had an increase of 9 members in the last six months, with no members lapsing.

The TS in **Ireland** has flourished for 11 years since 2005, when Northern and Southern Lodges came together under one umbrella as a Regional Association. The 11th All Ireland Convention was held in Dublin this year in May. Their guest speaker, Bhupendra Vora, gave a talk on their Convention theme, "The Glorious Future of Man". Membership, which has risen over the past few years, is now at 74. The Organizing Secretary keeps in touch with each member with regular newsletters and Study Notes.

The TS in **Austria** has 55 members, up from 49 last year. The 3 Lodges offer weekly lectures throughout the year. Study subjects are based on classical theosophical teachings and related topics, with lectures regularly placed on their website. Their members receive

*Adyar* magazine from the German TS. In April Raphael Langerhorst, member of the Lodge in Linz, who has helped with the reconstruction of houses after the earthquake in Nepal, financed and built four houses in Trisuli near Kathmandu. In one building a Theosophical Library was set up with books ordered from the TPH Adyar. The costs were covered by the Lodge in Linz.

The **Slovenian** Regional Association stands at 53 members in 4 Lodges. All Lodges had regular weekly meetings, studying many theosophical books. Some of Krishnamurti's DVDs were watched, followed by discussion. All memorial days were celebrated.

The **Hungarian** Presidential Agency has 31 members in 3 Lodges, but work could continue in only two Lodges, one in the country and the other in Budapest. Forrás Lodge was dormant, as two members resigned and four lapsed. They organize monthly recorded public lectures and upload them with slides onto the Agency and Lodge websites. They could publish the newly translated sixth part of *The Secret Doctrine* (vol. II, part 3) during the year and sent a set of published books (23 books and 4 booklets) to the Adyar Library in April.

The TS in **Norway**, with 19 members in 3 Lodges, has a new website with the help of members. Five new members were accepted to the Ostfold Lodge. Their Facebook group has increased to 45, and some have expressed the wish of joining the TS. They hope to elect a new Organizing Secretary in 2017.

The **West African Section** has increased its membership from 238 to

243 in 11 Lodges. Planned public lectures for the year and the annual Convention could not be held because the General Secretary was seriously indisposed and the programs for these activities had to be cancelled. The economic and political environment made things difficult but they are hopeful that things will improve with the recent election of a new government to take effect in January.

The TS in **South Africa** reports a membership of 151 in 6 Lodges. The location of Capetown, Pretoria, and Durban Lodges has been identified as a possible reason for the drop in membership from 174. These Lodges have been assessing the viability of relocating to residential suburbs, with positive financial results. The Section held their biannual Convention at the Johannesburg Lodge on “Be the change you want the world to be”. During the Convention, Jack Hartmann was re-elected as General Secretary and Tom Davis as National Lecturer.

The **East and Central African Section** composed of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zambia, has increased its membership from 135 to 146 in 5 Lodges. It is becoming increasingly difficult to attract new members, but they continue their efforts. Nairobi Lodge has seen keen interest from a few new members. But administration of the other four Lodges is very poor, with almost no one willing to take up administrative work. They look forward to regular international speakers visiting Lodges in Africa, as it may arouse more interest and attract new members.

The **Togo** Regional Association reports a membership of 25 in 2 Lodges meeting twice a month. They have been studying Annie Besant’s *The Doctrine of the Heart* and *Thought Power*, and the Three Objects of the TS. Their annual Convention took place in August at the TS Center in Danyl. The French Section sends them books and their monthly *Lotus Bleu* magazine.

The **Australian Section**’s National Convention was held in January and I was their guest speaker; the completion of their first professionally produced promotional video, filmed during the Convention week, is now on the Section’s website; a well-attended School of Theosophy at Springbrook was held in April, with John Vorstermans on “The Mahatma Letters”; a successful open day at Blavatsky Lodge took place in May, following its move to St Leonards in Sydney. This included the inauguration of its new premises, a celebration of White Lotus Day, and an opportunity for over 300 people to enter the Lodge. Membership declined by 45, mainly in three Lodges, and one center expanded with 21 new members, totaling 823. However, the continuing overall decline in membership is one of the reasons for their current move, at the national level, for more active promotion of the TS.

The main events held in the **New Zealand Section** were the annual convention in Auckland in January with guest speaker Victor Peñaranda from the Philippines, followed by a 3-day “Process of Self-Transformation Seminar”. In April they held a 7-day School

of Theosophy with guests Pablo and Michele Sender from the USA on “The Yoga of Theosophy”. Many of the videos of these events are viewable on their website <Theosophy.nz>. Their membership has declined to 633, so there is a focus on using social media much more to let people know more about the TS.

The TS in **East and South East Asia** comprises Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, and Myanmar — with an active Lodge in each. Their website has more information on the history of the Lodges and the Presidential Agency. The Singapore Lodge is 368 members strong; the Selangor Lodge in Malaysia has 89 members; Japan has Lodge Nippon in Tokyo with 48 members; and the Yangon TS in Myanmar has the Olcott Lodge with 47 members. The total number of members is 552, having a large turnover, with 53 incoming and 58 outgoing members.

The **Bangladesh** Presidential Agency added 110 new members and 4 new Lodges: Maynamati, Lalon, Proactive, and Kazi Nazrul Islam. The Comilla Lodge Secretary revived activities and organized programs jointly with Maynamati Lodge. They distributed and sold a good number of books supplied by Mr B. L. Bhattacharyya, the Presidential Representative. The Agency

has added 34 members, totaling 273 in 8 active Lodges. They have been studying *At the Feet of the Master*, and Annie Besant’s *Thought Power* and *Beauties of Islam*.

The TS in the **Philippines** has had another active year, adding two new Lodges, totalling 20, with 239 members. Their Theosophical Publishing House in Manila publishes and distributes the *Theosophical Digest* quarterly public magazine through over 100 bookstores nationwide, which attracts new members. They also publish TS books and pamphlets and distribute these worldwide, including the *Theosophical Encyclopedia*; the chronological edition of *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*; *The Collected Works of H. P. Blavatsky* (in digital edition and CD-ROM version); and many others. The Section also maintains “theosophical schools”, where they are evolving a model for theosophical education, catering to many underserved areas. Former General Secretary and current Golden Link College President, Vic Hao Chin, Jr, gave numerous lectures in the Philippines and abroad, including Adyar and Bhubaneswar in India, and in Hong Kong, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Switzerland.



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Number of delegates registered as on 3 January: 875

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