

THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION, A CHALLENGE TO THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

José Foglia

(Summary of Lecture delivered on 4.1.2017)

All the bits of information stored in the Big Data, a branch of IT, become usable with algorithms and this has made possible the Digital Revolution in the last few years. The Digital Revolution is the change from mechanical and analogue electronic technology to digital electronics. Central to this revolution is the mass production and widespread use of digital logic circuits, and its derived technologies, including the computer, digital cellular phone, and the Internet. With just the touch of a screen it is possible today to achieve goals, in a few minutes, what a few years ago was done in hours, days or months! This fact is changing the whole life of humankind: social relations, interaction with all the information of the Big Data, relationships between countries, democracy, international laws, politics, banks, privacy, individual freedoms, cities, cars, business, medical practice, robots taking over from humans with all its consequences, and so on.

Computers can resolve much faster any circumstances of our lives, and suggest better options with their “artificial intelligence”. But, what’s intelligence? Creation? Life? Is it rational to affirm that Homo sapiens created the intelligence on Earth?

Life appeared on our planet 3,600 million years ago, and the first cell became more and more complex: the human brain. Our brain processes information in two totally different ways: digital and analogue.

The left hemisphere, digital, rational, logical, creates the verbal language, but can we affirm that intelligence appeared on Earth with Homo sapiens? Using its creativity the human brain created digital technology, but to talk about artificial intelligence is nonsense. In fact, multitasking and clicking around are distracting, and contribute to the low attention and impaired learning. The more you train kids with computer games, the more attention deficit you

get. Games are addictive. Many children do not memorize anything, because they can Google it. The more time you spend with screen media, the less your social skills will be.

“Digital Dementia” is a term coined by neuroscientist Dr Manfred Spitzer to describe an overuse of digital technology resulting in the breakdown of cognitive abilities. Reduced grey matter in the hippocampus is associated with an increased risk for schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and dementia, amongst other disorders.

The digital process of the left hemisphere increased, to the detriment of

the analogue process of the right hemisphere, which consequently decreased. How can the Theosophical Society (TS) respond to this challenge? The Digital Revolution is not a challenge to Theosophy. Should the TS continue with its old paradigms? Should the Theosophist continue to speak to the young people with the language of the 21st century?

It is necessary to create a scientific language to transmit the wisdom of Theosophy to the next generations. A universal language to educate, to awaken compassion. To teach the wisdom of Theosophy to the new generation.



RENOVATION UPDATE SUMMARY

(Delivered on 2.1.2018)

Starting with the restoration of the Blavatsky Bungalow, Nilesh Thakkar, Director of the construction company Jeernodhar Conservators Pvt Ltd, explained that the building was part of the TS Adyar since 1907, but was probably built around 1880. In the early 1960s it was renovated and expanded. With the present restoration we will go back to the original building with all the terraces free of extensions. There are some major problems with the building: 1. The foundation has cracks and is not good enough to last long in the bad soil. The plan is to strengthen the foundation with a new system where every two metres a pipe would be put under the existing foundation and filled with a combination of fly ash and cement. 2. Water seepage has affected the wooden beams, some

will be replaced, and others repaired. 3. Rising dampness from the ground has ruined the lime plaster on the walls, mainly because of wrong paint and maintenance with cement plaster. The cement plaster will be removed and replaced by lime plaster. The beautiful ornaments will all be restored, so the building will look like new at the end, and can last for another 100 years.

Michiel Haas talked about the plans for the Archives. We will start this year with a new fully acclimatized Archives on the backside of the current Library and Research Centre. Offices for staff will be located in vacant rooms situated in the existing building. The renovation of Leadbeater Chambers is scheduled for next year and, apart from major technical problems with the concrete structure,

the accommodation can be modernized also, and sustainable measures implemented. Taking as an example a sustainable building in India, it is possible to do one room for \$ 5,000 or Rs 3.20 lakhs. With sufficient sponsorship, the first five-year-plan can be finished within two years and it looks like most of what was planned will be completed. For the next five years, Michiel Haas presented some possibilities: New accommodation for delegates in Vasanta Guest House with approximately 60 apart-

ments; a fully equipped vegetarian restaurant with possibilities for lectures and workshops all year round; an international school and vocational training centre; and continuation of the deferred maintenance of other buildings and infrastructure. He also gave a forecast of the end result in 2035: A fully renovated estate; with all maintenance up-to-date; a self-supporting campus with respect to energy, water, food, waste management, and so on; the estate will also become financially self-supporting.



“THE STORY OF THE BUDDHA” — PLAY BY THE SCHOOL - KFI

The School - Krishnamurti Foundation of India, which has been located at Damodar Gardens, on the Theosophical Society campus for almost 40 years, is moving in the next academic year to a new location at Thazhambur, near Navalur on Old Mahabalipuram Road. As a token of its formal leave-taking and expression of gratitude for the years spent here, they presented a play, “The Story of Buddha”, for the benefit of TS members. This was performed earlier for the 60th anniversary Convention of the Society in 1935 and was also the first production by students of the school on this campus in 1981.

The current performance was a joint endeavour of all the students, teachers, parents, and alumni of the school. It was presented in 18 episodes consisting of all the salient happenings in the Buddha’s life from his birth to death. The first episode shows a *mandala*, an in-

tegrated structure around a unifying centre, created and dissolved multiple times by the children, to the ancient mantra “Om Mani Padme Hum”. The next five episodes take the spectators through the birth of the Prince Siddhartha and his growing up in the palace, his growing disenchantment with the pleasures of the palace, his compassion for a wounded bird, and even the smallest insects which were disturbed during the festival of the plough, and so on. When Siddhartha was born, there was a prophesy that he would either be a great king or a great spiritual leader. Initially his extraordinary brilliance in academics and sport convinces everyone that he is going to be a great king. But later, his compassionate nature and tendency to be withdrawn from the crowd in meditative silence make people wonder whether he is more likely to become a sage. The turning point comes through

a few events where he comes face-to-face with the sad realities of life — old age, disease and death.

The next six episodes show the events that lead up to Prince Siddhartha becoming the Buddha. Though he decides to leave the palace to go in search of the Truth, he is torn between the futility of his princely life and his affection for his wife, but finally the longing for the Truth wins and he goes into the forest. There he meets many ascetics and lives with some of them in turn, undertaking the spartan life and the extreme austerities prescribed by them. His realization that abusing the body is not the solution paved the way for his eventual principle of following the “middle path”. A few incidents later, he settles down under the Bodhi tree, and he undergoes a few temptations which he overcomes successfully. Finally the cosmic revelation unfolds and he attains enlightenment, and becomes the Buddha.

The final episodes show his life after enlightenment. He delivers sermons of which the Fire sermon suggests an extinguishment of the fire of passion that destroys us through suffering. He says this can be done through quelling the

illusions of the five senses which are the progenitors of desire. He reforms hardcore criminals who voluntarily become his followers. He convinces a woman of the futility of trying to overcome death. After a long life, the Buddha dies at the age of 80. Before dying he advises his followers about how to take forward the Sangha in his absence. The play ends with a chant. Pondering on the question, who was the Buddha, leads to an understanding of him beyond the physical person, to find a relevance in the here and now, and the feeling that “when love and compassion go hand in hand, the Buddha perhaps is awakened in Man”.

A unique aspect of this play is the rich mix of devices used to portray various scenes, concepts, and emotions ranging from visuals, poetry, dance, music, drama, songs, classical ragas, moving back and forth from one language to the other, and so on. The children themselves evolved the plot by working together, discussing among themselves and deciding how concepts and emotions are to be portrayed. All in all, it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the spectators.



DEVOTIONAL MEETING

Conducted by Chandrika Mehta on 2 January 2018, she started with Saint Thyagaraja’s *krithi* “Naada Lolu Dai” and then continued with a Kannada *vachana* by Sri Basaveswara of Karnataka. Then she moved on to the Brahmananda Bhajan “Jai Durge” in Hindi and the Meera Bhajan “Jogi Matha Jaa”. She concluded with Adi Sankaracharya’s “Annapoornashtaka” *sloka* in Sanskrit. A devotional atmosphere was created. Ms Mehta sang a *devaranama*, “Esa Beku Yiddu Jaisabeku” by Purandaradasa.

BOOK RELEASE

Leave Your World and Come into Ours by Mr Surendra Narayan

During the inaugural function of the Convention Ms Marja Artamaa, the international Secretary, announced the release of the book *Leave Your World and Come into Ours*, by Mr Surendra Narayan, who left his mortal coil on 22 November 2017 at the age of 98. He was former international Vice-President of the Theosophical Society (TS) from 1980 to 1995.

The book was published by the Upasika Lodge, Trichur, of the Kerala Theosophical Federation, and is a collection of articles and speeches by the author, who aptly quotes from the gems of the theosophical literature: *The Voice of the Silence*, *Light on the Path*, *At the Feet of the Master*, *The Mahatma Letters*, and others. Being equally conversant with the vast literature of Indian philosophy

and the Wisdom Religion, he conveys his ideas by referencing portions from *The Imitation of Christ*, *The Bhagavadgita*, *The Holy Bible*, and *The Secret Doctrine*.

Hailing from a family of Theosophists, Mr Surendra Narayan obtained a post-graduate degree in history, and studied law at Harvard University. Joining the Indian Revenue Service, he rose to its highest position becoming Chairman, Central Board of Direct Taxes. A great scholar of philosophy, literature, religion and science, he had written numerous articles on Theosophy. His previous book, *Life is for Living*, was published by TPH, Adyar, and reflects his philosophy of life. He believed that if humanity cannot attain liberation or nirvana without living in the world, this world would not have been created in the first place.



THE ANNIE BESANT ROOM AND KRISHNAJI'S FLAT

Every year the International Convention brings together members of the Theosophical Society from all over the globe. It is a blessing to be in Adyar on this occasion of fraternal and inspiring days, sharing understandings and remembering the lessons taught by those who brought the Society this far.

This 142nd Convention is the time when we remember the extraordinary human being that served as the International President of the TS from 1907 to 1933. Annie Besant was a President who faced many challenges and was

known for her courage and determination; she was not afraid to say what she knew would not be understood by the majority of the people of her days, and this was the case when she announced J. Krishnamurti to be the chosen one to bring a new message to the world. She adopted him as her son and took care of his education and made sure that he had the best she could offer. It was with this in mind that Annie Besant built a flat for Krishnamurti to live with his brother Nitya, also adopted by her, in the Adyar campus. She told Krishnamurti: "No

matter what happens, this will always be your home”.

The Krishnamurti flat and Annie Besant room are open for public visitation during the days of the International Convention every year from 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm. The room where Annie Besant lived when staying in Adyar is located in the Headquarters building, a few steps from the President’s office. The Krishnamurti flat is located in the second floor of Raja House, which is adjacent to the Headquarters building.

Many people come to see the flat and sit there to meditate; there is a peaceful and serene atmosphere in Krishnaji’s flat that invites visitors to calm down, quietly and gently let go of thoughts and slowly start to feel the serene breeze

that comes through the large windows, which face the Adyar River.

It is a great joy to walk the same grounds that the founders chose to be the heart of the movement for Human Brotherhood, and to visit the Museum where small pieces of history are kept protected from the ravages of time so that we can see and feel the wonderful journey of the Theosophical Society from the days of its foundation. It is important that we can look back and get inspired by the brave examples of those who opened the gates of light in the midst of ignorance and superstition without doubting that it is possible for human beings to live a life of Universal Brotherhood with love and care for all beings on the earth.



THEOSOPHY AROUND THE WORLD

At Adyar, the **Archives and Museum** has completed the huge work of digitizing H. P. Blavatsky’s scrapbooks, primarily due to the great service rendered by volunteers. But their availability has shrunk a lot lately, and the Society looks forward to more people volunteering to help soon. Over 20 researchers from around 12 countries used our archives.

The **Adyar Library and Research Centre** completed digitizing manuscripts initiated two years ago. Two pamphlets were published and twelve books have been selected for new publication and the work is in progress. The affiliation with the American Institute of Indian Studies for research continued this year.

The administrative office of the **Theosophical Order of Service** (TOS) shifted

to Adyar in India along with the move of its international Secretary, Ms Nancy Secrest, to take up the position of international Treasurer of the TS. This year the TOS continued its relief efforts to communities in India, Nepal, Italy, US, and Puerto Rico that were affected by cyclones, hurricanes, and earthquakes. Facilitating funds for the education of underprivileged youth, especially girls, in Asia and Africa, continued to be a major focus of the TOS. Medical camps were also organized. More than 1,000 patron members of 120 groups organized into 22 regions work in India. There was a change of guard at the top, with the retirement of Dr T. K. Nair after 6 years as National Secretary, who was replaced by Mr K. Sivaprasad.

The **Theosophical Publishing House**

has undertaken new initiatives like on-line catalogues instead of printed ones, Amazon and Facebook stores for selling books, Twitter and WhatsApp channels for customer communication, multicurrency invoicing for foreign buyers, web-based operations in areas such as invoicing, inventory tracking, CRM, delivery management, and so on. New payment methods based on online gateways and mobile apps were adopted to discourage the use of cash, postal money orders, and old-fashioned cheques.

The **School of the Wisdom** conducted courses in Adyar from November 2016 to January 2017. The four two-week sessions consisted of “The Neuroscience of Meditation” by Drs Bhaskar and Rajni Vyas, “Self-Transformation and the Spiritual Life” by Mr Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, Dr Chittaranjan Satapathy’s “Theosophy and the Upanishads”, and Dr Amit Goswami’s “Live Quantum, Be Happy”.

The **Olcott Education Society** continued its stellar performance in providing free schooling, vocational training, and social welfare to socially and economically underprivileged children and youth. This year, the Olcott School catered to 378 children of primary and high school classes, the Social Welfare Centre took care of 58 young children, and the Vocational Training Centre imparted free training to 26 young women in tailoring and clothes design, and 87 unemployed youngsters in soft skills.

Concerning the **international officers’ travels**, in February I led the Board meetings at “Olcott”, the **TSA** headquarters. On 2 March I gave a Thursday

Night Lecture also at “Olcott” on “Theosophy: A Spiritual Legacy for Humanity”, and another one on 27 April about “The History of Our Future”. In the **Netherlands**, I codirected, with Mr Hao Chin, Jr, planning meetings held at the International Theosophical Centre (ITC) in Naarden from 4 to 8 March. Back in the **USA**, in April I gave a talk at the Detroit Lodge and at the Summer National Convention at “Olcott” in July titled “Adyar News”. I also gave talks in Chicago and a couple of other places in Illinois. From the European Congress held in **Spain**, mentioned at the start of this address, I arrived at the TS in **Portugal** on 27 August to give talks in Lisbon and Porto. Then on to the **Netherlands**, where on 3 September, I held a lecture in the morning for members, and another in the afternoon for the general public, again at the ITC Naarden.

The international **Vice-President**, Dr Deepa Padhi, was requested in June to speak to Indian ladies in Houston, **Texas**, on “Women Empowerment Projects in TOS Odisha”. They were inspired and are planning to support one of the projects in the coming year. Two of them wished to become members of the TOS India, and she gave them the forms for joining. Another lady donated \$300 for the Women Empowerment Project of the Mahabharat Group, Odisha Region, India. In July Dr Padhi discussed with the Sr Manager, Human Resources, of Google in Sunnyvale, **California**, about pledging a matching grant with TOS India for educational projects. Google pledged to give 50%

through their Sr Manager. She then contacted “Asha Princeton”, an NGO which gives grants for educational projects in India, and she obtained the grant application forms. While still in California in July, she also gave an introductory short talk to a group of Junior Girl Scouts at their parents’ request on “Meditation through Visualization”. She not only talked about it, but *taught* them how to do it.

The international **Secretary**, Ms Marja Artamaa, was Chief Guest at the 107th annual conference of the **Karnataka** Theosophical Federation, held at Huliya in mid-October, along with the golden jubilee of the Sanmarga Theosophical Lodge. She gave a talk on ‘Inner and Outer Aspects of Universal Brotherhood’, and gave a message at the valedictory programme. In February she gave a lecture for the Madras Theosophical Federation at **Adyar** on ‘Dialogue — More than Discussion’. She attended the GC Planning meeting at ITC **Naarden** in early March and inaugurated the South India Conference in **Adyar** in

mid-April. Ms Artamaa attended the 38th European Congress in Barcelona, **Spain**, in late August, giving a talk on ‘From Definitions to Insight’.

Ms Nancy Secrest, TOS International Secretary, moved to Adyar in June to take up her new additional role as international **Treasurer**. In the earlier months, she fulfilled lecture and workshop commitments to TS and TOS groups in the USA, visiting Oregon, California, Washington State, and New York. After her arrival in India, she traveled to Kakinada to participate as chief guest in TOS India’s South Zonal Conference. She spoke about compassion, was honored to launch the Indian TOS website and enjoyed meeting many Indian members. At the end of July she gave a presentation at the Adyar Lodge, on the work of the TOS around the world. In August she made presentations at the summer school of the TS in England and the European Congress held in Barcelona, Spain, where she gave a talk with the title “Grow as the Flower Grows”.

VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM

The “Bangalore Cousins” presented a panoramic picture of the folk songs of different states of India. Starting from Sanskrit, they moved on to Kannada, Telugu, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Bengali, Hindi, English and so on. All these folk songs described natural beauty, different cultures, literature, great personalities and the specialties of each culture. Some of them mentioned the forest, flora and fauna of each state, its famous poets and so on.

The Sanskrit song described the great spiritual background of India: India stands for world peace. We love India but we also love the whole world. We stand for the Theosophical motto of Universal Brotherhood, “There is no religion higher than Truth”. The whole world is a single family (*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*).

Number of delegates registered as on Thursday, 4 January: 965

Printed at the Vasanta Press, The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai 600 020, India