

THE SPIRITUAL PATH AND THE PHOENIX MYSTERY

Mrs Linda Oliveira

(Summary of Public Lecture delivered on 26.12.2010)

Some months ago, thirty-three miners suddenly became imprisoned underground. For many who watched their story gradually unfold in the media, theirs was a story of human suffering, solidarity and, ultimately, of triumph. Their rescue centred on a narrow device which came to be known as the 'Phoenix 2 capsule'. Within the space of one day the men emerged, one by one, from their shackled bonds within the capsule, into the glare of Chilean daylight, and most likely into a life which had been somehow changed forever. This particular drama has become part of the global narrative of our time, yet it has deeper correspondences in relation to the human journey.

The term 'phoenix' was borrowed from the phoenix bird which is found in the mythologies of a number of cultures. The Greek name 'phoenix' means 'bright coloured'. A bird of gorgeous plumage, it had a peculiar mode of reproduction. The author Geoffrey Barborika

described this as follows:

Gathering twigs from spice-trees the bird fashioned a nest, upon which it sat and thus concluded its cycle of existence. As the phoenix died, the nest burst into flames, thus consuming the body of the bird. Then, from the ashes a young phoenix sprang into life, and when strong enough flew to Heliopolis [the 'city of the sun' in Greek] with what remained of the nest, dropping it upon the altar of the sun.

The existence and life cycle of such a bird may validly be subject to different symbolic interpretations. For example, at one level, the phoenix bird has been interpreted as the human personality which ceases after one life. From its ashes a new personality eventually springs into being, as the *skandhas* 're-ignite'. In fact, Madame Blavatsky actually viewed the phoenix as a generic symbol for several different kinds of cycles.

This bird manifests in a number of traditions with various names. For example, HPB described the Garuda as the Indian phoenix. Chief of the feathered race (birds), the Garuda is the *vahana* or vehicle on which Vishnu (Kala or 'time') is said to ride. In one interpretation of the Hindu *trimurti*, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are understood as will, wisdom and activity. To relate this to our human cycle of existence, if we take Vishnu as wisdom, then the *Garuda* becomes the vehicle of Wisdom. In this sense it may be regarded as an individual in whom the *Buddhic* principle has awakened, through which Divine Wisdom may be expressed.

The image of the phoenix may be applied to a series of profound changes which an individual undergoes on the Spiritual Path. *At the Feet of the Master* provides a map, in the form of a clear set of qualifications, to help orientate the aspirant in that direction. These qualifications are all preliminary to entering the Path proper.

What is the nature of the Spiritual Path? In reality it is something which *we* create within our consciousness, and the making of it becomes our inner phoenix. Brother Sri Ram wrote: 'What is known as the Path is really the all-round development of every side of one's true being, so that there is ready love and sympathy for all, a knowledge of essentials which is complete and full, disinterested action born out of a deep understanding, and comprehension of all things with which one is concerned.' He also described the Path in terms of

regaining the fundamental unity of one's being.

Professor Charles Birch, a former Challis Professor of Biology at the University of Sydney, described certain biological levels of organization which have correspondences in relation to the Spiritual Path. He wrote:

As one moves up levels of organization — quarks, electrons, atoms, molecules, cells, tissues and organs — the properties of each larger whole are given not merely by the units of which it is composed but also by the new relations between these units. It is not simply that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. The parts themselves are redefined and recreated in the process of evolution from one level to another.

It is similar in the case of human spiritual evolution.

The phoenix mystery itself has several facets. Who we can be, who we *will* be, is part of the mystery of repeated awakenings into progressively higher spheres of consciousness, beauty and freedom. The phoenix mystery is also the silent way in which the everyday, self-centred, personality eventually becomes transmuted and regenerated like the phoenix bird into something new and beautiful, allowing what is highest and noblest within us to emerge. Another part of the mystery is that we never know just *when* episodes of this interior alchemy will occur.

However, the master key to unlocking the phoenix within *is* knowable, although most difficult to achieve — simply put, it is unselfishness.



THEOSOPHICAL TEACHINGS ON THE PATH

Mr John Vorstermans

(Summary of Short Lecture delivered on 27.12.10)

Is there a Theosophical teaching regarding a Path? Is there a path we can travel with a destination in mind? If there is a path then is it the same path for everyone?

These are some of the questions that come to me when I reflect on 'Theosophical Teachings on the Path'.

One of the first points that comes into mind when I think of 'Path' are the words of Krishnamurti: 'Truth is a pathless land.' My first reaction is that Truth and Path are not things that are fixed in nature, i.e there is no single Path that we can walk down which will lead us to any truth.

In *The Voice of the Silence* we find the following quote (I, v.58):

Thou canst not travel on the Path before thou hast become that Path itself.

And in a footnote to this verse:

This 'Path' is mentioned in all the Mystic Works. As Krishna says in the Dhyaneswari: '... without moving is the travelling in this road. In this path, to whatever place one would go, that place one's own self becomes.' 'Thou art the Path' is said to the adept guru and by the latter to the disciple, after initiation.

This is an insightful comment. The statement would seem to imply that the path and we must become one. In other words it would suggest that the Theosophical Path to be travelled is not an external path but an internal one.

What does this mean?

Theosophy as taught by H. P. Blavatsky and the Mahatmas is not one of acquiring knowledge but rather a journey of self-transformation. This journey has a goal of self-realization, of finding out who we are, or perhaps a better word is to *wake ourselves up*. This journey can only take place when we come to realize that it is ourselves we must work on.

The Theosophical Teaching on the Path is all about building the right foundations for our journey to begin. We must build a foundation of integrity, honesty, respect for life, compassion and selfless service to others. Once we have established these qualities in our character an inner world begins to open to us, if we have the eyes to see it. This is a journey or path that takes you on the inner journey of self-discovery. Slowly we begin to wake up and truly find out who we are. Our purpose becomes clear.

As we walk down this transformation path we are confronted by our own obstacles, our conditioning, personal values that are out of alignment with universal values or truths, fixed views which are not correct, and so on. These are the real challenges we must face and overcome as we begin on our journey.

I think this is all summarized very well by Geoffrey Hodson in *Light of the Sanctuary* (p. 520):

To fail to keep within the teachings of theosophy the great ideal of the Goal of Discipleship, would be to take the Heart and the Soul out of theosophy. The maintenance of the Path Ideal within the teachings and thought of the Theosophical Society, is one of the greatest if not the greatest responsibility before

you in this life. Proceed. The Path is the hidden Life and Light of the World.

There is indeed a Path, an inner journey, and we have those who have pointed the way for us, as our guiding lights to it. They have shown the way — can we pick up the challenge and follow their example?

THE LIGHT WHICH LIGHTETH EVERY MAN

Mr S. Sundaram

(Summary of Short Lecture delivered on 27.12.10)

The small earthen lamp which makes things visible in a dark night is a holy symbol of how one's life ought to be. Its inspiring characteristic is that the oil and the wick burn themselves in order to light the path. They exhaust themselves to show light to others. The basic instruction and the lesson one gets from this conscious yet spontaneous effort is to keep away from selfish motives for the welfare of others, to minimize the pain, sorrow and suffering of others. For this, one must think, act and take steps positively in the right direction.

Some of us may not know what purifies one's thought and conscience but we at least know the factors which prevent us from nourishing and promoting our good or noble ideas and actions, and the forces which sometimes compel us to adopt wrong ways. We surely have a view of what is happening around us but our ambition, narrow outlook and limited perspective get the better of us and we have

disorder, discontent, disharmony and sometimes even cases of violence as a result. Unless we overcome our tendencies to acquire more and more for our narrow personal gain, the consequences are bound to be what we are witnessing in the country and elsewhere in the world today. It is not easy to get rid of the 'misconceptions that we embrace'. However, if one is seriously concerned and aware of these illusions he can at least reach the 'take off' stage. In human history there have been instances where revolution within the individual's psyche helped him to come out of the narrow self and encouraged him to work for a greater cause.

Indian tradition and culture have taught us that education is that which liberates, intensifies one's awareness and awakens one's conscience. Besides, the education which does not help in the development of the human-self is self-defeating.

The 'Path Finders' have shown that

man should liberate himself from fear, greed, desire, ambition and so forth; then only will he be able to come out of his miseries. Unless we find out the causes of our internal disorder, mere gathering of information in the name of knowledge and education will lead us nowhere. What is needed is not merely extraordinary brilliance or technical and scientific knowhow but 'moral wisdom'.

That thought or knowledge alone is meaningful which changes our conduct, life and psyche and also helps,

smoothens and facilitates our journey on the path. Long absence of positive thinking makes us work against our own self and against the welfare of society as well. It affects the individual and the society in an adverse manner. Therefore, in order to remove darkness from our mind we have to make an effort to light the lamp within, intensively as well as extensively, and develop our positive forces vertically (within ourselves) as well as horizontally (around us). As has been said, 'Light when fused with Love produces Life'.

THEOSOPHY AROUND THE WORLD

The special Theosophical event of the year was the tenth World Congress; such Congresses are held from time to time in some part of the world. This time it was held in the city of Rome, Italy, and was attended by more than five hundred persons. The main theme of the Congress was 'Universal Brotherhood without Any Distinction — the Road to Awareness'. The Congress had been very well organized by the Italian Section, with the Vice-President, Mrs Linda Oliveira, keeping in touch and making suggestions. There were thirty-nine countries represented, the largest contingent being from Italy. But there were also members from other areas besides Europe, and all met in a spirit of friendship. The whole atmosphere of the Congress was harmonious, and the speakers, and other programmes, were

very good. There is a comprehensive account with many photos on the website.

The Indian Section has a membership of 12,597, the largest by far in the Theosophical Society. There were a number of interesting programmes and various activities at the Section Headquarters at Varanasi. An important occasion was the conference on 'Peace and Conflict' which was held at the Headquarters in Varanasi. The South Indian Conference and the Study Camps in different parts of the Section all helped to strengthen the work. The national lecturers travelled to different places and besides them, there were others who did similar work in this area. The *Indian Theosophist* brought out a special issue for the centenary of the publication of *At the Feet of the Master*.

The Indian Section has some large problems concerning property; one of them is that the city of Varanasi proposes to take part of the peripheral area of the compound to widen a road.

The Theosophical Society has suspended its activities in Pakistan recently because the political conditions were most unfavourable.

The National President in Australia visited some of the Lodges in the Section, and Dr Edi Bilimoria, Education Coordinator, visited a number of places as did some other members who gave programmes in parts of the Section. The Education Unit has been preparing varied material to augment the work of the Lodges and Branches. Mr Colin Price toured the Section in March and visited a number of Lodges. The membership is about twelve hundred. The National Convention was held in Launceston, Tasmania, and the theme was on the interesting subject of 'Divine Wisdom in Art, Science and Philosophy'.

In New Zealand, the National Convention was held at Napier with the theme 'After 2012, what Next?' An increased number of participants attended the School of Theosophy which was held at the Tauhara Centre. Prof. Ravi Ravindra presented a series of lectures on 'Science and Spirituality'. Many members have passed away including Mr Conrad Jamieson who lived at Adyar for several years.

The TS in the Philippines has been very active. Mr R. Doval-Santos was elected as General Secretary with Mr Victor Peñaranda as his immediate

helper. The Guest Speaker at the Convention was former Chief Justice R. S. Passo.

Twenty-six delegates from the East and Central African Section attended the World Congress in Rome. The Nairobi Lodge has issued four-monthly programmes and is incorporating these in the Section magazine. The Nairobi Lodge has a rich collection of books in its library which is housed in part of the building that they own. Everything has gone on as usual. *Theosophy Explained* by Pavri was studied at Kitwe Lodge in Zambia and this resulted in an increase in the number of sympathizers. Mufulira Lodge is holding weekly programmes. Many of the Lodges in East and Central Africa do a lot of TOS work, and the Nairobi Lodge made a considerable donation as part of its programme.

In South Africa the National Convention was well attended and held at Durban. The theme was 'The Ocean of Theosophy'. The Germiston Lodge is constructing a new building, and programmes are going on well with an intensive course on basic Theosophy.

The membership of the West African Section has hardly changed. At Ghana, the Section celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary on 17 November 2010. Three members, Paul Kwakyi, John Boakye and Macford Attigah attended the World Congress in Rome. Copies of *The Theosophist* from Adyar are distributed to public libraries, universities, etc. The work in the Ivory Coast is beginning to show improvement after much political disturbance.



QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE PATH

(Session I of Theme)

(Summaries of Talks delivered on 27.12.10)

Prof. R. C. Tampi

The One Life finds expression in an infinite variety of forms, showing a progression of subtler and subtler layers of consciousness. The orderly progression of forms is called evolution. All great religions uphold the truth that man and God are one and indivisible throughout eternity. Man is God in the making. Human evolution is the movement towards rediscovery of human divinity, and has 'no conceivable beginning or imaginable end'. Theosophy gives a comprehensive account of this mysterious unfoldment.

The course of man's search for his real Self is called the Path; it represents

a state of consciousness. 'Thou canst not travel on the Path, until thou hast become the Path.' Mystics on the whole reject the possibility of such a Path. Paradoxical affirmations are typical of all statements concerned with transcendental truths. The Path, divided into the Probationary Path and the Path proper, is a process of self-purification through self-sacrifice and service. The most important qualifications are discrimination, desirelessness, Love, and so on, all implying freedom of various kinds.

There are initiations at different levels, at the end of which man begins his superhuman existence.

Mr Chong Sanne

All earnest students of theosophy are familiar with the qualifications for the Path. There is no scarcity of books on this subject. One only has to search under the keyword 'Path' in a theosophical library to find numerous books written to guide aspirants in pursuit of the Path. Some of the highly illuminating books include the likes of *Viveka-chudamani*, *The Masters and the Path*, *The Path of Discipleship* and *The Pathway to Perfection*. There is, however, no book that more succinctly tabulates the qualifications for the Path than the little book *At the Feet of the Master* by J. Krishnamurti. Together with *The Voice of the Silence* and *Light on the Path* these three little gems and the

accompanying commentaries, *Talks on the Path of Occultism*, Vols. I, II and III, provide possibly the most complete guidelines for aspirants to a very high degree of spirituality.

It must be noted that talks on the path of occultism is not the exclusive domain of Theosophy and the esoteric tradition. It would be true to say that all the major religions and exoteric traditions prepare their devotees for the path by exhorting the devotees to live a life of virtue and purity in accord and harmony with nature. It is said that the entire teaching of the Lord Buddha could be summarized in one verse — *Dhammapada*, verse 183:

To refrain from all evil, (<i>Vinaya Pitaka</i>)	the context of the exoteric tradition that
To do what is good, (<i>Sutta Pitaka</i>)	the speaker has talked about Qualifica-
To purify the mind, (<i>Abhidhamma Pitaka</i>)	tions for the Path. Reference is made to
This is the teaching of the Buddhas	the Lord Buddha in his very first sermon
Undoubtedly to accomplish the above	to his five disciples, commonly known
would be to qualify for the Path. It is in	as the <i>Dhammachakkappavattana Sutta</i> .

OPENING OF THE CONVENTION

Over 1200 delegates from twenty-eight countries are attending
the 135th International Convention

The Convention was inaugurated at 8 a.m. on 26 December with the Prayers of the Religions, followed by the Universal Prayer which was led by the President. The International Secretary, Mrs Kusum Satapathy, read out greetings received from overseas. The General Secretary of the Indian Section, Mr S. Sundaram, conveyed messages received from Federations, Lodges and individual members from different parts of India.

General Secretaries and other representatives of the Theosophical Society in various countries then presented greetings from their members, as listed below:

Dr Dara Tatray, Australia	Mrs Magaly Polanco, Dominican Republic
Mr Jan Jelle Keppler, Belgium	Mr Colin Price, England
Mr Marcos Resende, Brazil	Mr John Vorstermans, Indo-Pacific Fed.
Ms Marja Artamaa, Finland	Mr Francis O'Kelly, Ireland
Ms Tran-Thi-Kim-Dieu, France	Mr Abraham Oron, Israel
Mrs Manuela Kaulich, Germany	Ms Sandy Ravelli, New Zealand
Mr S. Sundaram, India	Mrs Agnes Gaasemyr, Norway
Mr Herry Ispoernomo, Indonesia	Mr Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, Philippines
Mr Antonio Girardi, Italy	Dr Eladio Polanco, Puerto Rico
Mrs Els Rijnker, Netherlands	Mrs Lily Chong, Singapore
Mr Carlos Guerra, Portugal	Mrs Breda Zagar, Slovenia
Mr Tom Davis, South Africa	Mr Isaac E. Jauli Davila, Spain
Mr Pertti Spets, Sweden	Mr S. M. Jayatilleke, Sri Lanka
Mrs Betty Bland, USA	Mrs Svitlana Gavrylenko, Ukraine

Following the greetings, the President, Mrs Radha Burnier, requested the Vice-President, Mrs Linda Oliveira, to welcome the gathering. Mrs Burnier then proceeded to deliver her Presidential Address, which includes a comprehensive report about the work of the Society around the world. At the end of her address, the President declared the Convention opened.

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