

THE KEYNOTE OF HUMAN LIFE — ALTRUISM

Mrs Radha Burnier

(Summary of Lecture delivered on 29.12.2009)

Altruism in the present day is not understood in its deepest sense. Competing with each other has become a rule. Motive and motive alone makes an action good or bad. HPB says: 'It is impossible to employ *spiritual* forces if there is the slightest tinge of selfishness remaining in the operator.'

It has been said 'meditation, abstinence, the observation of moral duties, gentle thoughts, good deeds, and kind words, as goodwill to all and entire observation of self, are the most effective means of obtaining knowledge and preparing for the reception of higher wisdom'. All the words in this long sentence are easy to appreciate, but difficult to follow.

In modern life, competition is crucial: children are taught to cultivate and emulate the spirit of competition in the sports field, in classrooms, in jobs and in daily life — for example, women are stimulated to appear beautiful, even if they are not.

Very few people are encouraged to develop the spirit of altruism, so evolution itself is becoming slow. Artists are jealous of each other, and ordinary people who go to parties appear to be courteous when they really feel envious.

Our work in the Theosophical Society is to destroy such attitudes. As HPB says: 'The key in each degree is the aspirant himself.' Our motto should be to know ourselves well. Then we can begin to change the kind of civilization which most people accept.

We can thus initiate real human welfare. Human relationship as it exists is regarded by most people as the height of real life, but in the larger sense this is not so. It is totally inadequate. Human life must go beyond itself and be able to enter the life of all creatures, of the earth and matter, to a higher form.

Science has achieved a lot, but much of it is used only for war purposes; so science instead of being knowledge becomes a source of destruction.

However, it is capable of becoming an ally of spiritual growth.

Gupta-vidya was considered sacred knowledge or wisdom but it could be given only to those who were discreet. Because it is powerful it was considered dangerous to give it to the world. So *Gupta-vidya* or knowledge of the inner nature of life or the forces of Nature is not suitable for the present time.

Atma-vidya is wisdom or knowledge of the soul, and this is for people who wish to be wise and unselfish before they obtain full knowledge. *Atma-vidya* is available to those who wish to become beneficent powers. HPB, in her own style, says that when people obtain knowledge without renunciation they may take to sorcery, including vivisection. Perhaps something of this was seen after the last war when experiments were done of a horrible nature in order to learn more. It is better to be less ambitious. In fact, the real *siddhi-s* or powers were meant for those who follow true occultism or Theosophy. HPB says it is altruism; and it throws him who practises it out of the ranks of the living altogether. His personality disappears and he becomes merely 'a beneficent force in nature'.

This is one of the ways to enter the presence of the Higher Self or the Master. The Masters are people who will not allow 'fire to smoulder under a thin layer of ashes'. The Higher Self is the divine consciousness inside ourselves

— all the good feelings and aspirations are derived from this — it also shows one what to do to be alive within oneself when there are the animal desires and passions which are normal for one who suffers them. There has to be subjugation of the lower self.

The Higher Self cannot assimilate the lower. The animal principles have to be eliminated for this to happen. When the lust of the flesh is dead the personal self is also killed. The divine Self alone can be said to be with the Master within.

HPB says that even love of wife and family, when analysed completely, are part of the lower self. A mother will do things for her child at the expense of other children. He alone who would profit from the universal soul of humanity without distinction of race, sex, creed and so forth can really lead — because he disregards egoism completely. True occultism is practised by him — this is Theosophy or wisdom.

The aspirant must therefore choose between the worldly life and the life of a true Theosophist. The great cry of humanity finds a voice only in him.

This is the real altruism — the *Atma-vidya* which casts beneficent influences on all. This may be why it has been said: 'Narrow is the gate and strait the way that leads to the eternal.' We always hope that the study of Theosophy and its practise in daily life will lead people towards such altruism.



THE MYSTERY OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

Mr Colin Price

(Public Lecture delivered on 29.12.09)

We are aware that we are conscious. This is a sort of duality which arises out of our self-consciousness which seems to be unique to man. Although the animals exhibit various degrees of intelligence they do not demonstrate any of this self-consciousness although some of them have very complex brain cells like man. Research into the function of different areas of the brain has failed to discover any place in the brain where there are cells which could explain the human experience described as psychicism and mysticism. Then there are degrees of consciousness depending upon our development and even upon how awake we are. In fact there is no obvious limit to the expansion of consciousness to give us a clue to what is our ultimate potential.

H. P. Blavatsky tells us that everything, even stones, must have some degree of consciousness because they are a part, however small, of the manifestation of the Absolute. However, it appears that only man has self-consciousness. Wisdom requires higher consciousness than intelligence. Science strives for artificial intelligence but there is a vast difference between that and the sort of consciousness associated with imagination and even

more with man's creative imagination, one of his greatest attributes. An even higher consciousness is achieved by the mystics which enables them to understand higher or hidden occult teachings. However much we succeed in raising our level of consciousness individually it is still minute compared to the Absolute Consciousness because we are such minute sparks of the Divine.

The scientific quest to understand consciousness from a purely biological standpoint may well be as doomed as the attempt of the fool or clown to lift himself up by his own bootlaces. The really hard question is: 'Why do physical processes give rise to the subjective experience of consciousness?'

Trance has been investigated as an altered state of consciousness. There are many types of trance but they all are at the boundary between physical and psychic awareness. This is also the dividing line between external and internal thought stimulation.

There are several other boundaries such as that between the instinctive and the intuitive levels of awareness. Intuition is described as 'the immediate knowledge ascribed to angelic and spiritual beings with whom vision and

knowledge are identical' and 'the intuition of genius which is unconsciousness of any process'.

The phenomenon of simultaneous discoveries in science is an example of the intuitive level of consciousness. It has been observed by many research workers over a wide variety of different fields of research.

The study of different types of dreams and the various states of consciousness

associated with them gives us another field of insight into the complex nature of our human consciousness.

The possibility of immortality and the persistence of our higher individual consciousness after the death of our brains makes the whole mystery and nature of our consciousness a subject of crucial importance to everyone who is interested in the meaning and significance of life.

THEOSOPHY AROUND THE WORLD

The Olcott Education Society at Adyar has four main activities. The Olcott Memorial High School has 539 students including 236 girls. Fifty out of fifty-four students were successful in their final examinations. The students participated in extra-curricular activities like gardening and various crafts. The HPB Hostel has 23 students. These students are given training in Yoga, meditation and exercises.

Ninety-six children attend the Social Welfare Centre for day care. Tailoring and weaving courses were also conducted at the centre. At the Besant Memorial Animal Dispensary, Dr P. D. Jagannathan and his team treated 35 to 40 animals per day on an average, including some surgeries. The outreach programmes were conducted in nearby villages and 80 to 100 animals were treated on each visit.

The Besant Scout Camping Centre had 1500 children using the facilities

and during their stay they experienced living with nature and gained some appreciation of the Theosophical Society.

Dr K. N. Neelakantan Elayath has been appointed Director of the Library since early September; before that he had been working a little at the Adyar Library. He was former Professor and Head of the Department of Sanskrit at the University of Calicut, his special interest being Vedanta, and Indian Philosophy. To his credit several books have been published. Dr S. Sankaranarayanan retired as Director because of his age and state of health, but he is going on with some work of the Library to help out. The Library published one volume of the Adyar Library Bulletin, *Brahmavidya*. The Library has acquired about 1600 books during the year. The supply of 42,280 new frames of photocopies to researchers was carried out.

The Theosophical Publishing House did well financially for the fourth successive year increasing the sales volume. An online book store has been put in place. Seven reprints were published during the year. *The Theosophist* and *The Adyar Newsletter* were regularly published. The subscription rates had to be increased on account of the increase in postal charges. Publication of a new title *The World Around Us*, comprising 'On the Watch-Tower' articles from *The Theosophist* (1980–2007) written by Mrs Radha Burnier, was released by Prof. M. S. Swaminathan at a function at the Headquarters Hall on 22 November 2009. A short biography on the life of N. Sri Ram by Mr Pedro Oliveira, has been taken up by The Theosophical Publishing House and made available in the bookshop. Other books and reprints are continuously being published because there is a demand for them.

The January 2009 session of the School of the Wisdom was directed by Prof. Ravi Ravindra which many students attended. Dr Ravindra dealt with many important texts including the *Bhagavadgita*. Later in the year the Venerable Ajahn Sumedho Bhikkhu conducted a retreat to which people came from faraway places. In November 2009, Dr Satish Inamdar lectured to students on 'Brain Consciousness and Transformation'. Later Professor C. A. Shinde lectured on 'Human Evolution and Spirituality'. The students were appreciative of the classes they attended.

I have travelled this year to various places within India, including the Section Headquarters, Calcutta, and Surat where the Gujarat Federation Conference took place. A number of members attended these meetings. The Vice-President visited several places including the Telugu area and the Karnataka Federation Conference at Chitradurga.

I do not wish to say much about Adyar as it makes my report too long. However, I would like to point out that as members we should try to confine ourselves to acquiring and possessing as little as possible. In the old days there were people who were devoted to the religious life like Meister Eckhart, and in India we had people like Kabir who was a simple weaver, but until today their names shine outstandingly among those who study religious lore. Wealth has nothing to do with religious understanding.

Today there are some people in the world who have enormous wealth, most of whom waste their time on frivolities, but we must as individuals and as a body of people set a different example — one of frugality, simplicity and generosity. Perhaps, the greatest danger that the world faces is of material destruction caused by the activities of human beings. Some experts are of the view that unless humanity changes its ways and adopts a simple lifestyle great disaster may follow. The environment cannot accept human activity, however foolish, beyond a certain level.

We can, therefore, seriously give consideration to a life of simplicity, with

lofty thoughts and aspiration, because humanity is meant to progress along spiritual and not along material lines. We are proceeding headlong materially, but very few human beings yet realize that this may lead to grave disaster.

We have to share this planet with animals, birds, insects, plants and the earth itself. Are we really willing with all our hearts to live a simple life, to

share with all creatures and turn our thoughts and hopes to the future which will be one of realization, at the physical level of Universal Brotherhood? This is not an idle question. We have to live in this world, and we must face the problems it poses — which have now become problems which mankind is creating.

RADHA BURNIER

VARIETY ART PROGRAMME BY MRS AMBIKA BUCH AND HER GROUP

(Adyar Theatre, 29 December 2009)

The delegates had an evening of delight and superior art performance by a team of artists of the 'Aradana' group, all of whom are graduates in dance from the Kalakshetra College of Fine Arts. The evening programme was directed by Srimathi Ambika Buch, a former professor at Kalakshetra. The event included pieces of traditional invocation, dance forms relating to different states in India, including Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Manipur and Rajasthan among others. The exquisite costumes, the accompaniments, and the soulful music rendered by Mrs Hema Sethuraman, together with the beautifully performed dances lifted all those present to a world of aesthetic delight and enjoyment. The traditional and powerful Thillana came as an excellent and fitting finale to a most rewarding programme. The international Vice-President, Mrs Linda Oliveira, conveyed on behalf of those present a heartfelt appreciation to all the artistes as well as to Mrs Buch for their splendid performance.

DEVOTIONAL MEETING

(Held at the Bharata Samaj Temple on 27 December 2009)

All great teachers have extolled the quality of devotion as an integral aspect of the spiritual life. A traditional feature of every International Convention, this year's Devotional Meeting was conducted by Mr S. Sundaram, General Secretary of the Indian Section. He sang *bhajan*-s from Kabir, the widely acclaimed poet-

saint of Varanasi, as well as from other authors of the classical Indian devotional literature like Purandaradas and Surdas. Joining Mr Sundaram in singing a number of songs were Miss K. Jaishree and Miss Chandrika. The meeting took place in the hallowed precincts of the Bharata Samaj Temple, a most appropriate venue for us to lift our hearts and minds to the Source of all glory and all mercy.

THE FUTURE OF BROTHERHOOD

C. Jinarajadasa

(The American Theosophist, March 1943)

Sad as our present lot is, there is not a journalist, a writer, a lecturer, or worker for social service, who is not dreaming and hoping for a future. And through all their dreams there runs a golden thread; it is Brotherhood — Brotherhood not only within the nation, but throughout the whole world, excluding none, be he black or white or brown or yellow, including all, the criminal as the law-abiding, the poor as the rich, the peasant as the aristocrat . . .

Our work as Theosophists is above all things to proclaim this message of Brotherhood. But we proclaim it not as

an ideal, as some beautiful dream born in the imagination of tender-hearted men, but as reality, as a law of nature. Just as by the law of gravity all of us are held to the surface of the earth, in every place on its surface, so all of us are bound in the chains of one Brotherhood. To know ourselves as divine is the supreme task before us all. All else follows. When we have as our motto: “Divinity, Equality, Fraternity”, Liberty follows as a consequence. For how should I ever dream of coercing my brother who shares my Divinity?

WHAT IS A NUCLEUS OF UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD?

John B. S. Coats

(The Theosophist, April 1974)

There is an equality of a basic nature in that all men come from the same source and are wending their way to the same goal; but in a practical sense, each man is an individual and has to have individual attention. We may

never push aside a person that karma has put in our way, but rather be prepared to help, or to listen to everyone, including those who do not appear to be important. For this is the real practice of brotherhood. . . .

TEACHINGS ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH

(From *The Voice of the Silence*, Fragment II)

Search for the Paths. But, O Lanoo, be of clean heart before thou startest on thy journey.

Before thou takest thy first step learn to discern the real from the false, the ever-fleeting from the everlasting. Learn above all to separate Head-learning from Soul-Wisdom, the “Eye” from the “Heart” doctrine.

Yea, ignorance is like unto a closed and airless vessel; the soul a bird shut up within. It warbles not, nor can it stir a feather; but the songster mute and torpid sits, and of exhaustion dies.

But even ignorance is better than Head-learning with no Soul-wisdom to illuminate and guide it.

The seeds of Wisdom cannot sprout and grow in airless space. To live and reap experience the mind needs breadth and depth and points to draw it towards the Diamond Soul. Seek not those points in *Maya*'s realm; but soar beyond illusions, search the eternal and the changeless SAT, mistrusting fancy's false suggestions.

For mind is like a mirror; it gathers dust while it reflects. It needs the gentle breezes of Soul-Wisdom to brush away the dust of our illusions. Seek O Beginner, to blend thy Mind and Soul.

Shun ignorance, and likewise shun illusion. Avert thy face from world deceptions; mistrust thy senses, they are false. But within thy body – the shrine of thy sensations – seek in the Impersonal for the “eternal man”; and having sought him out, look inward: thou art Buddha.

(From *Light on the Path*, Rule 8)

Learn from sensation and observe it, because only so can you commence the science of self-knowledge, and plant your foot on the first step of the ladder. Grow as the flower grows, unconsciously, but eagerly anxious to open its soul to the air. So must you press forward to open your soul to the eternal. But it must be the eternal that draws forth your strength and beauty, not desire of growth. For in the one case you develop in the luxuriance of purity, in the other you harden by the forcible passion for personal stature.

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