

PASSION, DISPASSION, AND COMPASSION

V. Ramasubramanian

(Summary of Besant Lecture delivered on 1.1.2016)

While passion and compassion are attributes of *manas*, the mind, dispassion is an attribute of *buddhi*, the intellect. But, fortunately or unfortunately, it is the mind that either binds or liberates. This is why the Upanishads declared, '*manayeva manushyaanaam kaaranam bandha mokshaye*' — mind is the root cause for both bondage as well as salvation. When *buddhi*, the intellect reigns supreme, having absolute control over the mind, an ordinary emotion which takes the form of passion, gains *viswarupam* to become compassion. In other words, it is dispassion, the Sanskrit equivalent of which is *vairagya*, that transforms passion into compassion. This, in essence, is the connecting thread between passion, dispassion and compassion.

What modern psychology has categorized as harmonious passion and obsessive passion, is not something new in the world of religion and spirituality. We know that passion is born out of desire and it leads to attachment.

Great teachers say that our desires should be like horses. You must be in a position to mount and dismount a horse whenever needed.

Interestingly, the word passion is synonymous with the word 'rage'. The Sanskrit equivalent of the word 'passion' is '*raga*'. What is *raga* in Sanskrit, is rage in English. In other words, both Sanskrit and English have similar words to describe the emotion of passion. Passion is born out of desire that leads to attachment.

Once your attachment to an object is removed, the pain and suffering that is likely to arise out of that object is also removed. Therefore, the Oriental religions advocate *vairagya* or detachment as the panacea for sorrow. The difficulty with *vairagya* is, that detachment or non-attachment is a disincentive to action or *karma*. The word *kama* (desire) is only one letter short of the word *karma* (action). The letter 'r' probably stands for *raga*, which induces all human beings to

achieve their *kama* through 'karma'.

The relationship between action and attachment is made clear in the Bhagavadgita that advocates a love for action, but a detachment towards the fruits of action. Since desire and attachment act as the prime mover for action and also since action is inevitable to sustain the world, the Oriental religions of the world advocated a desire of a different nature and a passion of different dimension.

What is compassion? Compassion is a sustained and practical determination to do whatever is possible and necessary to help alleviate the sufferings of others. While talking about compassion, we must understand that it is far greater and nobler than pity. Pity has its roots in fear, and a sense of

arrogance and condescension, sometimes even a smug feeling of 'I'm glad it's not me'. Compassion, then, is to know all beings are the same and suffer in similar ways, to honour all those who suffer, and to know you are neither separate from nor superior to anyone.

To summarise, passion which is born out of emotion and which is an attribute of the mind, if channelized properly, can be converted into *bhakti yoga*. Dispassion or *vairagya*, if consecrated as the *peetha* or foundation of all our activities, we may become *karma yogis*. But, if we have eyes that well up with tears and a heart that melts at the sufferings of all creatures, living or dead, animate or inanimate, we might possibly have reached the state of *jnana yoga*.



THE POWER OF AWARENESS

Vicente Hao Chin, Jr

(Summary of Public Lecture delivered on 3.1.2016)

There is perhaps no factor more important to self-development and the spiritual life than awareness. Awareness has the capacity to normalize what is abnormal; integrate the disparate elements of the psyche; and transcend a level of consciousness. These capacities have both very practical and highly spiritual functions. On the physical level, it enables us to deal with the sorrow caused by pain without evading the experience of pain (which is a necessary protective mechanism of the body). On the etheric level, it resolves the problem of tension and

chronic stress. On the emotional level, it helps release unresolved emotional 'push-buttons' that are the primary causes of human unhappiness (such as fear, anger, depression, hurt, hatred, guilt and aversion). These pent-up energies are unreleased subconscious congestions that become automatic reaction patterns and when, strong, take control of the life of an individual. On the gross mental level, it enables us to become aware of the automatic behaviour of thinking; we then begin to consciously take charge of the contents of our minds.

On the subtle mental level, awareness enables us to enter into meditation proper (*dhyana*) which is to consciously sustain attention on a stream of thought without the use of mantras or tools. This stage of consciousness is impersonal and enables the spiritual life. The ending of unhappiness is the foundation of non-attachment. On the spiritual level, awareness is necessary to perceive the realities that are transcendent and beyond thinking. This is the realm of spiritual intuition or *prajna*. Beyond the spiritual is the state where the sense of self is transcended. The highest level of awareness is required here — the awareness of the root of one's nature or 'ego-hood'. When this centre fades on account of true non-attachment, then consciousness becomes undifferentiated. It is a state of non-duality.

The exploration of awareness enables us to realize certain insights on the nature of awareness. Awareness is energy of the consciousness that is

not identified with the ego sense. It is what we can call *peripheral awareness*. It converts or gets identified with other energies: emotions, thought. The less we waste it on emotions and on less important preoccupations, the more awareness-energy we have. What we are not aware of, we cannot master. What we are aware of, we integrate into the conscious mind, removing contradictions, and we transcend it. Awareness grows with meditation or daily mindfulness.

There are approaches in the nurturing of awareness such as deep abdominal breathing, intentional experiencing without judgment and meditation. Nurturing of constant awareness should be an essential part of spiritual practice and the culture of a spiritual organization, such as the Theosophical Society. It is essential to encourage the widespread practice of meditation, especially among the young. This is essential for the attainment of states of being that characterize true maturity.



INDIAN SECTION CONVENTION — I

The 125th Indian Section Convention was held on 1 January 2016. Greetings were given by the Secretaries of the following Federations: Assam, Bengal, Bombay, Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, Madras, Marathi, Rayalaseema, Tamil, Telugu, Utkal, and Uttar Pradesh.

Inaugurating the Convention, the President, Mr Tim Boyd wished the

Indian Section a 'Happy Birthday', for even though the Section charter signed by Col H. S. Olcott was dated 17 November 1890, it was to take effect on 1 January 1891, exactly 125 years ago. Mr Boyd suggested that perhaps this year we would not merely make a wish but rather make it our will in the coming year to open ourselves more deeply and access our higher

possibilities that are ever waiting for us, more profoundly.

Mr S. Sundaram, General Secretary, in his address said that human society today is passing through a crisis which actually is a 'crisis in values in human life'. People in general do not realize that values are the dynamic forces which control and guide human actions. If we look at the world scenario, it would be evident how theosophical teachings are becoming an inevitable, urgent need of the day. They guide us to live in harmony with people, Nature and with one's own self. Revitalizing the Theosophical Lodge, Federation and

the Section depends on the effort, depth and vitality of the members. The present as well as the future will depend on the commitment, effort and the inner strength of the members. The stronger the members are from within, the stronger will be the organization. Mr Sundaram then presented the Annual Report for the year 2014-2015 giving a general survey of the work done. It was followed by the Treasurer's Report presented by Bro. P. S. Panchakshari.

Dr Chittarajan Satapathy, International Vice-President, chaired the Convention.



INDIAN SECTION CONVENTION — II

Listening to the March of the Future

(Summaries of Symposium Talks delivered on 3.1.2016)

Geetha Jaikumar

The world is increasingly a place of violent conflict, hatred and brutal atrocities. Religious intolerance is on the rise. In an age of extensive connectivity and networking, we are finding a generation of youngsters reclusive, lacking social skills, and experiencing difficulty in having meaningful relationships. The number of poor people in the world has increased, with more people going to bed hungry than ever before. A skewed distribution of wealth coupled with lack of uniform development makes for an unjust and exploitative society and provides a fertile breeding ground for extremism and insurgency. There

is extreme levels of pollution and environmental degradation. It is easy to list the ills and problems of society and easier still to be bogged down with a sense of fatalism and hopelessness.

A members of the Theosophical Society we need to do more, beginning with ourselves. Mahatma Gandhi famously said, 'Be the change you want to see in the world', and any change we wish for can come about only when we internalize and change ourselves first. We need to be mindful in all our activities, from the smallest to the biggest task on hand. The attitude that we bring to our work is extremely important. The scale of the problems

of the world is so immense that it is daunting. Rather than giving up the task as impossible and beyond our reach, we should each of us do what we can to make the world a better place and bring peace and harmony to our community. The ripple effect is far. We can opt for a more frugal and simple

lifestyle, by adopting the motto of the minimalists, that is, *eliminate excess, go with less.*

Let us rediscover the joy in the little everyday things and reconnect with Nature. We need to smile, breathe and have gratitude for all the gifts that we have received.

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Shikhar Agnihotri

As theosophists, we should gradually acquaint ourselves with deep theosophical knowledge so that we may not only correlate it with the modern scientific findings, but also point out its limitations and thus try to awaken a few scientific minds. However, the greater challenge are those who think that this knowledge can be applied by only great souls. This mentality prevents us from making a whole-hearted effort.

Another kind of inertia that very often overcomes us is the belief that it is the job of the office bearers, be it at any level, to do everything. However, it is members like you and I who are the ambassadors of the TS in our immediate surroundings and here comes the importance of a Lodge. A Lodge is that nucleus which is the very source and a channel of subtler forms of energies and without a doubt a blessing for that community. In this

context, more number of centres, strategically located, will ensure higher attendance and will make its influence felt in that area as well.

Another important aspect is motive which has to be to bring Theosophy to more and more people whether or not they become members. We can generate a force which practically moves unopposed and will not only be positive but also long lasting. Last but not the least, working together for some social cause also tends to bring the members closer and the TOS is really an asset in this. Ideally with every TS Lodge there should be a TOS group as well or at least the TS Lodge should engage in some TOS activities.

We all can and are contributing in this effort, in several ways like sharing our time or finances, by giving a lecture, by writing an article, by acts of charity, by spreading theosophical literature, by attending a study class, or by meditation.

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Mahesh S. U.

Social media has for the past few years visibly impacted every aspect of human life. Traditional media had typically one

‘source’ of information, and the rest were receivers. The source depending on its own interest would release information, while the receiver in the

absence of an alternative source, would believe it or interpret the information out of personal experience. Now, with the improvement in technology and its low cost not only has there been a revolutionary multiplication of receivers, but also every receiver has become a potential source of information without limitations of geography, time, or even language.

Three events that occurred in the year 2015 will exemplify this impact of social media in our current world. First, the UN Climate Change Conference held at Paris was able to draft a legally binding agreement to limit greenhouse gas emission. Though the UN has been dithering on this for years, it is the unprecedented sharing of instant information among scientists, that resulted in this achievement.

Second example is the unexpected results obtained by Harvard Business Review, during the annual selection of

the top 100 Chief Executive Officers of the world for the year 2015, compared to earlier years. CEOs of little known but well performing companies came to occupy the top spots. Third, the recent severe floods in Chennai were able to elicit the prompt and effective intervention by ordinary people from all walks of life, including from other Indian states, in the form of rescue activities, food, clothing, medical aid, and shelter to the affected, only because of the availability of social media.

There always exists an opportunity to discover something new, to change an existing thing for the better, or to do the right thing in different ways. All it requires is an open mind and a pure heart. Every individual has to make the choice to take the next higher step towards fulfilling our inevitable destiny, which can be postponed, but never escaped. The earlier the choice is made, the sooner we arrive.

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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 3.1.2016)

Uma Bhattacharyya

Transformation of the world is possible only when we change the pattern of thoughts within us. The world is nothing but a reflection of our thoughts. Richness of mind and heart lies in selflessness. While the physical body resorts to service, the mind must embrace the world with love. Love is being in harmony with one and all.

Our basic underlying nature is

loving and peaceful. During the course of our lifetime an overlay of fear, anger and negative thoughts and emotions accrue and cover our beautiful inner nature. We can discern our true nature when we remove the outer layer of negative and harmful emotions through love. Feelings of love arise from purity of heart which can be attained only when one is elevated.

Spiritual practices help us to

develop the purer mind and subtler intellect which lead to realization of universal brotherhood. True social service demands soul service first. Social help which has a basic current

of oneness between the one who gives and the one who receives can work wonders for both. It is the responsibility of each one of us to reach out to the world with love and compassion.

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John Vostermans

In 'knowing and living unity' we are compelled to compassionate service. We know intellectually we are connected by a unifying principle, yet we still see division everywhere. As we begin to live, as a universal being, a shift in our awareness takes place. Our awareness from separateness to wholeness becomes a reality, we begin to awaken, our perceptions change, our worldview shifts as we start to perceive

everything as aspects of a universal expression.

Compassion is one of the Keys to awakening ourselves from our conditioned reality of separateness. Compassion can develop spontaneously through an experience, through service or through pain that we experience that opens our hearts to the needs of others. The separateness we see begins slowly to fade as a universal reality opens up to our awareness.

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Nancy Secret

The focus of our existence as human beings is self-realization. As we progress along this path, we become aware of, our *buddhi* nature. With this, compassion based on a sense of responsibility for all beings becomes a driving force in our lives, and we act as a bodhisattva acts, for the good of all. In 1908, Annie Besant formed the Theosophical Order of Service at the

behest of members who wanted to put the first Object of the Theosophical Society into action. These words, from Annie Besant say it all:

The spiritual man must lead a higher life than the life of altruism. He must lead the life of self-identification with all that lives and moves. There is no 'other' in this world; we are all one. Each is a separate form, but one Spirit moves and lives in all.

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THEOSOPHY AROUND THE WORLD

The **Spanish Section** held a 4-day Silent Retreat in Girona on Annie Besant's Universal Prayer, 'O, Hidden Life . . .', directed by Ms Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu, with 44 in attendance. She also conducted a 3-day seminar in Alicante on 'Self-Realization', attended by 40

people. At Easter the Section held its 37th 3-day 'Iberian Days' programme with 40 attending, on the theme 'The Unity of Life'. Their 7-day Summer School, with 107 participants, was on 'Karma, Dharma, Nirvana, and Mindfulness', and their guest speaker

was Mr Chaganti V. K. Maithreya, from Chennai. Dr José Foglia, from Uruguay, visited Arjuna Lodge and gave a public lecture on 'Meditation vs Stress', which was appreciated by many.

The TS in **Portugal** held public sessions in Lisbon with different formats, from public talks to panels and discussion groups. Ms Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu, Chairman of the European Federation of the TS, gave three public talks on 'The Science of Theosophy'. Ms Maria José Barrios, from the Spanish Section, delivered a public talk at Lisbon and Oporto on 'Reflections on the Path'. There are now 123 members in the Section, a slight decrease, as reported by Mr Carlos Guerra, their General Secretary.

Mrs Manuela Kaulich, General Secretary of the TS in **Germany**, writes that their Southern Meeting was held in September in Regensburg, with Mr Chaganti V. K. Maithreya as visiting speaker. The theme was 'Dharma, Karma, and Yoga'. Many members and guests came to listen to his five talks. At the end of his visit, he gave a public talk in Munich on 'Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science', attended by over 60 guests. The Section membership rose from 112 to 119, with younger people being attracted by their theosophical work. The **Dutch Section** held a members' National Board meeting at the end of May where a new General Secretary, Mr Wim Leys, was elected,

succeeding Ms Els Rijneker. The Section's activities included two 5-day seminars, one in May with Prof. P. Krishna on 'A Revolution in Education' and another in June on HPB's *Esoteric Instructions* led by Michael Gomes. Another 'Dutch Day' was held on 23 August, an interactive programme for members only, that Mr Boyd participated in. On the previous evening he met with the younger members of the Dutch Section. The Section membership is now 330, a drop of 17 since last year. The TS in **Austria** stands steady at 49 members. All three Lodges offer weekly lectures throughout the year on classical theosophical teachings and related subjects and lectures are regularly uploaded on their website. In March the annual meeting of the Austrian Association was held, where Mr Albert Schichl was re-elected as Organizing Secretary. The **Belgian Section** and its Lodges strengthened activities and functioning during the year. They also welcomed international guests in their Brussels headquarters. General Secretary Sabine van Osta welcomed Mrs Nancy Secrest, International Secretary of the Theosophical Order of Service, who visited in May and rekindled the work of the TOS in Belgium. She also welcomed Dr Chittaranjan Satapathy, international Vice-President, in July, who gave two much-appreciated lectures. The Section has 92 members in 9 Lodges.

Number of delegates registered as on 3 January: 939

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