

Freedom of Thought

As the Theosophical Society has spread far and wide over the world, and as members of all religions have become members of it without surrendering the special dogmas, teachings and beliefs of their respective faiths, it is thought desirable to emphasize the fact that there is no doctrine, no opinion, by whomsoever taught or held, that is in any way binding on any member of the Society, none which any member is not free to accept or reject. Approval of its three Objects is the sole condition of membership. No teacher, or writer, from H. P. Blavatsky onwards, has any authority to impose his or her teachings or opinions on members. Every member has an equal right to follow any school of thought, but has no right to force the choice on any other. Neither a candidate for any office nor any voter can be rendered ineligible to stand or to vote, because of any opinion held, or because of membership in any school of thought. Opinions or beliefs neither bestow privileges nor inflict penalties. The Members of the General Council earnestly request every member of the Theosophical Society to maintain, defend and act upon these fundamental principles of the Society, and also fearlessly to exercise the right of liberty of thought and of expression thereof, within the limits of courtesy and consideration for others.

Freedom of the Society

The Theosophical Society, while cooperating with all other bodies whose aims and activities make such cooperation possible, is and must remain an organization entirely independent of them, not committed to any objects save its own, and intent on developing its own work on the broadest and most inclusive lines, so as to move towards its own goal as indicated in and by the pursuit of those objects and that Divine Wisdom which in the abstract is implicit in the title 'The Theosophical Society'.

Since Universal Brotherhood and the Wisdom are undefined and unlimited, and since there is complete freedom for each and every member of the Society in thought and action, the Society seeks ever to maintain its own distinctive and unique character by remaining free of affiliation or identification with any other organization.



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THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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The Theosophical Society is composed of students, belonging to any religion in the world or to none, who are united by their approval of the Society's Objects, by their wish to remove religious antagonisms and to draw together men of goodwill, whatsoever their religious opinions, and by their desire to study religious truths and to share the results of their studies with others. Their bond of union is not the profession of a common belief, but a common search and aspiration for Truth. They hold that Truth should be sought by study, by reflection, by purity of life, by devotion to high ideals, and they regard Truth as a prize to be striven for, not as a dogma to be imposed by authority. They consider that belief should be the result of individual study or intuition, and not its antecedent, and should rest on knowledge, not on assertion. They extend tolerance to all, even to the intolerant, not as a privilege they bestow but as a duty they perform, and they seek to remove ignorance, not punish it. They see every religion as an expression of the Divine Wisdom and prefer its study to its condemnation, and its practice to proselytism. Peace is their watchword, as Truth is their aim.

Theosophy is the body of truths which forms the basis of all religions, and which cannot be claimed as the exclusive possession of any. It offers a philosophy which renders life intelligible, and which demonstrates the justice and the love which guide its evolution. It puts death in its rightful place, as a recurring incident in an endless life, opening the gateway to a fuller and more radiant existence. It restores to the world the Science of the Spirit, teaching man to know the Spirit as himself and the mind and body as his servants. It illuminates the scriptures and doctrines of religions by unveiling their hidden meanings, and thus justifying them at the bar of intelligence, as they are ever justified in the eyes of intuition.

Members of the Theosophical Society study these truths, and theosophists endeavour to live them. Everyone willing to study, to be tolerant, to aim high, and to work perseveringly, is welcomed as a member, and it rests with the member to become a true theosophist.

The Old Man and Theosophy: The Life and Work of Bill Lawrence — I

TIM BOYD

I WOULD like to share some stories connected with the life of someone very influential in my life, and in the life of a number of young people in the Chicago area. His name was Bill Lawrence. Later in life he became a member of the Theosophical Society (TS). To the many young people who gathered around him he was known as “the Old Man”. He was an exceptional man who chose to utilize his gifts as a great service at a very needful time in many people’s lives.

There is an old wives’ tale that talks about certain children who are born with a flap of skin covering their eyes like a veil. It is called a cowl and it is believed to indicate the possession of a profound clairvoyance. The only other person I heard speak about this was Dora Kunz, a former President of the TS in America, founder of the Therapeutic Touch healing method, and medical clairvoyant. She said that she was born with this cowl and was aware of the old wives’ tale surrounding it. The physician/astrologer/prophet Nostradamus (c. 1503 – 1566) was also believed to have been born with a cowl.

Bill’s family was non-theosophically oriented, living in a Central Illinois coal-mining town called Georgetown. To this

day there are only 3,000 people in the whole town. Early in life he became aware that the way he was seeing the world was very different from that of his friends and the people around him. At a time when children were supposed to be “seen and not heard” he was continually speaking up about the things he was seeing, things that were invisible to others.

From time to time the Old Man would share stories from his life. Many of them were so alien to my experience that often they were hard for me to believe. Having grown up in New York City, I was accustomed to hearing a lot of tall tales. So in my early years around the Old Man I had doubts about the accuracy of some of these tales. Over the years of being with him I met many of the people who were actually involved in these stories. Gradually I discovered that as fantastic as they seemed, the stories were not only true, but usually even more remarkable.

For instance, he said that when he was a child there was a woman in their town who came to visit his family’s home, and, when she walked in, all he could see was blackness surrounding her. There was nothing visibly wrong with the lady, but

he saw that this woman was going to die. She went home and died that night of a heart attack. Another time Bill's sister told me the story of a lady in their town that none of the children liked. When she would come to the house for a visit she was mean to the kids. Back in those days they would do the laundry with washboards and then the water would be pressed out with a wringer that was cranked. So Bill said: "This mean old lady is going to get her breast caught in the wringer." Sure enough, she went back home and the prediction came true. The lady told Bill's mother: "Your son cursed me!" Those kinds of things were happening all the time. It got to be problematic for his family because in this conservative town the boy was talking about things regarded as "wild", or "strange".

To add to the problems, from time to time when he was angry with his parents he would say: "You're not my parents! I'm from Tibet!" As a child he could see that Tibet was his former home. Of course, in Georgetown, Illinois, few, if any, knew anything about Tibet. He said that one of the outcomes of his unusual behavior was that it drove his father to try to learn more about this "problem child". Later in life his father became a profound student of metaphysics as a result of his son. Over time Bill came to the point where he became aware that the way he was seeing things was not what his friends were seeing, and he tried to suppress it. It became a problem, not a blessing for him.

To look at the Old Man one might have thought he was from Southern Europe,

or Native American, or Middle Eastern — a real American hybrid. His mother was half African American and half Native American, his father was half Native American and half English. The son came out with jet-black straight hair and sharp aquiline features. But if you would ask him, in keeping with the racialized American approach to caste, he would say: "I'm black." Today the word would be African American, but his appearance could have been many things.

Although he was of age at the time of World War II, he was not anxious to go to war. He did not enlist in the army, but was drafted. Because the US military was racially segregated at that time, he was assigned to one of the all-black units. He quickly rose to the position of first sergeant. Many years later he hosted a get-together of all of the men in his unit. Although they were all around the same age, even now that they were in their 60s, they looked at him as if he was a father figure. All of them said that they had gotten into some very difficult situations during the war, but that they would always watch Bill, and one way or another, they would come through.

Having participated in campaigns in northern Africa, southern Italy, and France, he returned from the war, and everything was supposed to be alright. He left his family home in Georgetown, and moved to Chicago. For a while he thought everything was fine, but, he, like so many other returning soldiers, discovered he suffered from Post Traumatic Stress from the war. For a time any sud-

den loud noise in Chicago's downtown would find him diving into a doorway for safety. He recognized there was some work for him to do.

When he got back from the war it seemed that anything he would touch would turn to gold. He would start a business and it would thrive. His business would flourish, money would be flowing in, then, almost as predictably as it would thrive, something absolutely unexpected would come along and it would be lost. Soon he would start a new venture and it would make another fortune.

The way he described it, at that particular point in his life, he began to feel an inward pull, and recognized that there was something more for him to do than make money. He was a very strong-willed person, and he was focused on willing his way through this dawning awareness and denying the spiritual calling of his youth. Things kept happening to him. The American architect, inventor, and visionary R. Buckminster Fuller is said to have made the statement that: "For some of us all it takes is the touch of a feather, and we get the message. For others it takes being struck by a Mack truck." The old man was of the Mack truck variety.

I remember his sister telling a story from this time in his life, when he had yet another successful business going. This time he owned and operated a number of grocery stores just outside of Chicago. He found that the clairvoyance he had tried to suppress, somehow kept bubbling up to the surface, becoming

more and more pronounced. He had made a huge apartment above one of his stores. During that time his sister was living with him, and he would come home in the middle of the day so tired that he would have to lay down and rest.

The way she told the story, when he would come home to rest there was a particular music that he liked, a recording of organ music. As soon as it would start to play he would fall asleep, or so he thought. One day his sister was wandering through the house. She had a habit of talking to herself, this time she had misplaced her ring, and was saying "I wonder where did I put that ring?" She said she was walking by the open door to Bill's room, muttering about it, when she heard him say: "Look behind the dresser." She turned and asked: "What did you say, Bill?" but he was fast asleep. So just to give it a try she goes over to the dresser, looks behind it, and sure enough, there was the ring! The way I visualize this moment is almost like in a comic book: She finds the ring and a light bulb goes on above her head. An Idea is born!

What happened next was that he would continue to come home tired, and as soon as he arrived, his sister would say: "Bill, you look so tired, lay down and rest. Let me put that music on for you." She would go straight to the phonograph, put the record on, and then, without his knowledge, she would ply him with questions, to which, unknown to him, he gave accurate answers. It got so good to her that she started to call up her friends and say: "Look, Bill should be home soon, give it

about ten minutes, and then you can come in. You can ask him anything you want.”

Bill described how one day he had come home, tired as usual, and his loving sister put the music on for him. For some reason he said that he suddenly woke up. Looking up, all he could see was a ring of faces intently staring down at him, and one woman was shouting at him saying: “Bill, don’t stop, don’t stop. You were telling me about my husband and that other woman!” After running everybody out of the house, what followed next was what he called one of the most important moments in his life. He said he went over to the record player, picked up the record of organ music and broke it into as many pieces as he could. That day he said that he made a vow to himself: “From this day forward, this capacity is going to come under my controls.” This began a different phase in his life.

The process that was going on in his life at that time was something probably many of us are familiar with. The poet Francis Thompson described it as “The Hound of Heaven”, nipping at us, trying to move us to a new level of functioning. He was having an experience of divine discontent. To the eyes of others there was no reason to be dissatisfied with his life, all the trappings were there, but for him there was something very deep and urgent that was missing. He found that his capacity to “see” and a deeper meditation were coming to him more and more

frequently. He started to become acutely aware of an inward guidance, a presence seeking to guide his way. More and more he made it part of his process to become open to that.

But the open invitation to change can be a dangerous thing. It is something that most of us invite with our words, but often recoil from when it actually comes upon us. He reached a certain point where, although on the surface all was well, he realized that he had to leave this life and begin something completely new. What that something was, he did not know, but he had become secure in the certainty of his guidance.

Likely most of us would have approached this crisis moment differently than he did. The logical approach would be to think of an exit strategy, draw down the assets from our business, invest it, and so on. But his approach was different. One day, it became clear that the end of this path had come. He walked away from his business, made no arrangements for selling it. He left everything as it was. The one thing he took away was the cash register, which he then donated to a nearby orphanage.

He began a completely new phase, an internal one, much like an extended retreat. Family and friends thought that he had lost his mind. He started to deeply explore his inner life, and the gifts that had awakened and become active in his life. This happened in the 1960s in Chicago.

(To be continued)

Corona Pandemic: The Challenge and Lessons

DEEPA PADHI

IT was a beautiful Sunday morning. The sky was unusually clear and blue. I was taking a stroll in my garden listening to the chirping birds, watching the magnificent movements of the multi-coloured butterflies and enjoying the beauty of the roses and marigolds. For a while I felt myself as an intrinsic part of Nature. But suddenly the ghastly picture of the unprecedented disaster caused by the corona pandemic came to mind and I was caught in the paradox of beauty and suffering.

It seems there is a serious incompatibility between the beautiful state of Nature in itself and the world which we have created by manipulating Nature for our own pleasures. I clearly remember the prophetic words from the essay “Only One Earth”: “Today, in early 21st century, the two worlds of man — the biosphere of his inheritance, the technosphere of his creation — are out of balance, indeed potentially in deep conflict. Man is in the middle.

This is the hinge of history at which we stand, the door of the future opening on to a crisis more sudden, more bewildering

than any ever encountered by the human species. . . .” This unprecedented disaster was expected, though not as the Covid-19 pandemic. Humanity is now faced with one of the most difficult and critical situations causing trouble and despair. Covid-19 has spread like wild fire across the world. It has collaterally affected the health and hygiene of people, the economy and commerce, education and employment, religion and culture, as well as relationships and friendships.

It is reported that Covid-19 originated in bats or pangolins at an animal market in Wuhan, China, where wild animals, dead and alive were sold and slaughtered for consumption. Since then, the virus has mostly spread through person-to-person contact. But till today it has not been established whether it is an organic virus or a synthetic one as opined by some. Since 31 December 2019 and as of 21 June 2020 the virus infected over 8.5 million people worldwide. The number of deaths had totaled more than 467,579 while those who had recovered numbered 4,768,283.

Out of 188 countries which had been

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affected, ten of them had been very badly affected: Italy, Spain, US, Germany, France, China, Iran, UK, Turkey, and Belgium. To prevent the spread of Covid-19, lockdowns and shutdowns have been imposed in countries affected depending upon the severity of the condition. Many people are working from home.

This pandemic has greatly affected societies and economies around the globe. In India and other developing countries, daily labourers and migrants have suffered the worst. During the lockdown domestic violence directed at women and children, rape and femicide has increased in India. There are many reported cases of suicide out of frustration and depression.

This crisis has its genesis not in the outer world as much as in the human psyche. It is of our own making. It can be largely traced to the erroneous vision we have of ourselves and the world around us. The arrogance of the individual as the most developed creature on the planet, our greed to exploit the plants and animals for our own comfort and luxury, and our selfish interest regardless of the interests of others, traps us in our own net. Arrogant humans always think too highly of themselves.

But here is a tiny microorganism called SARS-CoV-2 that came as a counter-movement of the present time against human centrism and turned the human kingdom upside down. The Earth is an ecosystem that rules and maintains itself. If we change things unilaterally, things must change on the other side

of the scale because that is what an ecosystem actually is — a kind of scale.

We human beings have lost our connection with Nature. We have been treating Nature only as a resource, but it is also our *source*. Nature has been discovered to be the womb in which we are generated. This in fact is the original meaning of Nature. It is derived from the Latin word *natura* “birth, Nature, quality”.

Nature is a fountain of life, and the whole fountain is of value. Inger Andersen, the UN’s chief environmentalist, is of the view that Nature is sending us a message with the pandemic and the ongoing climate crisis. Humanity was placing too much pressure on the natural world with damaging consequences and failing to take care of the planet meant not taking care of ourselves.

To prevent further outbreaks, experts are of the view that both global warming and the destruction of the natural world — for farming, mining, and housing — have to end, as both drive wild animals into contact with people. Markets butchering live wild animals need to be banned globally and the billion-dollar, illegal, wildlife trade should be stopped.

Religions of the world are explicitly articulate about the relationship between humanity and the non-human beings. They not only propound the creed of love between individuals, but underline the role of humans in protecting creatures who are less evolved. We have been assigned the role of guardians.

According to Dr David Frawley, “No religion, perhaps, lays as much emphasis

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on environmental ethics as does Hinduism. It believes in ecological responsibility . . . It champions protection of animals, which it considers also have souls. . .” He views Hinduism to be a religion of the Earth. Manu, the ancient Indian seer, is explicit in spelling out natural punishment for those who kill animals, whom he terms as murderers. He states: “All involved in the act — slaughterer, butcher, cook and the one who eats the meat — are liable to Nature’s punishment.” The karmic effect of mass slaughter is not to be taken lightly. It results in tragic disaster and wars.

Charaka Samhita forbids destruction of fauna purely on pragmatic grounds: “The destruction of forests is most dangerous for the nation and human beings. *Vanaspati* (the plant kingdom) has a direct relationship with the well-being of society. Due to pollution of the natural environment and destruction of forests, many diseases crop up to ruin the nation. Only then *vanaspati* with medicinal qualities may enhance the nature and cure diseases of human beings.” (“*Vimanasthana*”, 3.11)

In Islam there are explicit injunctions to preserve forests and wildlife: “We will create a true Islamic alternative, a caring and practical way of being, doing, and knowing, to the environmentally destructive thought and action which dominate the world today.” In Buddhism, there is “wholesale condemnation of violence and intense cultivation of love and compassion for plants and animals”.

Pope Benedict XVI declares: “The order of creation demands that a priority

be given to those human activities that do not cause irreversible damage to Nature, but which instead are woven into the social, cultural, and religious fabric of the different communities. In that way, a sober balance is achieved between consumption and the sustainability of resources.” (*The Environment*)

In the *Bhagavadgītā*, a spiritual treatise having a universal appeal, elaborate discussions are made regarding the type of relationship that should prevail between humans and the ecosystem (Nature). The concept of sacrifice (*yajña*) is laid out in the larger context of interdependence of beings in the cosmos.

Every member of the entire kingdoms of minerals, plants, animals instinctively follow the principle of *yajña* and thereby contribute to the smooth running of the cosmic wheel of action. (Chapter 3) Only human beings have been given the freedom of action and, for that reason, sometimes out of arrogance, they revolt against the eternal law. The result is what we see now, total chaos and disaster. Now is the time to seriously reflect upon this, and change.

The Covid-19 pandemic also raises our awareness of the importance of science. The international scientific community has been working hard these days by sharing and making universally available the result of research and new working methods. The present crisis demonstrates the urgency of sharing information very fast through open science. “We all depend on science to survive,” was rightly said by Marcos Pontes, Minister of Science, Technology,

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Innovation, and Communication in Brazil. Science should be allowed to lead the global response to this pandemic.

The Covid-19 world tragedy has thrown up challenges to be faced and taught us many lessons essential for the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual progress of human beings. There will be a fundamental change in our thoughts, perceptions and values. It also has many silver linings in spite of the dark cloud covering the global sky. Because of lockdown restrictions, industrial activities have slowed down, remarkably decreasing air pollution levels. This implies that less traffic can lead to clean air.

As the number of tourists has decreased drastically, the canals in Venice, Italy, are the clearest they have been in sixty years. Animals have reclaimed the land. With humans out of the way, cows, goats, and birds are freely exploring the areas peacefully. Planet Earth is healing.

The old theories of economics based on inequality, greed, and profiteering have changed, giving rise to new ones. Now many people have more than enough money, but it is of no value, as there is no scope to spend. As there is no socialization, there is no chance of showing off riches or making others envious. Small houses that can be managed by one person will tend to be preferred as people start believing in “simple living and high thinking”.

As far as religious institutions are concerned, people avoid congregations and turn towards spirituality. They realize the Truth that God is not in the temple or mosque or church, but in the heart of every

human being. As somebody rightly said: “This is a new world religion. An upgrade to every world religion so far because it is the first ‘prophetless’ religion. A millennial revolution like the ‘driverless’ car.”

This pandemic teaches us a new value system that accepts cosmic connectedness as the transcendent ground of all reality. It teaches the human species to move from human centrism to biocentrism, and finally to a cosmo-centric worldview that includes living and non-living beings. It teaches us to understand the intrinsic value of all beings, whether animate or inanimate. It once again connects us to our source. Instead of domination and exploitation, it inspires love and concern for all living beings; instead of materialism people would seek spiritualism; instead of inequality and fragmentation, it can guide us to the realization of equality and the oneness of Life.

As H. P. Blavatsky, one of the founders of the Theosophical Society (TS), observes: “All is life, and every atom of even mineral dust is a life, though beyond our comprehension and perception . . .” This Oneness or cosmo-centric vision finds its most eloquent expression in the universal prayer of the TS, composed by Dr Annie Besant:

O Hidden Life! vibrant in every atom,
O Hidden Light! shining in every creature,
O Hidden Love! Embracing all in oneness,
May each who feels himself as one with thee,
know he is also one with every other.

Human love has to be enlarged so that there is expansion in the human psyche,

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making room for spiritual refinement. Body, mind, and spirit form a continuity in the evolutionary scale. Mind is the subtler form of body, and spirit is the subtler form of mind. The psychic crisis today is an inevitable expression of the spiritual bankruptcy that has overtaken humanity and resulted in a frantic bid to serve human interest at the cost of all other

sentient life. Now is the time for inner as well as outer transformation.

It is time for humanity to ponder over the silver linings the pandemic has provided for a more sustainable, harmonious, and just world. We pray and hope not to return to normalcy but for a new normal, not a “stitched tyre” but a “new tyre”, a new world, a better world. ✧

Prepare, and be forewarned in time. If thou has tried and failed, O dauntless fighter, yet lose not courage: fight on and to the charge return again, and yet again.

The fearless warrior, his precious life-blood oozing from his wide and gaping wounds, will still attack the foe, drive him from out his stronghold, vanquish him, ere he himself expires. Act then, all ye who fail and suffer, act like him; and from the stronghold of your soul, chase all your foes away — ambition, anger, hatred, even to the shadow of desire — when even you have failed. . . .

. . . Remember, thou that fightest for man’s liberation, each failure is success, and each sincere attempt wins its reward in time. The holy germs that sprout and grow unseen in the disciple’s soul, their stalks wax strong at each new trial, they bend like reeds but never break, nor can they ever be lost. But when the hour has struck they blossom forth. . . .

But if thou camest prepared, then have no fear.

H. P. Blavatsky
The Voice of the Silence, 272–275

Scientific Research and Spiritual Search

RAVI RAVINDRA

LET me begin with a reminder from the oldest text in any Indo-European language, namely the Rig Veda:

*na vijānāmi yad-ivedam-asmi ninyah
samnaddho manasā charāmi*

I know not whether I am the same as this cosmos: a mystery am I, yet burdened by mind I wander (Rig Veda 1.164.37).

There are two great mysteries: *idam*, meaning “all this”, referring to the cosmos; and *aham*, meaning “myself”. These two mysteries are intimately related with the two major needs of our soul: *knowledge* and *meaning*. What are the laws running this vast universe with trillions of galaxies? In the face of the obvious fact that I did not create myself, I wonder why these delicate laws and the consciousness pervading the entire cosmos — as asserted by all the sages in human history — have bothered to create me, and only for a few decades? Who am I? Why am I here?

The aims as well as the practice of scien-

tific research are different from those of the spiritual search. The former is almost wholly occupied with the external universe, and the latter with the universe within. One is concerned more with *knowledge* brought by creative and competent minds, and the other is much more concerned with the practice of enhancing the quality of *being* of the practitioner. No serious human being can be uninterested in either knowledge or being as they relate with the two fundamental needs of our soul. The call to each one of us is to find the knowledge that gives meaning to our life and assists us to do our part for the welfare of the world.

The approach to meeting these two needs is different in scientific research and the spiritual search. The word “science” is derived from Latin and literally means “knowledge”. These days knowledge has been almost wholly equated with the current understanding and assumptions of science. However, it is important to realize that scientific knowledge is a certain kind

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of knowledge, based on certain assumptions about the basic nature of reality.

Every spiritual searcher is also very deeply interested in knowledge, but of a different kind. In fact, in all serious spiritual teachings — by which I do not mean organized religions — there is a strong emphasis on real knowledge. In the whole of the Indian tradition there is a repeated reminder that the major obstacle standing in our way to freedom or enlightenment is *avidyā*, or *ajñāna*, both meaning “ignorance”.

For example, in the *Yoga Sutras* (2.1-5) the aim of yoga and the obstacles that stand in the way are described. The greatest obstacle is *avidyā*, which is said to be the cause of all the other hindrances that lead to illusion, conflict, and suffering, to be free of which is the aim of any spiritual undertaking. A remark of the Buddha in the *Dhammapada* is: “*avijja paramam malam* (ignorance is the greatest blemish).”

The ultimate call in spiritual teachings is to discover one’s identity with the Divine. Therefore, the sort of knowledge of interest in spiritual search is that which enhances the quality of being of the searcher towards more and more freedom from egoism and from the isolated self. The whole concern of any spiritual practice is the quality of being of the practitioner. A universal suggestion from all the sages is that as long as I remain the way I am, I cannot come to the Truth, or God, or the Real. It is almost as if a new birth is needed.

Each one of us is born of the flesh, but

the call is for us also to be born of the spirit. To use the expression of the Christ in his remark to Nicodemus: No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again, born from Above, born of the Spirit (John 3:5-8). That requires a freedom from my usual worldly self, driven by the fears and desires of me-me-me. There is an old Hasidic saying: “There is no room in him for God who is full of himself.” In summary, the spiritual teachings aim at not freedom *for* myself, but at freedom *from* myself, as was said by Christ: “Unless you leave your self behind, you cannot be a follower of mine”. (Matthew 16:24).

As spiritual searchers come closer and closer to divine consciousness, which is the aim of all spiritual practice, they experience a feeling of unity with others, humility, and selflessness, as well as love and compassion. If someone said that the Buddha was enlightened but he was not compassionate, it will be an oxymoron. Compassion oozes out of a person who is enlightened. The Buddha does not decide to be compassionate. He cannot *not* be compassionate if he is enlightened. Similarly, love oozes out of the Christ because love is not simply an attribute of God, it is the very structure of God, as is rightly said in the First Letter of John: “Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.” (4.8) “God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.” (4.16)

Essentially a spiritual searcher is really a scientist of the interior universe. Those who do not have these characteristics

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are ignorant and suffer from *avidyā*. Since the whole focus in the spiritual practice is on the quality of being of the person engaged in a spiritual search, a basic requirement is an impartial self-inquiry. For example, we find in the *Yoga Sutras* (2.1, 2.32) a strong emphasis on *svādhyāya* — self-study, or self-knowledge.

Similarly, in the *Bhagavadgītā* (4.28) the God-incarnate Krishna said, “There are some who practice *yajñā* (spiritual practice involving sacrifice) by offering their material goods, others who undertake austere efforts and practice of yoga as *yajñā*; and for still others, with serious vows, *yajñā* consists of self-inquiry (*svādhyāya*) and sacred knowledge (*jñāna*).” Here is a remark of Christ as reported in the Gospel of Thomas: “The Kingdom is inside you, and it is outside you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will realize that it is you who are the children of the Living Father. But if you will not know yourselves, you live in poverty, and you *are* the poverty.”

The reason for so much emphasis in spiritual teachings on self-knowledge is an important principle: that self-awareness is the mechanism of self-transformation. The only sort of knowledge worth having is that which has a transforming effect on one’s being. For Parmenides (*Diels, Fr.* 185) and Plotinus (*Enneads* VI. 9), “To be and to know are one and the same”. Plotinus asserts that to know the One, by a kind of super-rational insight, means to become one with it. The soul can accomplish this by becoming as simple or as alone as the

One. In the moment of such union, the soul has become God, or rather, *is* God (*Enneads* VI.9 (9), Ch. 9f). Here is a remark in the Gospel of Philip: “It is impossible for anyone to see the everlasting reality and not become like it. . . . If you know the Christ, you become the Christ.”

This sort of knowledge is sought by intimacy and identity, not by distancing; requiring a sense of oneness, a feeling of love between the knower and the object of knowledge. “This sacred knowledge is beyond thought. . . . This knowledge is different from the knowledge obtained by testimony or by inference. . . . *Jñāna* born of discernment is liberating, comprehensive, eternal, and freed of time sequence” (*Yoga Sutras* 1.43, 1.49, 3.54), as illustrated by a remark of the Christ: “Before Abraham came to be, I am.” (John 8:58) Of course, scientific researchers may experience and express love and compassion, but that is not the aim or the general nature of science.

In spiritual teachings the entire manifested universe is understood to have been brought about from the highest level of consciousness, variously called Brahman, God, the Absolute, or simply That. The manifested universe emerges from the highest level of consciousness not by *evolution*, but by *involution*. In modern science, matter without consciousness is the primary reality. Life and consciousness are assumed to have emerged from matter by evolution.

In contemporary usage, “cosmology” essentially refers to physical cosmology

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based on physics, which has been regarded as the queen of the sciences since the 17th century. At that time the primary reality was described in terms of *mass*, *length*, and *time*; later, in the 19th century *charge*, and in the 20th century *spin* were added. Given the basic assumption of matter representing the primary reality from which everything emerges, there is a natural reductionist and materialist tendency in all modern science.

In spiritual teachings it is understood that consciousness manifests at different levels in the universe, taking on corresponding material bodies. A particle of Divinity or the breath of God at different levels of consciousness takes on a body in order to undertake appropriate actions in order to evolve back to the Source, or to God. And consciousness — usually often referred to as “spirit” — can exist without a material body.

But from the scientific perspective, consciousness cannot exist without matter. This is now being questioned by many serious scientists, especially in the mind sciences. A new science-oriented organization has been recently launched, called the Galileo Commission (partly to honour the famous 16th–17th century scientist, Galileo, who is regarded as the father of modern physics), which gives much more importance to consciousness that can exist even when the brain is completely dysfunctional, as reported in many near-death experiences.

According to all spiritual teachings, there are many levels of reality subtler than the body and the mind. These spirit-

ual realities cannot be deciphered by the mind. The spiritual domain itself is very large, lest one should imagine that an occasional paranormal experience brings one to the highest level of reality. For example, in the Bible one finds nine orders of angels between human beings and God. These are levels of higher and higher consciousness and freedom. They are all spiritual and above the domain of intellectual understanding. Therefore, one finds a strong emphasis in all spiritual practice on quieting the ordinary mind.

H. P. Blavatsky remarked in *The Voice of the Silence* that “The mind is the great slayer of the Real. Let the disciple slay the slayer.” (Fragment I, verses 4–5) The very first substantial sutra in the *Yoga Sutras* is “Yoga is stopping all the movements of the mind.” (1.2) By contrast, the scientific enterprise is wholly based on acquiring knowledge by the mind. It is true that many great scientists attribute their scientific insights to intuition, which is a form of refined and subtle feeling.

The famous scientist Pascal even said, “The heart has reasons that reason does not know.” However, whatever the way by which a scientific insight is obtained, it must be expressed in intellectual terms. In fact, all scientific observations are intended to lead to a more and more comprehensive theory; ultimately, a single theory of everything. But in spiritual practice all theories and ideas are intended to lead to experiences of and connection with subtler and subtler levels of being.

Another important suggestion from the sages is that the entire external uni-

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verse, in principle, can be mirrored inside us. As Rumi said, “Everything in the universe is within you. Ask all from yourself.” All spiritual search is in the inner universe of the searcher. We have many levels of reality within us, and the call is to find the level inside which is identically the same as the Highest, which is a call to return to an identity with the highest level. The Buddha said: “Look within, you are the Buddha.” One of the four great enunciations (*mahāvākyas*) in the Upanishads is “*tattvamasi* — You are That. (*Chāndogya Upanishad*, 6.8) According to the gnostic Gospel of Philip, “Christ came not to make us Christians but to make us Christ.” And, at the peak of the Mount Sinai of consciousness Christ said: “The Father and I are One.” (John 10.30)

No sage has ever conveyed the notion that this goal of connecting with the level of oneness with the Highest Divinity is easy. As Christ said, “Many are called but few are chosen” (Matthew 20.16 and 22.14); and Krishna said, “Among thousands of human beings scarcely one strives after perfection, and among those who strive and attain perfection, scarcely one knows Me in the full truth of My being.” (*Bhagavadgītā* 7.3) Even Siddhartha Gautama had to undertake serious spiritual practices for many lifetimes before he could become a Buddha.

Here it is also important to emphasize that the mind does not experience. All experience is by sensation or feeling. In the scientific realm, all experiences — more appropriately labelled observations

or measurements — are by externalized senses, whereas in the spiritual realm, experience is by internalized senses. That is why for scientific measurements we need to have more and more refined instruments and for spiritual experiences a more and more sensitive body and a finer and finer feeling. Of course, the mind has an important role to play. A creative scientist can look at many observations and propose a theory that can explain all of them and even suggest further observations to be made.

As remarked earlier, the ultimate aim in scientific research is to know the one equation or law which encompasses all knowledge, a theory of everything, preferably according to the laws of Nature discovered by physics, considered the queen of the sciences for the last four centuries. Although there is no shortage of ideas or theories in the spiritual enterprise, the aim there is to assist a searcher to go beyond any theory and ultimately to experience the identity of one’s deepest self with the Highest Divinity. It is repeatedly emphasized in the Indian spiritual teachings that our deepest Self (*Ātman*) is identically the same as *Brahman*, the Highest Real.

By contrast, in scientific research, the effort is to totally remove the particularities of the researchers from any knowledge gathered by them. The quality of being of the scientists is not relevant to the quality of their research and there is no need for any sort of self-inquiry about one’s motivations or intentions. Many great scientists have been spiritually oriented and have

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had a remarkable quality of being, but some have been quite self-centred.

Every spiritual sage will agree with the following remark of Einstein: “The true value of a human being is determined primarily by the measure and the sense in which he has attained liberation from the self.” Einstein described his religious feeling as one of “rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection.”

On another occasion he said, “The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. . . . To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms — this knowledge, this feeling, is at the centre of true religiousness. In this sense, and in this sense only, I belong in the ranks of devoutly religious men.”

Many people who knew Einstein personally insisted that he was among the most religious persons they had ever met. But he was not religious in any churchly or denominational manner. As he said many times and in many ways: “My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals itself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power

which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe forms my idea of God.”

A major and very significant contribution of science in the 16th–17th century revolution in thought was the importance of observation by appropriately trained scientists using the instruments suitable for the observations. Simply accepting and believing what the church authorities or the sacred texts such as the Bible said was no longer acceptable to the researchers. Scientific observations deal with the external universe and they have to be verifiable by other scientists as scientific truth is inter-subjective. Appropriate and right instruments are needed in order to observe any level of reality. In order to understand scientific theories and interpretations, appropriate training, education and quality of mind are needed.

Spiritual truths are arrived at by investigating the internal universe. There also, much is gained and elaborated by exchanging one’s observations with equally competent fellow searchers. However, spiritual search remains ultimately an individual undertaking with the effort to come to an objective truth which requires the right quality of being and the appropriate instrument of spiritual seeing. As St Paul said, the eyes of the flesh see the things of the flesh and the eyes of the spirit, the things of the spirit. All our telescopes and microscopes and other instruments, however extended and fine-tuned, still bring eyes of the flesh. One cannot connect with the eyes of the spirit until the mind is silent and the body is still.

However difficult it may appear logi-

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cally, the search is to come to a perception in which the perceiver is not separate from the object of perception. The *Yoga Sutras* describe the state of *samādhi*, the aim of yoga practice, as “the state when the self is not, when there is awareness only of the object of meditation.” (2.2, 3.3)

Science as a collective institution aims to produce more and more accurate explanations of how the natural world works, what its components are, and how the world got to be the way it is now. The observations in science are gathered by *experiment* and in spirituality by *experience*. Although both of these words have the same Latin root, they have been used differently for the last three hundred years. The procedure of *experiment* sets the experimenter apart from what is being experimented upon.

On the other hand, an experiencer is involved with what is being experienced. A scientist in his laboratory experiments with things and makes measurements based on those experiments; it is wholly erroneous to say that the scientist experiences those things. In one case, the knower and the known are separated; in the other, they come closer to each other. In spiritual teachings there is a very strong idea that what one perceives very much depends on the quality of the seer. If the Buddha were to look at a flower, he will see something quite different from what I see. In scientific observation, the person is out of the way and the quality of the experimenter is irrelevant.

Scientific observations are not dependent on the quality of being of the re-

searchers. In fact, in physics, no observation has been made by any human being in the last one hundred years or more. All observations are made by extremely intricate instruments conducting experiments. The theories proposed by scientists are based on or proved by the data gathered by instruments, whereas the enunciations of the sages are based on what they experienced. This is almost a definition of a sage: sages say what they see, not what they think or read.

Scientific knowledge is a public enterprise in the sense that if Einstein has published an acceptable theory, such as the Theory of General Relativity, then other physicists do not have to spend time creating it. But even when the Buddha, in a manner of speaking, published the Noble Truths, searchers still have to come to a state in which they can themselves experience what the Buddha did.

Both scientific research and spiritual search are dealing with mysteries. For some scientists, their scientific research itself has been a spiritual path to the Great Mystery.¹

Many great scientists would happily share the feeling of Kepler, who considered himself as “a priest of God in the Temple of Nature”. Unlike scientific mysteries, spiritual mysteries cannot be solved even in principle, although sometimes, in certain states of awareness, they are dissolved. Then one does not deny the Mystery; on the contrary, one celebrates it. Then Bach writes music, Einstein does physics, Eliot writes poetry, and Uday Shankar dances; each one

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sings their own song of praise for the Highest Reality.

From the spiritual perspective, we cannot know the Ultimately Real, but we can participate in It, or more rightly, we can allow It to participate in us. Spiritual mysteries carry energy and therefore work on us, but they always remain a mystery. Here is an example from the

well-known poet Rabindranath Tagore, who wrote a short poem just thirteen days before his death:

In the beginning of my life
With the first rays of the rising sun,
I asked, "Who am I?"
Now, at the end of my life,
With the last rays of the setting sun,
I ask, "Who am I?"



Endnotes

1. In this connection, please see the article "Science as a Spiritual Path" in my book *Science and the Sacred: Eternal Wisdom in a Changing World*, Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 2002. (Also published in Dutch and Spanish.) An earlier version of this book with the same title was published by the Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, in 2000. All the themes hinted at in this paper are discussed in detail in those books.

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Karma and the Higher Spiritual Path

WILLIAM WILSON QUINN

IN June of 1884, Henry Olcott received a letter from one of his spiritual teachers, the Adept Koot Hoomi (KH), and among the statements KH made to Olcott was this: “You have talked a great deal about karma but have hardly realized the true significance of that doctrine.”¹ The context of this letter makes clear that KH was addressing not just Olcott, but the collective of spiritual seekers and prospective chelas around him as well.

If this discrepancy between “talking a great deal” yet “hardly realizing” much about the true significance or doctrine of karma among esotericists was obvious to KH in the year 1884, this discrepancy applied to the wider public in our time would exceed that of 1884 by a hundredfold. This is because today “karma” has become popularized as a fashionable cultural form. As this has occurred over the last 150 years, the meaning of karma has become ever more diluted and misunderstood as a spiritual concept — not so much among wayfarers or esotericists generally, but certainly among the wider public in the West.

Among the necessities of ascending the higher spiritual path is the wayfarer’s need to realize, in KH’s words, the “true sig-

nificance” of the law identified by the Sanskrit word “karma”. The necessity of such a realization is based in the simple truth that karma represents a core or “first principle” of the *philosophia perennis*, upon which the operations, if not the meanings, of other such first principles rely to effect their own universal applications. Two useful methods or tools for the wayfarer to employ in achieving such a realization are, first, that while the law of karma is multivalent, it is more easily understood as dualistic.

This dual perspective entails a personal and impersonal application; a corresponding physical and metaphysical application; and a corresponding application best described as a lower 5th principle (*manasrupa*) perspective, and a higher 5th principle (*manasarupa*) perspective infused with the light of the 6th principle or *buddhi*, stated otherwise as a rational and suprarational intellectual perspective. This method, or tool, comprises the preponderance of the content that follows in this discussion.

The second such method or tool, being yet another confirmation of the multivalency of the law of karma, is simply

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recognition by the wayfarer that different names are given to this law. In the writings of H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) and her principal teachers, the Adepts Morya and KH, these names represent different features, applications, and thus valencies of this law, and so we see the “Law of Karma” variously referred to in their writings as: “the Law of Retribution”,² “the Law of Compensation”,³ “the Law of Readjustment”,⁴ and “the Law of cause and effect”.⁵ Each of these separate designations — and others from different sources, including the “law of mediate causes” — points to a different branch stemming from the trunk of the tree of karmic law.

KH observed that “We have several sorts of Karma and Nirvana in their various applications — to the Universe, the world, Devas, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, men, and animals — the second including its seven kingdoms.”⁶ This assertion is given additional support by HPB’s observation that “Karma is a word of many meanings, and has a special term for almost every one of its aspects.”⁷

These wayfarers’ tools, to summarize, are the awareness of the multiple names and modes of operation of karma, and a reduction of these plural modes into a singular dualistic approach for meaningful understanding — personal and physical on the one hand, and impersonal and metaphysical on the other. Equipped with these tools, the wayfarer on the higher spiritual path is the more empowered to make good progress toward compliance with the implicit exhortation of KH’s words to Olcott about the need to realize

the “true significance” of the law of karma.

Popularized Karma

Before examining any higher dimensions of our subject, it is important to take note of the extensive popularization of the term karma in the West. We focus here on the West, rather than any global popularization, owing to the variations of meaning of karma in the East — in Asia — where it has been imbedded in those cultures for millennia owing to its salient presence as a religious precept in both Hinduism and Buddhism. By contrast, in the West, in its popularized form, karma has devolved into a concept that has been largely desacralized, and often conveyed only as an inscrutable cosmic retaliation against bad actors who arguably deserve punishment.

Perhaps as consequences of: (i) the mission of HPB and H. S. Olcott begun in the late 19th century, which brought to the attention of many in the West the salience of the *philosophia perennis* within ancient religions of the East; and (ii) the wide dissemination of the same principles of yoga and Eastern religions that occurred in the West in the late 1960s, today karma has nearly become a “household” word. The term has found its way into the cultural mainstream, often appearing in scripts of film and television productions, and in media literature of the day. This infusion of the term karma into popular Western culture has brought with it a corresponding obscuration of the term’s deeper meanings, thereby prompting significant misunderstanding.

In popular culture the desacralized

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term karma has come to be cloaked in a patina of retaliation, rather than divine retribution, perhaps through cultural absorption of a command set forth in Leviticus 24:20: “Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again.” Such a strict approach to a restoration of balance is primarily a societal mechanism, largely divorced of spirituality. In fact, it is a literal exegesis of the ancient law of retaliation (*lex talionis*, the “claw of the law”) whose operational principle, known as disambiguation, is that a person who has injured another must be penalized in the same way, or closely similar, as suffered by the injured party. Predating the Old Testament, the earliest recorded expression of this ancient concept is found in the *Code of Hammurabi*.

Having now noted this popularization, and desacralization, of the term karma in the modern West and its widespread misuse as essentially retaliative — though occasionally tinged with a hue of the mysterious — it need detain us no further. Any such vernacular uses of the term karma comprise no portion of the stated subject of this discussion, so we may now turn our full attention to the topic at hand, being the operation of karma within the context of spirituality.

Rational Perspective of Karma

Little disagreement exists among scholars of Sanskrit that the basic translation into English of the term karma is “action”, as an executed “act”, though one occasionally finds the English words “deed”

or “work” as translations. This same basic translation is also widely accepted by esotericists, with respect to the term’s root meaning in Sanskrit, as evidenced by a definition provided by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, being “action, by thought, word, or deed”. He adds, “In its simplest form, this doctrine merely asserts that actions are inevitably followed by their consequences, ‘as a cart a horse’.”⁸

This is further supported by HPB’s basic definition: “Karma (*Sk.*). Physically, action: metaphysically, the LAW OF RETRIBUTION, the Law of cause and effect or Ethical Causation.”⁹ Elsewhere she states that “Karma, thus, is simply *action*, a concatenation of *causes* and *effects*.”¹⁰ Yet the simplicity of this term as so translated belies the complexity of its application, especially as it relates to the spiritual, or metaphysical, realm.

The most scientific illustration of the cause-and-effect nature of the principle of karma as action in the physical realm can be observed in Isaac Newton’s third “law of motion”, published in *Principia* in 1687: “To every action there is always opposed an equal reaction: or, the mutual actions of two bodies upon each other are always equal, and directed to contrary parts.” Not only does this succinct and eloquently stated law of physics properly relate action (karma) to motion, but it leads inescapably to the further conclusion that “reaction” is the co-equal counterpart to action and must therefore necessarily fall under the plenary definition of karma, as well.

In all realms, karma covers equally

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both action and reaction. This is because reaction, though it may be contingent upon ingenerate, or innate, action, is nonetheless action itself, and together an action and its reaction form a unit within a concatenation, or linked “chain” of actions. This leads to higher and suprarational dimensions of karma that will be addressed momentarily. But here we acknowledge this rational and impersonal facet of karma in its physical application as a motor propelling all phenomenal action/reaction. This may be described alternatively as the motion or flux between the opposite though connected poles of duality, or polarity — another first principle of the *philosophia perennis*.

It is probable that the application of karma most familiar to esotericists is the personal one, which pertains to individual transmigration, or reincarnation. Certainly the law of karma applies to human beings in an *intra*-transmigrational sense, meaning that the reaction to some action done by someone in his or her early life may manifest at a later point in the same incarnation.

But the most common usage, if not understanding, of karma by many, if not most, esotericists refers to its *inter*-transmigrational sense — that is, the law of karma as spanning multiple incarnations. It is in this sense that karma is frequently discussed by HPB and the Adepts. “The Law of KARMA,” wrote HPB, “is inextricably interwoven with that of Re-incarnation.”¹¹ This is because, as HPB also noted, “. . . *Karma*, or action, is the cause which produces

incessant rebirths or ‘reincarnations.’”¹²

Based on these established principles, the Adept Morya explained that “Now every individuality will be followed on its ascending arc by the Law of retribution — Karma and death accordingly.”¹³ And so, consistent with these fundamental and rational propositions of theosophical doctrine, the spiritual Monad arrives at the dawn of each new incarnation up to its last involuntary one, when it has achieved liberation from the wheel of death and rebirth — where “The law of retribution as *Karma*, waits man at the threshold of his new incarnation.”¹⁴

One further or additional observation must be made regarding *all* the karmic effects that “wait man at the threshold of his new incarnation”. These effects are not those caused only by the individual, or ourselves. Rather, we must *each* bear the weight of the oppositive — as distinct from positive — karma caused by those with whom we associate or even those in our larger castes, vocations, ethnicities, or nationalities.

Speaking metaphorically of blows to the individual by a “sword” in the “hand of karma”, HPB claims there is “. . . one for the transgressor, the other for the family, nation, sometimes even for the race, that produced him”.¹⁵ This collective view of karma is one that HPB repeats in numerous places, and one which is confirmed by KH, who declared that “It is a true manhood when one boldly accepts one’s share of the collective Karma of the group one works with, and does not permit oneself to be embittered. . .”¹⁶

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Suprarational Perspective of Karma

To this point, what has so far been discussed is fundamentally a restatement of the law of karma as understood by many, if not most, esotericists. Yet for those wayfarers ascending the higher spiritual path, the dive into this profound doctrine must go even deeper to realize its “true significance”, to repeat the words of KH. The depths upon which the law of karma rests, and from which it draws meaning like some desert tree whose taproot reaches meters below to a life-giving aquifer, is the metaphysical principle of *causality*, whose most prominent profile is often expressed as “cause and effect”. As a point of beginning, one can see an equivalency, if not a correspondence, between the concepts of (i) action and *cause*, and (ii) reaction and *effect*, but this is essentially a launching point for the discussion that follows.

The question of causality, or HPB’s related term “ethical causation”, relative to the concept of karma may be said to be both semantic and metaphysical. Even if suprarational in scope, the verbal equation “action : cause :: reaction : effect” is by no means a non-rational or dyslogical proposition. If one accepts this equation as valid, both the concept and definition of karma should then necessarily involve the first principle of cause and effect — or causality. Ananda Coomaraswamy provides a passage which conveniently incorporates the interaction of these first principles. In explaining the Sanskrit term *pitṛyāna* within a specific traditional context, or mythic story where *pitṛyāna* was represented as the “Patriarchal Voyage”

of the “Pilgrim”, alluding to the entire voyage of transmigration by the spiritual Monad, he wrote:

In other words, the *pitṛyāna* is a symbolic representation of what is now called the doctrine of reincarnation, and is bound up with the notion of latent (*adr̥ṣṭa* or *apurva*) causality. The purely symbolic character of the whole conception is made all the more apparent when we reflect that from the standpoint of [the] very Truth, and in the absolute Present [eternal Now, or aeviternity], there can be no distinctions made of cause and effect; and that what is often spoken of as the “destruction of *karma*”, or more correctly as a destruction of the latent effects of Works, effected by Understanding and implied with *mukti*, is not really a destruction of valid causes . . . but simply a Realization of the identity of “cause” and “effect”.¹⁷

Here Coomaraswamy uses the terms “latent causality” and “the latent effect of Works” interchangeably, “cause” being replaced in the second term by “Works”, work being one among several words used for translations of the Sanskrit word karma. This brings into alignment the metaphysical first principles of “cause and effect” and its corollary, “action and reaction” with *causality*, which traces its roots to the Absolute, and so can be said to have both absolute (latent) and relative (active) aspects. It is within this hieratic sphere of understanding that wayfarers on the higher spiritual path will be able to realize, borrowing once again the words of KH, the “true significance” of the doctrine of karma, especially as that

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relates to the coincidence of opposites.

Fully consistent with this view is that of HPB who, in describing karma as “one with the Unknowable”, states that “Karma is an Absolute and Eternal law in the world of manifestation; and there can only be one Absolute, as One eternal ever-present Cause . . .”¹⁸ While it is not possible to conceive intellectually from the standpoint of Unknowability, one can conceptualize the initial process of emergence or manifestation from the Absolute as duad from monad, and further conceive of the various ways in which this duad functionally bifurcates in manifestation.

One of those ways appears as relative causation, or cause and effect, and another is or appears as the first principle of polarity, which is the cosmic — and terrestrial — stage upon which action and reaction, of cause and effect, both play. The law of karma inheres in these twin aspects of relative causality, and “adjusts” the activity of the links connecting action and reaction, cause and effect. In this drama which contains both cosmic and individual levels, the interaction/interplay or flux of action and reaction, of cause and effect between the opposite poles of duality, can be seen as a fluidic motion — to use HPB’s words, as “*action*, a concatenation of *causes* and *effects*”.

Karma, or action, thus includes the “action of linking” or the “linking process” in the theosophic perception of the chain of causes and effects, restated here by Coomaraswamy: “The traditional and orthodox [Vedantic] doctrine is a recognition of the causal chain by which all events are *linked* in a phenomenal suc-

cession, but of their intrinsic and not extrinsic operation.”¹⁹ In other words, viewed from *extasis* or duality (or multiplicity) and differentiation, this process is seen as a kinetic chain of innumerable causes with innumerable effects both through the universe and in our lives.

But viewed from *instasis*, or inherent unity and wholeness through the suprarational perception, this process may also be understood as a singular impartite, or undivided, Cause in which no distinctions can be made between cause and effect or action and reaction, because these opposites have become coincident, or synthesized, in the perception — and in the life — of this enlightened viewer.

Conclusion

It is this view from *instasis* that wayfarers on the higher spiritual path should ultimately seek to achieve — a permanent vision of *coincidentia oppositorum* within action, a transcendence of contraries that are the progeny of the principle of polarity. It is also a direct application of this view to the wayfarer’s sentient life that should also become an objective to be achieved, which is the coincidence — or perfect balancing — of his or her positive and opposite karma, achievement of which bestows the Sanskrit title of *jivanmukti*. Such extraordinary achievements will necessarily include realization of the “true significance” of the law of karma, and comport with the view of HPB when she observed that “Once an Arhat obtains full illumination and perfect control over his personality and lower nature, he ceases to create ‘merit and demerit’ [or karma].”²⁰

Karma and the Higher Spiritual Path

Initiation is conferred upon those wayfarers who are able to reach the summit of the higher spiritual path through these achievements of harmony and balance. At that point, as new initiates, their way becomes the way of the *bodhisattva*. Also at that point their deeper understanding of the *philosophia perennis*, of *theosophia*, including the doctrine of karma, will

allow these initiates to follow the compassionate directive of the Mahachohan to “Teach the people to see that life on this Earth, even the happiest, is but a burden and an illusion, that it is but our own *karma*, the cause producing the effect, that is our own judge, our saviour in future lives, and the great struggle for life will soon lose its intensity.”²¹ ✧

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Universal Brotherhood

BORIS DE ZIRKOFF

IT can never be too often repeated, nor too strongly emphasized, that the pivotal point of the modern Theosophical Movement is the formation of a nucleus of Universal Brotherhood.

This nucleus of human solidarity is to be formed irrespective of, and completely above, all the irrelevant distinctions and the temporary differences which exist in the purely personal make up of human beings. Above these distinctions and beyond these differences, there exists a spiritual unity of being which is the root from which all of us have sprung. Upon the basis, of this spiritual oneness can be erected a solid structure if the common origin of all men is never lost sight of. . . .

As students of the Ancient Wisdom cannot hold any monopoly on Universal Brotherhood, as an expression or term, the misuse of it in our present-day world of confused thinking is almost to be expected, and the true nature of this idea must be constantly re-explained and clarified. . . .

The spiritual Oneness Theosophists speak of has to do with the fact that all human beings, as well as other kingdoms

of evolving life, ultimately come from the same source and can trace their origin to higher worlds of being where their Selfhood has its native home.

The student of the Ancient Wisdom, while acting towards all men as if they were his brothers, and rising in his relations to others above the separative distinctions of creed, sex, color or ethnic grouping, does not fail to recognize the obvious fact that humanity is divided, as a result of ages of complex evolution, into certain types, groupings, natural divisions or classifications, usually somewhat overlapping, in which certain distinct forms or aspects of consciousness predominate one over the other, without in the least denying the fact of the common spiritual origin of all men.

A student who, on the ground of his Universal Brotherhood conception, would disregard the intrinsic differences of consciousness, and the mental and emotional biases, such as exist between, let us say, the Negroes, the Mongolians, and the so-called Whites, would run the risk of becoming willfully blind to certain very definite facts of Nature, which owe their

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origin to a varied evolutionary past. But the man who, on the other hand, would psychologize his mind with these varied facets of consciousness, and forget the greater fact that they represent merely different modifications of one underlying stream of Spiritual Consciousness, would never be able to understand the Idea which Theosophist, of all ages have termed Universal Brotherhood.

Might we put it in a rather quaint form? The many kinds of dogs are all united in their common "Doghood." The thousands of different grasses are all one in their common "Grasshood." The many different types of men and women are equally one in their common "Humanhood." And let us not forget the paramount fact that the dogs, and the grasses, and the men and women, as well as the stones, and the atoms, and the planets and the stars, are all intimately united in their common spiritual "Selfhood," above and beyond the almost bewildering divergencies and categories by means of which they manifest for purposes of evolutionary growth.

No lasting social order can ever be built in this world until and unless men and women everywhere realize, with sufficient inner strength of realization, that the only way to "get together" and to "stay together" is by recognizing our common kinship, our points of similarity, our mutual inter-relatedness, and the many ties which bind us together as human beings. As long as we allow our leaders, representatives, spokesmen, and the like, to dwell upon our mutual differences, our conflicting interests, our divergent goals, our

unequal advantages and opportunities, and to flood the world's airplanes with the pompous verbiage of the conference room, our mutual relations will retain their strained character. As long as we, as people and nations, insist upon the validity of our mutual suspicions, our deeply-rooted hatreds, and our self-righteous conceit, we will continue to have wars of all kinds, and exploitation and moral disgrace.

There are a number of distinguished visitors which must be admitted to our World Conferences, and be seated at the round table of our momentous discussions, and they are, among others, mutual sympathy for the souls of men, self-sacrifice, magnanimity of action, forgiveness of past wrongs, charity, humility before the greatness of Life as such and the majesty of Cosmic Law, a sense of human dignity, integrity of purpose, the strength and power of a keen sense of ethics, the recognition of our common rights to justice and fair-play, and of our duty to help and serve others, and a genuine love for one's brothers, however deluded, confused, and ignorant they may be. Until these missing guests of honor are admitted, with full rights, duties and privileges of partnership, into the Halls of the People, where the affairs of the nations are being discussed, and their future planned and blue-printed, we shall have but a sickening "smog" of emotional confusion, a pall of frustration, and the never-ending stream of verbose nonsense from which all noble Ideals have taken flight as the swallows of last spring. ✧

The Flame of Awareness

SHIKHAR AGNIHOTRI

THE last nine months have been unprecedented, in the sense that for anyone alive, this is the first time that they would have experienced a situation in which, on the one hand, the physical separation was forcefully implemented and encouraged, but, on the other, solace was provided by technology to come together and realize that our connection or sense of unity is much deeper than mere physical proximity. Also LIFE as we know it is a much more intricately knitted web than we can imagine, the realization of which is the basis of the teachings of the Ageless Wisdom. The dream of every true theosophist is the *practical regeneration of universal brotherhood* or, simply put, *unconditional love*.

But in daily life unconditional love is something that is beyond the conception of our minds because, knowingly or unknowingly, we are almost always within the field of conditions, limits, choices, and preferences. The reason why it seems so difficult to transcend this field, is because having this ownership of conditionings that we call I-ness, or self, gives

us a sense of security, a sense of separateness, and hence special existence. In transcending this field, there is the fear of losing our identity, a fear similar to death. And therefore the whole of life just becomes a tiresome struggle to expand and fulfil this bottomless pit of self-gratification.

Although amidst the hardships of life it often feels like a burden one has to carry, still, carrying the burden of the self seems relatively more comfortable and convenient than dealing with the fear of not having anything to hold on to, fear of being nothing in this world, where we are continuously and constantly brainwashed to become something or someone important. As a reaction, we then halfheartedly try to find out and practise the ways to get out of this cycle of birth and death, to fight the so-called enemy that is the self through various disciplines, often missing the *key* aspect of these disciplines.

This was expressed in modern terms by J. Krishnamurti as “Truth is a pathless land” and “Happy is the person who is

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nothing”. According to him, all that is needed for this realization is to be *aware of this process called life*, to look intently, and pay attention with all our energy, to what is happening within and without. Keeping this in mind, we will be talking about something that has been the underlying *key* to all spiritual disciplines or texts, but it only became popular in the 20th century, and still remains a mystery to a large extent to the mainstream modern science and psychology. It is a subject that is at once the most intimate and the most enigmatic aspect of our lives.

To study this underlying key one has to turn inwards, become an introvert, in the real sense of the word. This is because the materialistic approach is to study the object, but the practical and therefore spiritual approach is to study the subject first. *Who am I?* And it is in this respect that we come upon words like Awareness, Consciousness, Life, and so on.

But all these words are so frequently used as synonyms that it sometimes seems like we are caught in a web of words. I am not suggesting at all that we are going to find straight answers. Instead this is an invitation for everyone to find out for themselves how the flame of awareness brings about the transformation within, and hence without, because this is a field of individual research and understanding.

Let us examine the meaning of these words in general. According to the dictionary, Consciousness means “The state of being aware of and responsive to one’s surroundings.” Awareness is “The state

of being conscious of something; the knowledge or perception of a situation or fact.” Life is always in relation to an object. If a being is conscious and aware of its surroundings, it is called “alive”.

Based on these meanings, we can say the following: First, Consciousness, Awareness, and Life are more or less the same thing. At the most they can be referred to as different expressions or aspects of the same energy. As Dr Annie Besant says: “Consciousness and life are identical, two names for one thing as regarded from within and from without. There is no life without consciousness; there is no consciousness without life. . . . When our attention is fixed on unity we say life; when it is fixed upon multiplicity we say consciousness; and we forget that the multiplicity is due to, is the essence of, matter, the reflecting surface in which the One becomes the Many.”

(A Study in Consciousness)

Second, for consciousness and awareness to exist, as we know, there must be duality — a subject and an object. Referring again to Besant in this regard: “The existence of consciousness implies a separation into two aspects of the fundamental all-underlying UNITY. The modern name of consciousness, ‘awareness’, equally implies this. For you cannot hang up awareness in the void; awareness implies something of which it is aware, a duality at the least.” This is the mystery behind the concept of Trinity in most of the religions.

But a few questions still remain unanswered by this dictionary meaning:

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- 1) What is the difference then, between an unconscious person and a dead person?
- 2) What is the difference between deep sleep, transcendence, and death?
- 3) What about a person in a coma?

All these phenomena are very common in everyday life. Obviously, going by the above meanings, we do not get a very satisfactory answer to these questions, because these definitions are limited to the physical point of view only, and therefore limits the meaning to the waking state only, while a student of the Ageless Wisdom learns that there are various states of consciousness which clearly explain all the above questions.

The more relevant query to us at this time would be that if consciousness and awareness simplify duality, the existence of a subject and an object, of I and you, then, does the absence of duality necessarily mean absence of consciousness or awareness? There is a notion that we often come across that if there is no duality, there is no awareness. This is because we have been using these terms in a particular context. But as H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) says: "In esoteric philosophy non-being is ABSOLUTE Being". And therefore when it is said in *The Secret Doctrine (SD)* that the Absolute Principle /*parabrahman* does not know itself, we are very quick, but not accurate, to call that state as Unconsciousness.

It is quite an illogical assumption that the source of everything is not aware of itself. How can that be? The mystery behind this statement is not at all due to some kind of ignorance at the highest

level, but due to the state of consciousness/awareness that is beyond our conception at present, the state where there is no second — Advaita, literally "no duality", that is, unconditional love.

HPB clarifies this in *SD*: "To know itself or oneself, necessitates consciousness and perception (both limited faculties in relation to any subject except Parabrahm), to be cognized. Hence the 'Eternal Breath which knows itself not'. . . . Consciousness implies limitations and qualifications; something to be conscious of, and someone to be conscious of it. But Absolute Consciousness contains the cognizer, the thing cognized, and the cognition, all three in itself and all three in *one*."

Based on the above views we can broadly classify two states of Awareness:

- 1) Relative or Fragmented or Conditioned Awareness: This is always in relation to a subject. There is always a centre of observation and this observation is limited and fragmented by the limitation of the observer, be it the limitation of the senses from which it receives sensations, or the limitation of the mind in the form of prejudices and conditionings. In theological terms, it is the awareness at the physical and psychological level, including physical, astral, and mental senses. The result is that the truth is never realized at this level, but opinions and prejudices are formed. Therefore a lot of emphasis is given to purification at all these three levels in every spiritual discipline.

- 2) Absolute or Integrated or Pure Awareness: There is no centre of observation

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here but just awareness of the whole, as there is no sense of separation between subject and object, thus the perception is direct and not limited by any intermediate agent. In theosophical terms, it is the awareness or faculty of the Monad or *ātma-buddhi*, the *prajñā*, the universal principle of a Human being, the realization of which transforms a human into a superhuman. As *The Voice of the Silence (VS)* says, "Prajñā, the key to which makes of a man a god, creating a Bodhisattva" — a state that is given various names like Love, Compassion, Mindfulness, Living in the Eternal.

The basis of misunderstanding about the generous use of these terms is that when we use the words Awareness, Consciousness, Life, we do not use the prefixes, "Relative" or "Absolute". Actually everything in this world is relative.

The same message is conveyed beautifully by a parable originating in the Vedas and used in many Upanishads (1.164.20): Two birds who are friends, take refuge in the same tree; one of them eats the sweet fig while the other, abstaining from food, merely looks on. Here the bird that is eating the sweet fruit is the individual soul, the mind-body complex or, in our case, relative Awareness.

The other bird is the *paramātmān*, Absolute Awareness, the spark of the flame that accompanies every living being in the heart while it remains in the material world. The only difference is that one of these birds is busy enjoying the delicious fruit and the other bird is not

interested in eating anything. It is merely looking on, unconcerned and unattached. So there are two levels of experience going on in one's own body: an awareness that is very much involved — Relative — and an awareness that is totally detached — Absolute.

Yoga means the dawning of this absolute awareness by burning away the dross of our psyche.

This brings us to the poetic word "flame", which has been used often to give a hint of the state of Awareness that is beyond limitations or conditions. The reason may be that, first, even though the flame burns, there is something more than that which happens. It does not just burn, it transforms. Whatever is offered to fire, it transforms it to a different dimension. It transforms the coarser matter into subtler matter or, rather, energy. Second, there are the twin aspects of a flame, light and heat. In light TRUTH is perceived and in heat the dross is burnt, the combined effect of which is HUMAN REGENERATION.

A very familiar reference to this is the third eye of Shiva, or the Wisdom Eye which, when it opens up, burns Māra, the king of desire. Of course it may be an allegorical way of saying that when the Wisdom Eye opens up, it transforms our whole perception of this manifestation and *vairāgya*/Desirelessness happens as a side effect.

The word *vairāgya*, the second qualification in *At the Feet of the Master*, very beautifully explains this. The etymological meaning is *vi + rāga* which means

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“to see without any colour”. To perceive without conditionings. When that happens, Desirelessness is an obvious consequence. As Gautama Buddha says: The entire world is in flames, the entire world is going up in smoke; the entire world is burning, the entire world is vibrating.” (*Therīgāthā 200*)

That was of course Siddhartha’s truth, and everyone has to find one’s own truth. But often a question arises as to how can things transform just by being aware? We are so used to putting in great effort or struggling our way through life that being aware seems to us as “no action”. But the fact is completely the opposite. We can see how often it happens, when we perceive a small act of care, or a

word of love, or a compassionate look in someone’s eyes breaks down our whole inner structure of prejudices, and there is instant and spontaneous communion. Being aware and attentive is not merely a perception of the situation but it is also the womb from which RIGHT ACTION takes birth. It is a movement of energy that operates and brings about certain results.

This is not just a belief or theory, it is something that even modern science has an inkling about. In this context I would like to share a very interesting experiment performed by Thomas Young in 1801 and then later repeated by many scientists for further research.

(To be continued)

Seek refuge in the attitude of detachment and you will amass the wealth of spiritual awareness. The one who is motivated only by the desire for the fruits of their action and anxious about the results is miserable indeed.

Bhagavadgita, Chapter 2

Bernice Croft — In Memoriam

1. From John Vorstermans (National President of the TS in New Zealand)

We have lost from the physical plane a dear member, Bernice Croft, a close friend to many. She was a member of the Wellington Lodge of the Theosophical Society (TS) in New Zealand for over 45 years. I first met her at some of the members' meetings on my joining that Branch in 1984.

I remember clearly in 2002 when she asked me about going to work at Adyar, India. She had always been a compassionate person and she dedicated her life to service where she could, so it was not a surprise that, after her husband had passed away, she would consider moving to the TS Headquarters in Adyar. I recall advising her of the challenge that the change in culture and climate would be, and suggested that she talk with Conrad Jamieson for his advice, a long-time TS member who had gone to live at Adyar and was visiting in Auckland. Soon thereafter, her application to work at Adyar was approved and she moved to India.

Bernice's presence as special friend and coworker will be missed by many, yet she is always with us.

2. From Mrs Sushma Webber (President of the Wellington Lodge)

Bernice joined the Wellington Lodge in June 1975. She held senior positions in the Wellington City Council for thirty



17 November 1937 – 19 January 2021

years and was also a Justice of the Peace. Bernice told me that she used to drive an elderly TS member who was her aunt's friend, to the public meetings, and she had expressed a wish to be able to attend the members' meetings also. So Bernice decided to join the TS! Soon she was asked to be Acting Secretary, and later served as the Lodge Secretary for nine years.

She often spoke to our younger members at Lodge meetings, sharing her inspiring experiences of working and traveling with the President. At the 2017 Foundation Day retreat, Bernice gifted to the Lodge the letters received from Clara Codd by her aunt Beatrice Lloyd.

3. From Peter Jenkins (London, UK)

I met Bernice many years ago on one of my visits to the TS Adyar, Chennai, India, and had kept in touch with her

Bernice Croft — In Memoriam

since. At the time, she was the Secretary of then President Radha Burnier. I found Bernice to be very efficient at her job and always polite and helpful. She escorted the President on several of her overseas travels, making sure things worked out according to plan. She left her home city of Wellington to dedicate ten years of her life working for the TS Adyar.

Bernice was much loved by all who met her and I will always remember her generosity and willingness to give sound advice.

4. From Aureen Strong (Bernice's sister)

Bernice Ross was born on the West Coast of New Zealand. She arrived in Wellington at the age of 20 and spent all of her working life in the city. At 24 she married Ken Croft, and she had aspirations for fine things in life like travel, career, with a strong determination.

To achieve the fine things in life, in her memorabilia notes she says that “a very nice home, continual overseas travel, and so on, could not be funded on a 40-hour work week”, and so she set about building a rental property portfolio and at one time owned around ten rental properties around Wellington. In 1972, when there was talk of capital gains taxes, she sold out, and that started another important part of her life — travel.

Her first trip was with Ken to South Africa and Rhodesia, where they stayed with relatives. Subsequent trips were to China, Turkey, Greece and the Greek Islands, Egypt, and other parts of Asia. There are some great letters about the

trips that she had written with real talent.

A tremendous part of Bernice's life was also her work. Much of her career was spent with the Wellington City Council. Bernice kept in her memorabilia many letters of recognition about the quality of her work. But in 1998 it was time for Bernice to end her working life. Her husband, Ken, whose cancer had been in remission, fell sick again, and she retired to nurse him through his last days. After Ken's passing, and still a young 61, Bernice needed a new purpose in life.

Not long thereafter, Bernice was approached to volunteer at the Theosophical world headquarters in Adyar, India, and soon took on the role of Secretary to the international President for the remainder of her time in Adyar. She told us she was going for 5 years, but stayed for 10. Accompanying the President, she went on to travel throughout India and the UK, US, Canada, and Japan. But beyond this work, Bernice's friend Dorothy Bell, once wrote of the difference Bernice made to so many other lives in India.

After leaving India in 2011, she continued supporting the TS by looking after their UK property in Tekels Park, Surrey, six months each year, for several years. Her New Zealand time was spent volunteering to help women into employment and contributing to Soroptimist International, whose goal is to improve the lives of women and girls around the globe.

Bernice will be remembered as a kind, generous, caring woman, with an impeccable memory, who could tell a great story any time! ✧

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