

## 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.



# THE THEOSOPHIST

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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 — II

TIM BOYD

IN the 1960s Chicago youth gangs had become quite pronounced. Whole neighborhoods were the fiefdoms of 15- to 21-year olds, and there was warring between gang groups.

In response to an inner guidance, Bill Lawrence moved from the suburbs to the heart of the youth gang area. He bought a house which to call it “dilapidated” would be glorifying it — the windows were broken, the heating system had died, and the frame was leaning about ten inches on one side. The house sat right at the boundary where three of the neighborhood gangs would contend. The way it worked was not too different from the way nation states function today: There were certain boundaries recognized by the gangs, and if a member of one gang was found on the territory of another, there would be trouble. They were constantly fighting over territorial rights.

Bill came from a rural community, and all of his life he was used to having flower gardens. So he started planting flowers. A well-meaning neighbor spoke to him one day: “Mr. Lawrence, I see what you’re trying to do, but let me tell you, save your effort, because the kids in this neighborhood never let anything grow.”

His simple response: “Well, I’m going to have a flower garden!” To which she said, “You can try, but I’ll be dead and gone before you grow flowers in this neighborhood.”

At that time, grown people would be sitting on their porches after work, but as soon as it got dark, everybody would go inside because then the “kids” ruled the streets. It was a difficult time. A lot of these gang kids, because of the violence surrounding them, were hyper alert. It was a survival mechanism. So when this new person, who clearly did not look like the rest of the people in the area, came into the neighborhood, they started to wonder who he was. They thought he might be with the police. So they would be going around trying to “check out” who he was.

Sometimes Bill would call them aside and talk to them. One of those fellows was a boy they called “Crazy Willie”. At that time Willie was 16 years old and was deeply involved in one of the gangs. I got to know him very well when I moved to Chicago.

Both Willie and the Old Man told me the story about the first time they met. Willie was walking by one day while Bill

was working in his front yard. He called Willie over to him: "Say, son, come here." Bill had told me how Willie had walked over to him, his lips were tight, face hard, and a gun visible under his T-shirt. Willie was suspicious of this man and roughly replied: "What?" The Old Man told him: "I see where you and another boy with a scar in the middle of his forehead, shot someone the night before last." Bill described how they had done it, how they had been hiding behind something, and shooting at a man. Willie was shaken, but denied it. "I see it, son, what I want you to do is to bring the boy with the scar here. I want to talk to both of you."

Willie then went back and told his accomplice what happened with the Old Man. He would not believe him and said that Willie must have told him what happened, because nobody had seen them. This, Willie denied, and said the man just wanted to talk to them. Finally, the two boys went to see Bill and he talked to them in a very different way than they had expected. All of these rough young people started to learn that this man could "see" things. At first they were suspicious, but they soon realized that the Old Man was only telling them things for their own good.

More and more of these young fellows started to gather around the "Old Man". He would talk with them. Gradually they started helping him work on the house. He taught them how to use a hammer and nail; how to saw wood; how to make a salad; they helped to level the leaning

building; they even helped planting flowers! One day he was working in what had become his glorious flower garden, and the same neighbor who had told him he would never be able to grow such a garden, came out on her porch and said: "You know, Mr Lawrence, you have the most beautiful flowers!" The way he told me the story, he was bent over pulling weeds and did not even look up, but told her, "You mean you're not dead yet?", and kept pulling weeds.

Bill became known as "the Old Man" when he started working with these kids. There was a tall and skinny kid who became quite attached to him, and Bill would always tell him: "Larry, you look just like a string bean." So the others nicknamed him "Bean". So Larry said: "You're calling me "Bean", let's all call him "the Old Man". The name stuck. At that time Bill was 48, which seemed ancient to these young kids.

Those kids started to help with something they had *never* done: to encourage growth, to encourage life. Soon Bill started to have meetings at his house, where he would call together members from the different warring gangs. This had never happened before. At any other time or place such an encounter would have guaranteed a shootout or a fight, but they all trusted and respected him.

When they came to his door he would tell them the ground rules: "First thing you need to know, there are only two bad people in this house, and I'm both of them! There will be no violence here. Leave your weapons at the door." Though

hesitant, they would tell him, “I wouldn’t do this for anybody but you!” Then they would pull out a gun, a knife, and so on, and would place them all on the growing pile of armaments by the door. They would then go into the house and he would start to talk to them about the Ageless Wisdom, Theosophy, but in a language that was completely understandable to these young people.

One mistake that many make is to accept assumptions about kids like these, lacking in certain types of opportunities. The most common approach views them as some sort of problem. A fact is that many of these kids were natural born leaders. The type of person it takes to be at the head of an organization of 200 to 500 people is not something accomplished through mere violence. Many of them were brilliant and highly developed old souls, lacking in guidance and exposure to another way of seeing the world. So when they came in contact with the Old Man, and what he had to offer, the hidden and misdirected abilities of a lot of these people blossomed.

Bill would sit them down and talk to them, stepping down the conventional language used to express the Ageless Wisdom into terms to which they could relate. He would talk to them about what we understand as “karma”. It would be something like asking them to think about the flowers that they planted, or an apple tree: “If you plant an apple seed, what do you get?, an apple tree; and from that apple tree, what do you get?, an abundance of fruit, and it is all apples, not

grapes, or oranges. It’s all according to the seed that you plant.”

Then he would tell them:” If you plant a seed of hate, of violence, or of killing, what do you expect to grow?” *That* they could see. Out of this group of young people, a number of them took it upon themselves to use their leadership abilities in a totally different manner. They became self-appointed ambassadors of peace. At some risk to themselves, they would go out and make treaties and truces among the opposing gangs.

That particular area of Chicago, which had been a continual hotbed of gang violence, saw the violence steadily diminish. A lot of those young fellows went on to become quite prominent in activities promoting peace and understanding — strong voices for positive change.

During this time Bill Lawrence came in contact with Theosophy and the Theosophical Society (TS). This was going to change his life completely. The first time he went out to the TS headquarters in Wheaton, Illinois, he said he had a feeling that this was a place where he had been before. He described it as a sense of coming home. It was at that time that he would say that the jigsaw puzzle of his life started to come together. It was at that time, too, that he started to have a different vision that kept pestering him. It was about a move to another house. Having done so much work on his present home, he had no inclination or money to purchase another one, but the vision of this house kept coming back to him.

It worked out finally in a remarkable

way that he found the house, purchased it, and moved in. He kept working with the gang kids, but another group of people was drawn in at that point. I came in on that wave around 1972-73. The house he moved into was very different from the previous one. It was a 16-room mansion that over the years had declined.

When I first encountered the Old Man I was not looking for Theosophy, or what it had to offer. As a college student on spring vacation, living in New York City, I had come to Chicago to visit a cousin that I was very close to, but had not seen in a couple of years. My reason for going was typical of a 19-year old with time on his hands, going to visit a cousin that I remembered as a fun guy. I thought this was going to be a good vacation.

Barrett's parents were wealthy and had given him far too much. Staying with him this time, however, I noticed that his behavior was different than I remembered. In addition to a new common sense and responsibility he talked about meditation, reincarnation, and other metaphysical subjects to which I had no previous exposure. I found myself wondering: "What is this?" In the past Barrett would wake up late in the day. Now when I awakened in the morning he would be sitting in the corner of the room, facing the wall with his eyes closed.

It is a statement about my own shortcomings that this behavior seemed strange to me. Talking common sense is one thing, but just sitting down and not moving? At that time I did not have any frame of reference for such behavior. Finally I asked

him: "Barrett, what are you doing?" He said: "I'm meditating!" He gave me a little book to read which did not particularly interest me. So I said: "Barrett, you've changed since I saw you last! What is going on?" He told me, "You need to meet my teacher, the "Old Man". My plan for a really enjoyable time in Chicago seemed to be melting away.

On hearing this my thought was, "I am on vacation from teachers, and I certainly didn't come to Chicago to meet an old man." So he took me to meet the Old Man. I was prepared to be underwhelmed by this fellow. I did not want to be there. Although he talked about some interesting things, nothing in particular stuck with me. One thing that did stick was that while we were there, a friend of my cousin's who had come with us was having a headache. The Old Man turned to two young men who were studying with him and asked them to "take his headache".

I expected someone was going to get a Tylenol and a glass of water for him. Instead they put a chair in the middle of the room with one standing in front and the other behind him. They rubbed their hands together and put them close to his head without touching him, waited maybe thirty seconds, shook their hands, and went back to their original seats. Immediately the young man said how much better he felt!

I did not know what to do with what I had just witnessed. I saw something, but, really, I did not see anything! Clearly my cousin's friend was relieved, he was not pretending. Without any familiar

label to place on this event, I just let it go.

Finally, the time came to leave. At the door I said goodbye to the Old Man. He looked at me and said: "I'll see you soon, son." I was returning to New York very early the next morning. Having listened to him for an hour, making numerous positive pronouncements, knowing that I would not be seeing him anytime soon, my 19-year-old arrogance came into full bloom, so I told him, "No I doubt I'll see you." He just smiled and repeated, "I'll see you soon, son", and I left.

Back at my cousin's house, while packing to leave, I found that something I had brought with me was missing. We looked for it everywhere and could not find it. After our futile searching my cousin said: "We should probably go ask the Old Man." This made absolutely no sense to me, and I told him that this "Old Man stuff" has gone too far. Feeling that my cousin could use a reality check, I pointed out things that were so obvious to me, namely that the Old Man lived miles away from here, so how could he possibly know anything about it?

Having made my case, like the lawyers on TV, I looked at my cousin awaiting his confession of being wrong. I will never forget the way he looked at me. It was a look of pity, as if I was the one out of touch with reality! I let that pass, feeling that I had made my point.

On this last night of my vacation we had some of the fun I had been hoping for, visiting different people. I did not have a sense of direction in Chicago at that time, so I had no idea of the places

my cousin was driving. Later on in the evening we stopped in front of a house. I recognized this house as the Old Man's place. When we came in he looked at me, smiled, and said: "So, we meet again?" Then he added: "The thing you came here to ask me about, you'll get your answer when you get back to New York."

From that point on the conversation switched completely and he started talking about Theosophy, the Ageless Wisdom, about who we are as opposed to who we think and pretend ourselves to be. He started to go very deep. At a couple of points during the evening he diverged in his conversation to describe in very graphic detail specific occurrences in my own life that he had no possible way of knowing in any ordinary manner. At that point I did not have to be further impressed with the fact that he could "see".

He talked for a while and I listened intently. Then he said: "You know, son, I want to share something with you. It is a mantra I made for myself; think about it, it might do you some good." It went: "I know that I am a spark from that eternal flame. I am a grain of sand on this beach of life. I am related to a blade of grass, correlated to a leaf on a tree. I am part of the universal all; what can be denied me?"

The Old Man kept talking. At a certain point he said: "It is time for you to leave." I still wanted more and said, "No, please keep on . . ." He interrupted me saying, "You had better go. Remember, you have to leave early in the morning. Look at your watch!" I realized that four hours had passed in what seemed like the

blink of an eye. Already it was early in the morning!

I left and went back to New York. Driving back, I cannot say that I was thinking about the things he had said. There was far too much for me to process. I arrived in New York and still had a couple of days before I had to be back at school. I went for a walk in the park to sort through all that was on my mind. As I walked I found myself thinking about the Old Man's mantra.

When I was in Chicago my cousin had given me a book on yoga to explain something about meditation. I had read only a paragraph, which had not made much of an impression on me. But while walking in the park that one paragraph came back to me. It was specifically about the breath and a way of breathing. Focusing on the in-breath and the out-breath, and thinking about "I am a grain of sand on this beach of life", that was when something happened to me that I will not attempt to describe — not because I don't want to, but because even in the many years since that moment I still have no words. I can talk about the after-effects.

While walking I had a feeling that suddenly everything around became very, very quiet and still. In the midst of New York City, there was not a sound, only an intense, gathering silence. I started to walk down a flight of steps and, literally, in the time between raising one foot and putting it down for the next step, something inside me opened up, like a shell breaking open, and I could "see" in a way that I did not know how to describe.

Later, when I read about people who had mystical experiences, I realized: "That's it!" There were a number of side effects associated with the experience, but from that point on it became very clear that there was a great deal more to life than I had previously imagined. Many of the pieces started to fit together, and a much deeper level of understanding unfolded.

This heightened experience stayed with me for a couple of weeks, then died down. There is an often-quoted expression: "It is better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all." It is one of those truisms that only become clear when the intense suffering of the loss has faded. Having lived in, then been removed from such an exalted awareness was the most miserable experience I could have imagined. It was clear that the experience had been generated by my contact with the Old Man, so that is when I decided I had to return to Chicago.

A year later, when I returned, there were many young people gathering around the Old Man from different places. Some had met him and had their own extraordinary experiences. Every Wednesday night there would be meetings at the house. At one point musicians from all over Chicago started to come. Usually the gathering would not end until the morning hours. These young musicians felt that their music had a potency to heal and uplift, and they came to the Old Man sensing that he could help them go deeper. Often they had had transcendent

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experiences while performing. Out of that group healing teams were formed, and much work was done.

Initially I had taken a term off from school, planning to spend three months with him. There is an expression: “Man plans and God laughs”. The three months turned out to be thirteen years, until the day he died. In the background of my mind I had thought that since my experience had resulted from having met him one time, if I stay with him for three months it will be permanent. But, of course, that is not the way it works. On this path we get occasional glimpses that serve to give us motivation to study and do the work required to deepen.

The Old Man died in 1987, but a community had formed around him that continued for another fifteen years. Gradually people turned their attention to different areas of their own lives that they wanted to pursue. So the com-

munity had its time, and then it ceased.

From time to time, if we are lucky and aware, we find ourselves in the presence of exceptional people. As difficult as it is for us to accept, the message they all share is that what we see in them is not as great as what they see in us. The difference is not that they are somehow endowed with gifts unavailable to the rest of us, but rather it is their openness to live a life that is authentic. The Old Man was completely and fully himself, not an imitation of anyone else.

Authenticity and lack of pretense remove the barriers blocking our access to an inner source. To anyone who makes themselves available, that inner life expresses itself in the unique manner suited to their development. The Old Man had a powerful personality which was attractive to many people. But its value was in his ability to use it as a tool for something altruistic, more profound. ✧

**Human beings, vegetables, and cosmic dust,  
all dance to the tune of an invisible piper.**

Albert Einstein

# The Mandate of the TS

SAMDHONG RINPOCHE

Friends,

I feel immensely happy to be with you at this important inaugural function, where Mrs Radha Burnier is once again formally assuming the role of International President of the Theosophical Society (TS). At the outset, I congratulate all the members of the Society in particular, and humanity in general, for having Radhaji as International President for the fourth consecutive term. On this solemn occasion I humbly and sincerely invoke the blessings of the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and all the Enlightened Ones, that they may bestow blessings on Radhaji to have the health and strength to lead the Society for many years to come, and on all its members to devote themselves to their share of service towards realizing the Society's objects. Although I have been a member of this great Society for the last three decades, I have not been able to serve it in any substantial way. Yet it is a great privilege for me to have this opportunity to say a few words this evening.

I need not dwell on the Society's objects, history and what it has done in the past,

because every member is quite familiar with them. I would like to use this opportunity to draw your kind attention to the present state of humanity, the great challenges before all elevated persons, and the universal responsibility of the TS as a whole, and each one of its members as individuals.

Dismayed by the human condition today, many are often tempted to question the relevance of the TS to this present age. A similar question has been asked of other spiritual traditions and institutions. In my view, this doubt which results in a lack of enthusiasm and lethargy arises in the minds of those who have not fully grasped the nature, function and strength of the Society. The relevance of any spiritual endeavour can never be determined by external conditions. It is determined by the faith and confidence of the practitioners. Those having the required *śraddhā*, or enlightened faith, will never doubt the relevance of the objects in which they have put their total faith. Each TS member must strengthen his or her enlightened faith in the purpose and path of the

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**His Eminence Professor Samdhong Rinpoche** is former Director of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, Varanasi, India, and life member of the Theosophical Society (TS). Talk at the inauguration of Mrs Radha Burnier's 4th term as international President of the TS, July 2001. Reprinted from *The Theosophist*, August 2001.

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Society, and be aware of its relevance to our present age — a relevance which is perhaps greater than what it was at its inception.

The inspirers and founders of the TS saw the gross materialistic trend in the world more than a hundred years ago, and realized that the various religious traditions would become void of religiousness and be substituted by institutions and dogmas that would not be able to save humanity. On the contrary, they saw that the names of religions would be used very effectively to create divisions and conflicts. For this reason, a brotherhood of spiritually inclined people, irrespective of race, creed, sex, caste, or colour came together and established a programme in search and defence of Truth. The TS has promulgated the motto “There is no religion higher than Truth” to remind people not to neglect Truth, not only through the materialistic mindset, but also through the mind conditioned by religious institutions. In my opinion, the theosophical movement has played a very important role at a crucial juncture of human history for more than a hundred and twenty-five years.

If the TS had not come into being, the history of spiritual tradition, particularly in the Asian continent, would have been very different. In spite of tremendous negative forces, Mother Earth still holds pockets of positive energy and rays of light in the vast horizons of darkness. The task of the Society is not at the stage of completion, but of strengthening and continuing a great mission to save the earth and all its inhabitants. Although the es-

sence of human nature is good and pure, human beings are vulnerable and they can be conditioned by several predispositions. To be born as a human being is a most precious privilege, because in this life we have the potential to achieve liberation and enlightenment. But congenial conditions are required for the spiritual mind to grow, and for all mental impurities first to subside, and eventually to be eradicated.

If throughout life one were bereft of spiritual stimulation and consistently encountered the powerful stimuli of negative emotions, the opportunity for transformation would be totally denied. Today, the entire world is going towards moral bankruptcy and spiritual starvation. Powerful negative forces have been carefully planning an economic colonization of the entire world. They have found fertile ground in human greed and intolerance because these are easily exploited and used to promote their ulterior ends. These negative forces have been given a boost by the media in multifarious forms. The so-called information revolution has left no one untouched. Not so long ago, remote and unpolluted areas such as Ladakh and Bhutan have been unconsciously and easily captured by this Black Age instrument, exposing innocent people to an unquenchable thirst for material objects.

Consistently stimulated greed and intolerance, right from childhood until death, has left no time and energy for the spiritually immature to reflect upon and discriminate between right and wrong, good and evil. Their mind is heavily conditioned to accept the idea of “wealth

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for self” as the ultimate object of human life. The self- and money-centred mindset has no hesitation in creating catastrophes such as the starving of millions in the poor nations and depriving future generations of natural resources. Killing, war, fear of war, terrorism and the like, are the most effective means to promote trade, particularly that of arms and ammunitions. From a young age, people are systematically trained for comparison, competition and conflict. So-called conflict resolution, especially through violent methods, guarantees a new generation of multiple conflicts while trying to resolve the first one. Environmental degradation as a result of human greed has deprived all, including the animal kingdom, of health and a safe life. Most criminal acts are already legalized under various pretexts, and now they are in the process of being made “moral”, which is indeed a most alarming danger for humanity as a whole. This is the state of the world today.

All sensible persons who have even a slight inclination towards spirituality need to wake up and unite to face these challenges, and the TS must play a major role to save the future of humanity and the world. One may be tempted to raise the following points:

1. What can I do, since no one listens to me or cooperates with me?
2. Against these powerful forces of globalization, what can a few individuals or relatively small organizations such as the TS do? How can we stand against this current?
3. Many people justify their immoral

acts by saying: “I have no intention or willingness to do wrong but, since I have to survive in this evil society, there is no way out but to compromise with the current situation.”

I would stress again that the above questions and attitudes are a result of a lack of faith and conviction in Truth and the ideals to which we claim to be committed. In this apparent tug of war, many arguments and counterarguments can be presented endlessly, and we may go on discussing them academically or intellectually, but that would lead us nowhere.

The fundamental issue involved in this discussion is Truth. Whether one believes in Truth or not will determine all the answers to the above questions and attitudes. If someone believes in Truth, there is no room for raising such questions. Truth can only manifest itself through goodness, righteousness and justice, and not through evil, wrongdoing and injustice. If this is the case, then Truth must be incomparably more powerful than falsehood. Then the question of what can I, or we, do against massive evil does not arise. Truth and falsehood are not to be determined by a majority view. They are determined by reality itself. It is not like forming a government in a parliamentary system. Truth and falsehood are to be perceived by authentic wisdom, like seeing black and white.

In this context, the first and foremost task of spiritual organizations, including the TS, is to re-establish or strengthen people’s faith in Truth, so that they are empowered to disassociate themselves from, and resist, falsehood. I know this is

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not an easy task. Our minds are so conditioned by a mass of predispositions, preconceptions, and particularly indoctrination by the media, that they lack the basic ability to comprehend and perceive the whole. The mind has been conditioned to always see things in fragments and alternatives. Whenever we talk about Truth, our thought process immediately puts forward an image of truth that is the opposite of, or an alternative to, our image of falsehood. In this way, Truth is presented to one's thought as just an image parallel to the image of falsehood, giving both images equal status. This is the pitiable condition in which we find ourselves.

Unless and until the state of falsehood is recognized and negated completely, Truth can never be perceived. The materialistic mindset is incapable of recognizing and negating anything. It is indoctrinated with fear, self-negation and nihilism, which play a very subtle role in our mind, preventing us from identifying and negating falsehood. The Buddha, Nagarjuna, Jiddu Krishnamurti and many other sages and seers tried their best to teach people how to negate. Negation should not be construed as being negative. It is the source of total creativity. In a sense, it is the only positive, because it paves the way for

uncovering the Truth. Therefore, I entreat everyone to allow their intelligence to be awakened and perceive the Truth as it is, so that our physical, verbal and mental activities may naturally flower in goodness to benefit all living beings. To create a congenial condition for this awakening, each one should be aware of his or her universal responsibility to: (1) disassociate from wrongdoing; (2) firmly and non-violently resist all wrong acts in society, expressing their disagreement in clear words; and (3) step out of the mighty stream of the evil forces of consumerism and globalization. While doing so, each one should lead a righteous life with right livelihood, discriminating needs from wants.

I am sure this is not impossible for anyone with the clear inclination to find Truth. If such a spiritual mindset is generated, it will not be difficult to lead an uncompromisingly righteous life even in today's world. If a human being cannot survive without compromising with evil, such survival has no meaning. The Theosophical Society, with its definite mandate from the Enlightened Ones, can help a vast number of individuals to enter the right path of Truth.

May all sentient beings have peace and contentment. ✧

**May all sentient beings have peace and contentment.**

# World Crises: The Root Cause — I

P. KRISHNA

MY views on this subject are mostly based on my understanding through the teachings of J. Krishnamurti and Theosophy. This is the first of three parts of this article, in which we are going to look at *major global problems* that are facing humanity, and to discuss their origin. In the next part we will consider whether those problems can be resolved by making external changes in laws, the economy, and other controls, or whether they require a much deeper change, an inner change in the consciousness of humanity. In the third part we shall consider whether education needs to be changed and whether it can bring about this transformation of consciousness, or at least help students to go in that direction.

Let me first discuss six major challenges which I think humanity is facing today, in order of their importance:

## 1. Groupism/Division

The first challenge is the fact that *human beings are divided* because they identify themselves with various groups:

national, religious, linguistic, and ideological groups (like communism, capitalism, and so on). That divides them from *other* groups, leading to rivalry and violence, and in extreme cases to wars, terrorism, rioting, and so forth. This problem has been with us for thousands of years. Ever since we know of history, human beings have been at war with each other.

We have tried to eliminate wars by creating the League of Nations and later the United Nations. But this has not eliminated the problem. I believe there are forty spots on Earth right now where armies are facing each other with guns or tanks. But when do we call it a war? When the armies march, when planes bomb, when guns shoot, and so on? But much before that, is there not psychological warfare between the two communities? There is distrust, fear, anger, and all that is a precursor to the above physical consequences.

We seem to be concerned with the manifestation of the division only when it reaches the level of what we call a war,

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but that is only an extreme manifestation. Unless we can get rid of the division and hatred between the groups, we will never end this situation. This is because the root cause of division has not been addressed. That is why the threat of war has remained with us for thousands of years. Our history is full of accounts of wars, one after the other: what each king did, what territories he gained, and so forth. We are still in this situation because we have not really understood that this is a problem that starts in the human psyche. Unless we handle it there, it will not end and we will only contain the manifestation of that hatred temporarily.

We need to understand what creates the division in the first place. After all, not all groups are divisive. We often have to work together, so there are school groups, hospital groups, and many other functional groups, where we collaborate, and these do not create division or hatred. So, when does a group become divisive? How does the mind decide which group to belong to, apart from the functional groups? When we examine this, we will find that when we develop an identity with a particular group or invest psychologically in it, it begins to define us, like being an Indian or American, a Hindu or Christian.

We give importance to belonging to a group because we feel that in belonging to it we become secure, and members of the group seem to be our friends or brothers, unlike *other* people. It creates this feeling of “we” and “they”. How does the mind do that? Unless we understand

that and free ourselves of this divisive process, it works in our mind, even though we may agree it should not be there as it creates a serious problem. It will not go away if the process that causes division occurs in our mind.

In Nature, everything is different from everything else; everybody is different from everybody else, in knowledge, possessions, dress, age, food habits, and so forth. It is not that differences create division; we are often able to see a difference only as a difference, without converting that into any kind of hatred or division. For instance, we have not had any war between tall and short people, even though they are different. They do not group together in that way. So, there are lots of innocent groups and innocent differences.

When does a difference turn into a division and generate violence? When we examine this question, we will find that when we attach a value to that ideology or religion and feel that it is superior to others, that is what creates division. It is a kind of process of identification, a sense of belonging, feeling that this is “mine”, and the “mine” becomes important just because it *is* mine. So, the country in which one was born becomes particularly important because it is “my” country, similarly my religion, my family, and the rest. What we identify with defines us, gives us a status. So long as this process goes on in our mind, it inevitably creates division.

As theosophists, we need to examine if the Theosophical Society (TS) is also

like that. Are we, as theosophists, divided from the rest of the world? Are only members of the TS our brothers, or all of humanity? The Buddha said: “The other person is yourself.” If one does not feel that way, it is because we identify with a fragment, not think of the whole, and our mind creates division. That is the process, and unless that goes away this problem is not going to end. Its manifestation is what we try to control. That is the job of the UN and similar organizations. They immediately try to diplomatically facilitate some sort of agreement between the two parties, but those agreements keep breaking down.

The problem between the Arabs and the Jews started in 1948 with the creation of Israel — it still exists, nothing has changed. The problem of Kashmir between India and Pakistan is similar. So many efforts have been made, small wars have been fought, but that has not ended the division. The conflict goes on, it erupts seriously now and then, and we object only to the eruption. That is the root cause of violence, wars, rioting. I would include our *cruelty to animals* in this.

We are identified with our own species and create holocausts for animals. Millions of animals are being butchered to feed human beings. Tremendous amounts of suffering go on, not vastly different from what Hitler did with the Jews. We object to the latter, but we do not extend it to the animals though they are our ancestors. Biology tells us that we have evolved from them, and that they

have a highly developed nervous system, so they feel pain and terror the same way as we do. But just because one identifies with the human species, one treats it as normal that animals can be butchered.

I have come across people in Europe who said, “Animals don’t suffer”. I said, “Don’t you see that they suffer?” And they respond: “No, they don’t have souls, so they don’t suffer.” Some idea like that helps them to cope with the cruelty, not feel guilty about it, through belief in an illusion. Lots of illusions like that create the divisions between us. Therefore, one must learn how to free the mind of illusions. That is the deeper source of all these problems which are currently arising all over the world, and whose root cause has not been really addressed.

## **2. The power unleashed by science and technology**

We have had thousands of wars for thousands of years, but war has never been as dangerous as it is today. The power unleashed by science and technology has created nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Earlier, war meant two armies went into a field and it was a match as to which army was better trained. The rest of the population, mostly civilians, women, and children, were not involved. It was a contest between two armies with their training. The whole country was not involved in that match. But now with these weapons of mass destruction we can decimate a whole country with one bomb, so war has become much dangerous than it ever was.

Does this mean that the problem is with science? Science is the quest for truth about Nature. Einstein revealed a great truth about Nature, that mass is also a form of energy, and gave us the famous equation:  $E=mc^2$ . That was a great truth about Nature. It did not say: “You must make a bomb.” The human mind created it. That is why they say: “All wars start in the minds of men.” This is because of the division I described above. There is so much hatred between nations that we are constantly preparing for war, calling it defense, but preparing for war. Therefore, we are accumulating weapons of destruction to be used. Indeed, the United States dropped them on Japan at the end of World War II. We know the tremendous destruction that resulted from that.

All we need is for all countries to agree that although we may have differences and quarrels, we will not use war as a means to solve them. Such a simple thing! Just do not use war, discuss problems, have an international court. After all, that is what we do within the country when we have a dispute — we go to court and we accept arbitration and the decision of the judges. Why can we not do that internationally? Because we are not wise enough — we want war, we want to be powerful and to dominate the “other”. We are not satisfied with justice, we want victory! That is a psychological issue, and it comes from the divisions mentioned above.

If we are a little wiser, all countries would be twice as prosperous, because

half the revenue of almost every country goes into supporting the war effort. Most scientific research is funded for so-called “defense” projects. This is a very major problem. We have not really understood our relationship with power. Shakespeare wrote: “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” That is because we do not use our innate wisdom. Power is not meant to destroy, to kill, we need power to protect and discharge our responsibilities.

When I was the Rector of the Rajghat Education Centre I had tremendous power, but it was not *personal* power. It was power to discharge my duties, to do what was right for that whole institution. We are given that power as the captain of a team, and we must take decisions in the interest of the whole team. It is not meant for dominating, destroying, or hating others; but we have not really understood our relationship with power.

There are *all kinds* of power that we need: muscle, electric, steam, and other kinds. Power is just the ability to *do* things. What makes us use that power for domination, exploitation, or destruction? Is it not lack of love or understanding? This problem will not end by using any kind of external means. We may be able to control it to some extent, but the problem persists, and we are living extremely dangerously.

### 3. Environmental catastrophes

I will not go through them because we are all knowledgeable about them. Every

day the news is warning us about global warming, pollution of air, water, and food; deforestation, soil erosion, nuclear fallouts, depletion of the ozone air, and others. If we examine the root cause of these, we will find that our relationship with Nature has undergone a tremendous change after the Industrial Revolution.

For millions of years human beings lived in harmony with all other species, rivers, mountains, and all of Nature. We did not have the power to dominate or destroy. Our ancestors used to worship Nature, the rivers, a tree, an animal. We still find evidence that they worshipped Nature. But after the Industrial Revolution, which brought power, we could cut down trees, remove forests, and use Nature as a resource for economic development and fulfilment of our desires and greed. So instead of being a friend of Nature, being a part of it, the mentality arose that we are masters of Nature and can use it to fulfil our endless desires.

This egoistic relationship with Nature is the root cause behind all these problems, because constantly man is using that relationship for his own economic development. When you couple that desire with the competition between nations — because each nation has a rivalry with other nations — the desire to be the first to exploit Nature grows. Even a rich country like the United States of America withdrew from the treaty for solving the problem of global warming and environmental collapse.

For millions of years, during the course of evolution, there was an intri-

cate balance in Nature, but we are now destroying that balance, and these catastrophes are the result. We can destroy this balance because we have all the power generated by science and technology. Unless our attitude towards Nature changes, unless we feel as friends with trees, mountains, and rivers, instead of all the time looking at them with utilitarian eyes, not valuing a cow because it gives milk, and the river because it provides water and electricity, not valuing a tree only because it provides fruit, but having true friendship, which means sharing, caring, and love.

We are still sharing this Earth with all those other species, but that mutual respect and feeling of care has gone. The attitude now is utilitarian — “what can I get out of this relationship?” It is this attitude which is behind these environmental catastrophes. We are tackling them externally, one by one, trying to solve global warming, pollution problems, and so on. It is necessary and it may solve some of the problems. But it will create new problems, too, because the whole approach is wrong. That is an important thing to understand. We may put in a lot of effort, but when that effort is made with the wrong vision, the whole thing fails, because the effort is towards a vision which itself is illusory.

Therefore, this is a serious problem, and unless it is addressed at the level of the root cause, these problems will never go away. The ecologists have now realized this, and they — the scientists and biologists — are telling us that the

whole of the Earth and its environment is like one single living body. If you damage any one part, you damage the whole body. We cannot pick and choose and say: “I will have this and will not have that.” Either we take the whole or we get nothing. The whole approach of using the forests and diverting the rivers, manipulating the land with chemicals, and so on, has been a big mistake and needs to be seriously looked at.

#### **4. Dictatorships**

Our experience in history has shown that the greatest cruelties and destruction have taken place under dictatorships: under kings, the Nazis, communists, and military dictators. In dictatorships they suppress the press, the information and the people do not come to know what is really going on. Therefore, mass genocides and cruelties can be perpetrated, and the world does not even come to know of it until much later.

When the USSR was a communist dictatorship, there used to be a joke which went: “In the West you cannot predict what the future will be. In the East (meaning the USSR) you cannot predict the past!” This is because under dictatorships we do not know what happened in the past due to it being successfully suppressed. A dictatorship is not only a problem when the head of the government is a dictator, it is also a problem when the head of a family, or an organization is dictatorial.

Dictatorship is an attitude of mind which says: “I am more intelligent, more

powerful, I’ll decide what is to be done and everybody else must obey.” It is an attitude of domination, a feeling of superiority rooted in the ego of the individual. We need to work at changing that attitude in all spheres of life, so that, rather than a dictatorial attitude of ordering people around, there is a truly all-encompassing democratic consciousness rooted in cooperation.

Democracy cannot just be in its form, it must be there in the spirit of the people as well. Otherwise, political parties regard the opposition as enemies and can play havoc with the whole country. Therefore, it is important that children do not grow up with a dictatorial mind, but with a cooperative, democratic mind. That value must be instilled. Even today we have lots of dictatorships throughout the world and living in those places is dangerous.

#### **5. Breakdown of the Family**

Divorce rates in some of the more economically progressive countries have exceeded fifty to sixty per cent. That means, more divorces take place than marriages. Marriage was not meant for just rationing sex. It was an institution which human beings devised because children need to be cared for and looked after for twenty years before they can function independently in society. No one could discharge that responsibility better than the two people who produced the children and created a home and a family in which to raise them. It was meant really for

discharging our responsibility towards the next generation.

When the cooperation between man and woman breaks down, then the purpose for which the family was constituted is affected. This means that the younger generation grows up without love and care. Madame Maria Montessori made a remarkably interesting observation. She said: "A child who is brought up without love and compassion becomes his own worst enemy." The mind of the child begins to function in such a way as to be destructive of others and of itself. This has profoundly serious consequences. The rise in juvenile delinquency, particularly in affluent societies, is caused by this to a large extent.

I am not saying we should go back to the unjust system of men dominating over women within the family, or man ruling over the woman. There must be equality, but it means that we have to learn to live as friends, working cooperatively with mutual care and respect without seeking to dominate each other. At present the cooperation between man and woman is breaking down. It probably was never really there since men dominated in a hierarchical system imposed by society.

Unequal relationships tend to be quite secure and to persist. In equality there is greater difficulty, but we need to learn how to live with equality, because the hierarchical relationship was, and still is, an unjust order. To have a just order we need to learn about how to live cooperatively, which involves love, compassion, and mutual respect, all of which requires

an inner transformation at the level of consciousness. We will examine this further in the second part of this article.

## 6. Replication of Society

All our problems tend to replicate. There is a tremendous inertia; problems repeat and continue. Consider the division between the Arabs and the Jews. The children of the Arabs are brought up being told that "Jews are our enemies". And the Jewish children are raised being told by the elders that "the Arabs are our enemies". The old people die, but the enmity continues in the next generation. So, how will it ever end?

The same is true of all kinds of sinister traditions. In India there is casteism, which started some 3,000 years ago. We do not even know in what form it was started, but today it is completely dividing society, causing discrimination, domination, and occasionally riots between groups of people. One recognizes it as evil, the government tries to eliminate it, but it does not go because the mind of individuals has been infected by casteism.

A child is born, and at birth it is assigned not only a religion, but also a caste. They grow up with those assignments and the mind gets infected with this thousand-year propaganda. Unless they are raised to question this, not just accept, it will never change; but it is inconvenient to train the younger generation to question. So, elders want them to conform and follow the tradition, as it is very convenient for them. All these problems arise because

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we look at them with a narrow vision.

When we strongly identify ourselves with one fragment of society, one ideology, one religious group, one caste, and so forth, it does give us a feeling of security to have a group of friends or colleagues who will help us. But that is also what is causing division and the greatest insecurity in the world. Unless we look at this with a long vision, we do not realize that in the very act of seeking security through identification we are creating great insecurity for all. It is a deep-rooted illusion caused by the narrow vision.

These are to my mind the major problems and their causes. As we shall see, the cause always lies in the notions and attitudes of mind which are a part of human consciousness. These problems originate from our mind, and the world is the way it is because we are the way we are. We have these problems in our mind, and so they also manifest in society. Of course, we must control the outer manifestations, but so long as we continue to be this way, these problems will never end.

*(To be continued)*

How surely gravity's law,  
strong as an ocean current,  
takes hold of even the  
strongest thing  
and pulls it toward  
the heart of the world.

Each thing – each stone,  
blossom, child –  
is held in place.  
Only we, in our arrogance,  
push out beyond what we  
belong to, for some  
empty freedom.

If we surrendered  
to Earth's intelligence  
we could rise up rooted,  
like trees.  
Instead we entangle  
ourselves in knots of our

own making and struggle,  
lonely and confused.

So, like children,  
we begin again  
to learn from the things,  
because they are  
in God's heart;  
they have never left him.

This is what the things  
can teach us: to fall,  
patiently to trust our  
heaviness.  
Even a bird has to do that  
before he can fly.

Rainer Maria Rilke  
Translated from the German by  
Joanna Macy and Anita Barrows

# From Becoming Aware to Ever-Becoming

JENNY BAKER

FROM a very early age a baby starts to become aware of its surroundings, and by the age of three it can recognize itself in a mirror and knows itself as a separate individual. All through childhood into adulthood, the awareness of ourselves and the world in which we live grows. We accumulate massive amounts of knowledge, acquire skills, and develop a personality as we mature into adulthood. We become aware of all that life has to offer in a materialistic world, and for some people this is all they require from life.

But this awareness is not the whole story, and for some of us there seems to be something missing. We feel the need for a deeper meaning to our lives and begin to search for something beyond our conscious awareness that we call spirit or soul. This search into the depths of our being takes various forms and will take a long time. For most, this acknowledgement of a soul, of an eternal “Oneness”, comes gradually, and for others it can happen spontaneously. Let me share my story with you.

I was a very shy child, introverted, and

lacking in self-confidence. At the age of about thirteen, I longed to be like some other girls in my school, outgoing, gregarious and seemingly always having a good time. I brooded over these thoughts for a long time until one day I had a sudden realization. It would not matter what I was like on the outside, for, regardless of whether I was introverted or extroverted, my “I”, or my “Self”, would always be the same “I”, the same “Self”.

In that moment of inspiration, I had become aware of my True Self, had managed to separate my personal ego from my spiritual ego, and found it extremely comforting. I decided to stop wanting to be different, and instead to get on with being who I was. Sadly, the significance of this was not apparent to me until much later in life when I started to study yoga, philosophy and Theosophy.

Becoming aware, or becoming conscious that our personality and our senses and emotions are not who we really are, is the first step on the path to Self-realization. Like the many tracks leading to the top of the mountain, there are as

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many different approaches as to how this goal can be achieved.

Like the many hazards that lie along the mountain tracks, we need to be wary of things that can distract us on our quest for Truth. Climbing a mountain requires fitness, attention, and alertness to the various obstacles that lie in the path, as does our spiritual journey; for it is easy to become less alert and perhaps complacent or impatient or to be distracted by the pleasures of life.

Our five senses let us know where we are in time and space. Our senses feed our minds with experiences, images, and sensations. But what part does the mind play in our consciousness? Are mind and consciousness the same? Let us put it another way; can there be mind without consciousness? No, there can be no mind unless consciousness is present, but mind is not consciousness, for consciousness is Self-awareness. And what is Self-awareness? It is the knowledge of our True Self.

From becoming aware of the outer planes of existence, we will eventually realize we have delved into the inner planes of existence. Then we change from becoming aware to just becoming, to “ever-becoming”. Ever-becoming describes the “pilgrim’s progress” on their spiritual journey towards Oneness. To attain Oneness, we must be free from all dualities and search for our inner peace in the middle of life’s complexity.

It is hard to imagine a life free from duality, for duality is all around us and is an integral part of our lives. There can be

no light if there is no darkness, no in without an out, no joy without sorrow, no positive without negative, and so on. Let us consider a coin, it has two sides, a front and a back, but it also has an edge or rim. It is the same with a sheet of paper but here the edge is finer although it is still present. So, imagine being able to dissolve the two sides and leave only the edge. Duality is lost and only Oneness remains.

“Ever-becoming” is not a finite expression but one that describes the continuous evolution of the spirit within. The start of the evolutionary process we are told is the Great Breath, which *The Secret Doctrine* also calls the Divine Breath. This Great Breath is the perpetual motion of the universe. Theosophy teaches that LIFE has but one attribute which is eternal, ceaseless motion. Hence the significance of the term “ever-becoming” when applied to the One Universal Life and our own life.

Once we have started on the path to Self-realization there is no turning back, although there may be times of inertia, doubt, distractions, and numerous deviations along the way. To help us on the journey we use guides that advocate certain practices. These can include yoga and meditation and the study of sacred texts, but the first step required could be a change of our lifestyle. We need to develop patience with ourselves and selflessness, for the more we can leave our lower nature behind, the smoother the path ahead. Our thoughts and actions are for the good of others as we put aside our own wants and desires. We require no recognition or reward for what we do although Karma

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will play its part. The longing for the union with our Higher Self is unstoppable, a part of the process of “ever-becoming”.

The harder we try the more our efforts are rewarded, and we find it easier to let go of material things, for we know they have no permanence. The only permanence is THAT which we seek.

Let us return to the mountain-climbing analogy. The climber has overcome many difficulties, but nevertheless continues undeterred, so sure are they that they will achieve their goal. That is, until they come to one final obstacle, a deep ravine with rocky sides and a torrent of fast-flowing water at the bottom. The only way across is to construct a bridge using any available means. The mountaineer sees a person on the other side and throws a rope, and together a bridge is built.

The seeker of truth reaches a similar obstacle, the gap between his lower self and his Higher Self. This too requires the

construction of a bridge, the *antakharana*, or as some people like to call it, the Rainbow Bridge. Just how do we cross this divide between our two selves? Our Higher Self cannot cross to the lower but does instead encourage the pilgrim in his efforts to bridge the divide. We throw out a mental rope; our thoughts are only with reaching our Higher Self, as we tell our Higher Self that we are ready to cross, that we have left behind the trappings of our worldly life. We have lightened the load that we carry, for along the way we have been able to distinguish between the finite and the infinite. We have attuned ourselves with all things spiritual and are ready to enjoy absolute and total Bliss.

The Vedic prayer is realized.

Lead me from the unreal to the Real.

Lead me from darkness to Light.

Lead me from death to Immortality.

*Hari Om Tat Sat.*



I died as mineral and became a plant,  
I died as plant and rose to animal,  
I died as animal and I was human,  
Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?  
Yet once more I shall die human,  
To soar with angels blessed above.  
And when I sacrifice my angel soul  
I shall become what no mind ever conceived.  
As a human, I will die once more,  
Reborn, I will with the angels soar.  
And when I let my angel body go,  
I shall be more than mortal mind can know.

Rumi Jalal ad'Din

# The Ethical Revolution

TRÂN-THI-KIM-DIÊU

AMONG the successive crises that humanity has gone through, the one that has been caused by the coronavirus pandemic, Covid-19, has an unprecedented significance in its form, manifestation, and implications. Though there were extremely serious health disasters such as the Black Death, which decimated a large part of the European population, there were also revolutions of various kinds, including that of 1789, which swept away the monarchy in France, bringing a wind of radical change.

The industrial revolution at the end of the 19th century brought its share of spectacular progress and procession of miseries. Humanity has witnessed since then a material disruption that highlights an ocean separating the vast continent — the laborious working class — from islands of insolent wealth. One may ask: “Would Lady Fortune be blind?” Each of these two categories lived and still lives in its own world, ignoring each other, fighting against each other, and using the single language of confrontation, until today, as a kind of curse repeated by its own self-generation.

It was in this context that leaders emerged trying to point a way out of humanity’s self-destructive unconscious habits. Among them were Madame H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) and Annie Besant (AB). In 1875, the formal foundation of the Theosophical Society (TS) in New York saw a vast “rescue plan” looming. A series of works by HPB, including her magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine*, opened the mind to worlds, ideas, concepts, hitherto unknown. Overall, the important thing was the lifting of a thick veil at the mental level. It was as if human consciousness, suddenly awakened by shaking from the higher planes, recovered after having been stunned, began to search in all directions.

The bridgehead was thrown. Guided by universal intelligence, AB, already matured by a lifetime of social service, as an avant-garde freethinker, was brought to meet HPB. Instead of just reviewing *The Secret Doctrine*, as had been planned, AB implored HPB to grant her guidance. The first deck of the bridge was laid. More decks and more arches would follow to complete the construction and

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consolidation of this bridge, whose ultimate purpose would be to lead human consciousness towards the state of Unity. If the motto of the Great Revolution of 1789 was *Freedom, Equality, Fraternity*, that of the theosophical movement would be *Unity*. This was the start of implementing the “rescue plan”.

The industrial revolution, despite its imperfections, brought a positive note. Indeed, along with the enrichment of the new bourgeoisie born of industry, one could observe some improvement in the material life of the indigent. Unfortunately, the human mind quickly fell into the trap of repetition, which soon produced the thirst for endless consumption. The desire to possess, to have more and more, seems to be the result of the combination of two factors: the thirst generated by the lack of necessities at first, and then the unconscious repetition of acquired habits. Utilitarianism, whose motto is “to ensure the greatest happiness for the greatest number”, makes the situation worse.

The 20th century, hampered by two world wars, saw its last quarter become a witness to the rise of consumerism. In “developed” countries, huge spaces constitute “temples of consumerism” where humans wander, like half-conscious zombies, drawn in the whirlwind of unnecessary acquisitions, and eventually to financial and moral impasse. This drunkenness of possession acts like a virus that “businessmen” nurture to satisfy their own thirst for self-enrichment through the lure of gain.

Surprisingly, the cyber revolution

began visibly almost simultaneously. It breaks out old notions about time, information, communication, and so on, and, consequently, old ways of thinking as well as “traditional” lifestyles. While computer science makes tremendous progress in all aspects of life, those who are dependent on consumption undergo greater pressure, right down to their homes. With one click, one after the other, in an always semi-conscious state, they can go as far as bankruptcy.

So what? The popular political revolution had its moment of glory through exportation of ideals. The industrial revolution, despite the abundance acquired by a “new aristocracy”, improved a little the daily life of the people. Then came the cybernetic revolution that, in less than half a century, has shaken up the established order on the mental level. Until a certain regulation, financial speculation allowed almost instantaneous acquisitions of insolent fortunes — simultaneously with the constant further impoverishment of the poor.

What is most painful is the indifference of the new plutocracy vis-à-vis others — the Other. Otherness is ignored by most of humanity, apart from rare evolved souls on the planet. The fact is that most human souls are sick with the virus of greed, the source of a recurrent evil whose conflicts and fears are just visible symptoms.

And now Covid-19 has come. “From where”, one asked in the general panic. “From a province in China”, we were told. Let us take the risk of interpreting

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with some observations and reflections. First, Nature “does not make leaps”; it has no clear, definite borders among its kingdoms. Indeed, there are “beings” that cannot be defined as plants or animals because they are constantly changing; so that without our knowledge there is constant overlap between different kingdoms and planes.

Second, it would make sense to accept what theosophical teaching suggests, that is, negative and toxic, invisible thoughts could eventually become pathogenic microbes; and when these thoughts come together on a large scale, they would “rush” into the physical world in the form of epidemics, after their “incubation” on the invisible level of elementals. Evil thought-forms can precipitate viral clusters.

Therefore, whether it is from a province in China or elsewhere, that is not the point, because there is always a “before”. Reason tells us that it would be better to deal with problems upstream, where they are generated, and not where they have already achieved their precipitous forms. Downstream are the habits of thinking related to the lifestyle of humans who are rightly mocked in a song by the French singer, Jacques Dutronc, “Seven hundred millions of Chinese, and me and me . . .” — Otherness has only eyes to cry!

In all this, where does happiness stand? In the plethora of items consumed? This is rather poor! In the satisfaction of desires? Simple decoy! For, the register of desires is renewed to the rhythm of

enticing catalogues that deprive the planet of oxygen by requiring the felling of trees for their manufacture. So, to provide *the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people*? Here again, are the shifting and outdated sands of utilitarianism.

“Social ethics” seems to be nonsense because each of the individuals who makes up a society *is* the society. If everyone lives their life properly, society *is*, therefore, an ethically evolving community, without having to adorn itself with such a qualifier. To put an end to any compromising concept, ethics is certainly not the finished product of perfect behaviourism, just like happiness is not quantifiable.

Then, where does happiness stand? Wouldn't it be the natural state to which all sentient beings aspire, including suffering humans? Humans are running in all directions for its search. But, in fact, they are only grasping their shadows by catching the multitude of objects of their desires. And all this in the absence of the Other, and without a real involvement of consciousness.

With the “precipitation” of Covid-19, the human mind is once again shaken, both by the suddenness of the phenomenon and by its lightning speed. It is once again recalled attention to the natural order of things, characterized by the impermanence and interdependence of the phenomena of existence. Indeed, we can observe, with a more awakened consciousness than that of the previous centuries, that humans die in terrible

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conditions. Indeed, one can die in the space of a day without the possibility of saying “goodbye” to loved ones. Thus, impermanence goes beyond the intellectual concept and enters the experiential stage. One can realize that nothing lasts “forever”, that everything has an end.

It seems so obvious. But how is it that one did not see it, when one’s life flowed in a peaceful stream, so that one must take the painful experience of rupture to open one’s sight? Leaving one’s family, interrupting emotional habits, and so on, act as a slap to the various vehicles of a human being. This time, well-developed internal sensory acuity amounts to a greater ability of the soul to understand the phenomenon and to want to seek the cause. The cause is part of the recurring selfishness.

Similarly, the observation of interdependence makes it possible to no longer deny the “other”. Good discoveries! But not the only ones. Covid-19, as an act of grace, reveals this quality of the rare, evolved souls, which is self-denial and greater awareness. The “other” is no longer denied; it is recognized and placed at the centre of attention, for the “and me, and me” is no longer there. Otherness resumes its place, natural, legitimate, whole, as new as at the birth of the world. The Divine would not have allowed the manifestation of life to take place without accepting this otherness. Each of the creatures is the “other” of the Divine, until their ultimate Union with It.

Thus, let us rejoice, despite losses, suffering, heartbreaks, and tears, for the

“other” has been rediscovered. We are at the dawning of another revolution. In the words of the Buddhist monk, Matthieu Ricard, it is the “altruistic revolution”. In all humility, but with an attempt at anticipation, I would rather call it the “*ethical* revolution”. Universal ethics include all life — beings and the universe. It derives from the universal order as its effective action. If “the other” is present, it is because “me” is no longer there.

However, this vision remains dualistic. If “I” disappears, it will no longer be necessary to refer to “the other”, since “the other” and “me” define each other. When “the other” and “me” merge quietly, everything fits into the natural order of things. The actions resulting from this state of order are of the nature of ethics. Thus, our Sufi brother-poet, Omar Khayyam, can, with impunity, invite his Friend to the tavern to share the “nectar of union” and drink it to their satisfaction. (It does not matter whether the anecdote is factual; the allegory is eloquent and beautiful.)

The ethical revolution is underway. It will help design a new paradigm to guide action after the pandemic, because, as there has been a “before”, an “after” will follow. It would not be wise to think that everything will return to normal, “as before”. In this case, what is the purpose of the experience? Certainly, at the social level, more effective actions for the less well-off will be needed, as well as any effort to intelligently reconstruct human society will be essential, aiming at

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greater equity and decency about wealth.

To do this, it will be necessary to revise one's behaviour. Will desire and greed be kept as the motive for action? Can not sharing be another motivation? Will the language of confrontation be again used, or will people try the experience of dialogue to transform the opposition of ideas into cooperation? Will we agree to change the paradigm: reject negligence by adhering to attentive learning? Will we be smart enough not to miss the train of evolution in motion? Will we be able to learn empathy?

Experts of all kinds will concoct a "new" model of "after". But it will not

make sense if it is only a reproduction of the past model. Inventiveness is the nature of the alert mind. May it also be permeable to empathy.

Without being overly optimistic, one can in time proclaim the advent of the *ethical revolution*. Of course, in the early stages, failure will be unavoidable, but as the oil slick spreads inexorably, evolved souls will unite silently but effectively to move together forward. Each theosophist can participate with a brick, a hand, a thought, a step, in the building of this bridge, still invisible but already perceptible, which will lead humans towards the consciousness of *Unity*. ✧

**The path which we seek to tread is not outside ourselves; the qualifications state briefly the condition of being. It is said that the person who wishes to tread the path must become one with it. Therefore, it is a way of living, thinking, feeling and acting that springs from our fundamental being. It is therefore the most natural thing in the world. We are all, to a greater or lesser extent, unnatural, made up into the likeness of the world with its falsities and perversions. But in treading the path we must be true to ourselves, revert to our fundamental state of being.**

N. Sri Ram  
The Way of Wisdom

# The Fire Within: Time for Action

TIM WYATT

HUMANITY'S spectacular progress over the past three centuries — especially its exponential embrace of technological ingenuity — has far outstripped its inner spiritual evolution. Accelerated material progress may even have curbed or distorted it. The digital revolution, once heralded as a saviour and a connector of humanity, is becoming a curse and a disease which is causing more harm than benefit.

Ignorance of humanity's spiritual underpinnings — let alone our potentially divine status — remains widespread if not ubiquitous. The lure of materialism and the miasma and confusion it has created has severely hampered any meaningful quest for deeper truths.

Intriguingly, our current confection of crises and conflicts — be they environmental, military, political, social, or economic — is having the somewhat paradoxical effect of acting as a forcing house and compelling people to view themselves and the world beyond the perceptive shackles of an exclusively material paradigm.

According to many recent research polls, increasing numbers of people regard

themselves as “spiritual but not religious”. Released from the straitjacket of conventional religious and scientific thought, more and more people view the world — and indeed the entire cosmos — as a living, breathing entity.

Something is violently shifting within the human psyche. The tectonic plates of our collective mind are grinding aggressively together. Major changes and uplifts in consciousness such as these are always accompanied by deep friction. Conflicts gouge out the riverbeds for new thought currents to flow. The geography of the mind is being remodelled.

The profound changes in our planet's physical condition are mirrored precisely by our own sense of angst and malaise. This parallel extends to the Earth's — and our own — subtle etheric, astral, mental, and higher bodies. As well as being physically damaged, the Earth is also damaged mentally and astrally and this is where the healing has to begin. No physical plane improvements are possible without action first in the subtle realms.

Humanity's prolonged spiritual alienation has led it down a one-way alley and

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straight into a metaphysical wasteland. There is collective global hysteria closely focused on the environment and on politics. Our responses have become raw, our dialogue coarse and our ability to act collectively depleted. Our high octane emotions have become overcharged and are poisoning our atmosphere and damaging our equilibrium. Rational thought and controlled positive action seem impossible in such a potent emotional maelstrom.

*The lessons for humanity are urgent, vital — and simple.* We have to know who we are. This is a crucial and unavoidable first step. First and foremost we are spirits. Accepting our innate spiritual nature is no longer a desirable option for people with nothing better to do. It may be the most essential survival tool that we possess.

Equally dangerous at this time is to allow pessimism about our prospects to take greater hold than it already has. Human ingenuity and a highly questionable and skewed version of progress have entrapped us in this parlous situation. Human ingenuity released from the hardened steel bonds of materialism has the potential to identify an exit route from this cul-de-sac.

The exclusively material world is the only world most people ever see. But this perception will change because it has to. The universe is no longer the dead, random, clockwork-driven expanse of frozen waste we were told it was. It is a vibrant, evolving conglomeration of hidden worlds and invisible energies and entities permeated by sinews

and filaments of pure consciousness.

Science is finally beginning to recognize some of these often bizarre truths about ourselves and the cosmos. It has taken a century of delving into the weird and inexplicable world of quantum mechanics and staring into the furthest reaches of space for this dovetailing with some of the Ageless Wisdom truths to happen. Soon the oldspeak of the astrophysicist — words like vast, icy, dead, lifeless reaches of empty space and so on — will be part of a redundant language.

Some of the once-secret traditions preserved down the ages by initiates and mainly concealed from view are percolating into this world far more energetically than many realize. For maybe the first time in the West, previously subversive notions of karma and reincarnation, the interconnectedness of the universe and hylozoism, the doctrine that all matter has life, are beginning to take deep root. They may be the panacea to prevent a pandemic.

It is easy to identify many places, situations and individuals where this energy cannot yet flow. But new channels are opening up by the hour. This new consciousness is starting to pulse down the capillaries, arteries, and veins of our collective consciousness.

Despite this, it is impossible to deny that a death shroud of doom and gloom hovers over the planet like lingering and lethal mustard gas drifting through the corpse-strewn barbed wire of a World War I battlefield.

Children are being driven into depres-

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sion and despair by this prevailing pall of helplessness. They — and indeed everyone — should not be brainwashed into believing there are no solutions to our problems. Such an admission would be tantamount to a mass suicide of the human spirit. It would amount to the ultimate defeatism. It would represent a capitulation of the soul and that cannot be permitted.

These conflicts, catastrophes, confrontations and crises may confuse and unsettle us. But unseen they are cracking open new pathways, fresh possibilities, and reinvigorated individual capacities we never even knew we possessed.

Anyone on any kind of spiritual path-

way owes it to themselves and to suffering humanity at large not to succumb to the malignant and insidious forces of despair because these are corrosive and life-draining. Guilt alone solves nothing.

We need to step out into the light and start culturing and birthing these exciting new/old ideas that we are eternal, evolving, conscious, ensouled beings treading the byways and backwaters of eternity. We have proved our ingenuity and our adaptability throughout our presence on this Earth. Now we must use it in a purer and more rejuvenated form to create a seismic shift in consciousness.

This is the fire burning within us all. ✧

**It was our belief that the love of possessions is a weakness to be overcome. Its appeal is to the material part, and if allowed its way, it will in time disturb one's spiritual balance. Therefore, children must early learn the beauty of generosity. They are taught to give what they prize most, that they may taste the happiness of giving.**

Ohiyesa (Charles Alexander Eastman)  
Wahpeton Santee Sioux

**Some day the Earth will weep, she will beg for her life, she will cry with tears of blood. You will make a choice, if you will help her or let her die, and when she dies, you too will die.**

John Hollow Horn  
Oglala Lakota

# Giordano Bruno, Defender of Truth

CATALINA ISAZA CANTOR

ON this Adyar Day, we gather to celebrate the lives of true messengers of the theosophical teachings: Giordano Bruno, C. W. Leadbeater, J. Krishnamurti, and H. S. Olcott, apostles of Truth, whose life and work showed integrity and free thought in a Krishnamurtian sense, and who wanted to spread that Truth to their contemporaries. They were those who became torches of light for a humanity that still lives in the shadow of ignorance and attachment to the illusion of the transient.

I have always been fascinated by the figure of Giordano Bruno and his work, and what better than this Adyar Day to share something on the life of this remarkable man who dedicated most of his life to proclaim a message that continues to resonate to this day — one of true religiosity.

The word “religion” comes from the Latin *religare*, to bind. The motto of the Theosophical Society (TS) says: “There is no religion higher than Truth.” The search for Truth is what should inspire the religious human being. However, few are truly religious and go beyond what the dominant religious or scientific doctrine of their time teaches. Few seek

to remove the veils behind which Eternal Wisdom hides. Giordano Bruno was one such man, a spirit of true love for science and religion.

Bruno became a Dominican priest at an early age and was later excommunicated by the Catholic Church. As ironic as it may seem, it was this same Church, in charge of protecting religion and dictating the limits of science at the time, that, through its so-called holy Inquisition, condemned our hero to the stake. He was even persecuted by the Calvinist Protestants, showing that, despite trying to be reformers of certain principles of Christianity, Protestantism became an equally dogmatic Church and closed to deeply revealing ideas such as he had.

Born in Nola, Italy, in 1548, Bruno was burned to death in the Piazza di Fiori in Rome, after a long trial that lasted through the last 8 years of his life, and after spending most of his life fleeing from one European city to another. In fact he said: “All the Earth is a homeland for a true philosopher.” He died on 17 February 1600 and, before he expired, he pronounced before his judges the following words: “Perhaps your fear of

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passing judgment is greater than my fear of receiving it.”

He did not fear death because he understood that life transcends momentary matter. He was aware of the unity of life, he knew that the body is only a vehicle of the high spirit, and that the true purpose of human existence is evolution and its ultimate goal is union with the source. Bruno affirmed that the Universe is infinite, that God is in all things, that there are innumerable worlds with other forms of life. He also denied the core of Catholic doctrines and spoke openly about reincarnation. His philosophy, inspired by Pythagoras, expresses similar ideas to those of the *Upanishads*. In *Isis Unveiled* (Volume 1) H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) says:

The Eternal is the Spirit of Fire, which stirs up and fructifies and develops into a concrete form everything that is born of water or the primordial Earth, evolved out of Brahma; but the universe is itself Brahma, and he is the universe. . . . God is an Entity totally per se, an Infinite Spirit, and the only Being utterly free and independent of either effects or other causes; who, through that same Will which produced all things and gave the first impulse to every cosmic law, perpetually keeps in existence and order everything in the universe. (p. 93)

And, in fact, Pythagorean ideas were very close to him, not only because of their affinity, but also because Nola, his homeland, was at the time of Pythagoras the centre where the philosopher taught. It is even said that in a previous life,

Bruno was part of the group of disciples who were close to Pythagoras.

Due to his philosophy, he was persecuted and accused of being a heretic and an atheist, like the Indian *swābhāvikas*, who, it was said, belonged to one of the oldest schools of Buddhism in Nepal. Bruno imparted his teachings and expressed his beliefs publicly, and these were opposed to those of his time. But although he often had the favour of kings and scholars, he never had rest, for he never agreed to retract his ideas, to silence his voice and his restless mind. Possessing a profoundly open mind, an eager intellect, a brilliant intelligence, eloquence, and natural disposition for debate, he always questioned and examined in depth all the teachings of his time, exposing the scientific and philosophical backwardness.

Bruno was an apostle of Truth. His life was a living example of that brave declaration of principles of HPB's "The Golden Stairs". He said: "Fear, falsehood and baseness are the real evils of life. Only a noble life is useful. Dishonour is worse than death, it stains the life, while death does nothing but break the form." Never, not even when he was asked to attend Mass and reaffirm his faith in the Church in exchange for teaching at the University of Paris, not even during the eight years he spent in a cell while his trial took place, not even during the eight days before his death in which the religious authorities offered to spare his life if he publicly recanted his statements, never did he betray his principles and

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the call of his soul. In his texts we read: “There are still ideals which are worth martyrdom; there is still a service which demands the sacrifice of all the world holds dear.” And those ideals were the same ideals of serving the Masters for the progress of humanity.

Bruno’s path can be compared to that of the Bodhisattva: he embarked on a quest for universal truths, for knowledge of the eternal, and strove, throughout his life, not only to defend these truths but to spread them, to awaken minds. His quest was not for his own benefit but for the benefit of all, like the Bodhisattva, who seeks not only individual but collective salvation, he was motivated by compassion and commitment to the religion of truth. Bruno identified himself as an “awakener of slumbering souls”.

HPB dedicates fragments of her *Isis Unveiled* and *Collected Writings* to explain his ideas. Annie Besant deeply admired Giordano Bruno and wrote extensively about him. She called him “the apostle of Theosophy”. In fact, it is even said that she was Bruno’s reincarnation. We do not know clearly about that, but what we can say for sure is that the message that Bruno proclaimed in the 16th century resonates in the world of the 21st century; and that he brought to the Western world of his time the message of Theosophy.

It is that attitude of Bruno that we must remember in our day-to-day lives. Today, on this Adyar Day, the 421st anniversary of his physical death, we honor his teachings and remember his attitude in a special way. His ideas are still relevant; looking back at them should make us think about our purpose as students of Theosophy and how to fulfil the dharma of the TS. It is a centre for spreading the Ageless Wisdom, for combating intolerance, dogmatism, superstition, and fundamentalism, which were, are, and will always be obstacles to our inner progress.

On the day of Adyar, the vibrant centre of our beloved TS, let us remember that it is from the attitude of an open mind, a pure heart, and an eager intellect, that we can transform our lives. We must position ourselves as defenders of those unjustly attacked, and have a deep understanding of the principles of *gupta vidya*, which is fundamental to maintain, as Bruno did until the last moment of his life, a brave declaration of principles.

I will conclude with his words: “No matter how dark the night is, wait for the dawn, rejoice and remain with integrity, return love for love.” Let us honour these words by making ours a life of integrity, service, and a brave declaration of principles. ✧

**Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake:  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

King James version of the Bible, Matt., 5:10

# Esoteric Perspectives on Meditation

CECIL MESSER

AN extraordinary esoteric view of the spiritual journey is represented in the works of the mystic Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (HPB), the Theosophist. At the suggestion of her Teacher, M., she was sent to Tibet to undergo a traditional three-year retreat in preparation for their work. On the summit of her esoteric writings, *The Voice of the Silence*, a unique jewel box laden with precious gems awaits viewing.

These gems metamorphose into magical seeds when rightly gazed upon. Labeled by her as a “book of instruction”, it is a masterpiece of source material for objects of meditative inquiry. It affirms the *pāramitās* as the basic conditions for leading the spiritual life, the “golden keys . . . that open the gates of the portals . . . that lead the aspirant across the waters on ‘to the other shore’”. In *The Voice of the Silence*, HPB directs attention to the possibility of two paths to spiritual liberation:

Which wilt thou choose, O thou of dauntless heart? The . . . [meditative state] of Eye Doctrine, fourfold dhyana [meditation

practice], or thread thy way through *pāramitās* [transcendental virtues], six in number, noble gates of virtue leading to *bodhi* and to *prajñā* [enlightenment and transcendental knowledge], seventh step of Wisdom? (Fragment III, “The Seven Portals”, 3rd verse)

Subsequent passages make it clear that, though the path of meditative concentration is useful and important, an even loftier and steeper path exists that is grounded in the whole of the *pāramitās*. The singular practice of concentration can lead to individual liberation from suffering. However, it may invite an unwitting detached indifference towards the suffering of others that could result in a superficial or cosmetic compassion; hence, HPB designates it as the “Eye Doctrine”. She asserts that this approach is insufficient because it does not advance the spirit of universal brotherhood, the “Heart Doctrine”. The sixth basic quality, wisdom, implies the integration of the two paths into one, the marriage of heart and intellect.

HPB’s advice on “study practice” is

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pertinent to approaching meditation practice. She says a new and different kind of mental effort or mode of thinking is required for serious spiritual study. At first, vague conceptions will arise and subsequently form into mental pictures. However, we must not be deluded into thinking that these represent reality. For as we work on, even greater pictures will arise until the true student realizes: “. . . no picture will ever represent the TRUTH . . . and so the process goes on, until at last the mind and its pictures are transcended.” Ultimately, consciousness unfolds the perception of the emptiness of self and phenomena, and thus becomes free from delusion.

The central theme of unity characterizes her main teachings. From the “Proem” of her magnum opus *The Secret Doctrine*, she draws attention to the first page of an “Archaic Manuscript”. Helena the Theosophist sees “. . . an immaculate white disk within a dull black ground”. She presents a poetic description of esoteric mystical elements designed to push a student’s comprehension from the perspective of rationality to intuition:

The one circle is divine Unity, from which all proceeds, whither all returns. Its circumference . . . indicates the abstract, ever-incognizable PRESENCE, and its plane, the Universal Soul, although the two are one.

In consonance with this, she opens her meditation teaching to her “inner group” students by drawing on her “Diagram of Meditation”. She directs them to “first

conceive of Unity by Expansion in space and Infinite in Time”. Within the context of the word “conceive”, perhaps HPB wants their minds to become pregnant with the seed of unity. More than merely giving rise to a noble conception of oneness, the idea must take root and develop. From the sprout of this development comes the blossom of compassion: the rational knowing of the kinship of all life, the basis for a universal brotherhood. We usually think of space as the container of things or objects, and time as the container of happenings or events, but Helena the Theosophist has set her own stage for the terms “space” and “time” in Stanza I of *The Secret Doctrine*:

The eternal parent [space] wrapped in her ever-invisible robes had slumbered once again for seven eternities.

Time was not, for it lay asleep in the infinite bosom of duration.

In her commentary on the stanza, she says that space is the *one eternal thing* most easily imagined. It is “immovable in its abstraction”, is not conditioned by the presence or absence of objects, is “without dimension and is self-existent”. She states that time is “an illusion produced by the succession of our states of consciousness as we travel through eternal duration”. Therefore time does not exist in reality but is merely apparent in a consciousness that is susceptible to delusion. May all beings realize that clinging to the concept of a separate self is the most pernicious obstruction to unity. May we be freed from delusion and uncertainty. ✧

## INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORY

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