

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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Cover: Confucius presenting the young Gautama Buddha to Laozi, Qing Dynasty (1644–1912)

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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.

Presidential Address

To the 140th Annual Convention of the Theosophical Society
Adyar, 31 December 2015

Dear Brethren, welcome all to the 140th Convention of the Theosophical Society, after a trying period of climate-related emergencies experienced in one way or another by almost all of us in the recent past. Let us offer together a moment of silence in memory of those who have lost their lives in these tragedies, wishing them a peaceful transition, also in giving thanks that the damages suffered by others were not worse than what they were, and in hoping for a return to normalcy in general as soon as possible, for all those who have been seriously affected. Please rise for the invocation to the Great Ones who protect the Society with their energy and strength:

**May those who are the embodiment of Love Immortal
bless with their help and guidance this Society, founded
to be a channel for their work. May They inspire it with
their Wisdom, strengthen it with their Power, and energize
it with their Activity.**

I am very glad to open this 140th Annual Convention of the TS.

Little needs to be said about the appropriateness of the theme for this year's convention: 'Compassion and Universal Responsibility'. There seems to be a growing perception that our world, the network of relationships we have created, is becoming less caring, more brutal, and insensitive. Certainly this is the feedback received from popular media sources. Whether or not this perception is accurate, it is affecting the outlook and responsiveness of people around the world and within our Theosophical Society.

During the TS's history great shifts have been witnessed in the structures of society and the knowledge that supports those structures. The world has changed

profoundly since the founding days of the TS. The long list of global changes during the past 140 years includes colonialism, human and civil rights, national independence, world wars, massive technological advances, nuclear threat, economic depressions, large scale human migrations, and ecological challenges. In the face of such challenges many people feel paralysed by a sense of powerlessness and insignificance. Others feel energized and seek out ways to make their presence felt. Still others find themselves searching for some serene haven, safe from the onslaught of the world around. For many the life of the spiritual seeker seems to provide such a hiding

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place from the troubles of the world. This is not, cannot be, and never has been the choice for members of the TS.

Although so much of the change in the world is revealing itself in visible and tangible ways, always the root is hidden — out of sight and beyond the reach of surface attempts at ‘fixing’ the problems. The level of causes is necessarily unseen. It is on that level where we find our work.

One of the prevailing truths that has become clear across disciplines is the fact of the radical interdependence, not only of the people of the world, but of all life. Social science, psychology, economics, quantum physics, biology, ecology, and normal common sense are now magnifying this awareness that all things are inextricably interrelated and are continually affecting each other. From the human perspective, our most potent tool in this world of effects is thought. A mind that can link itself to its higher, hidden potentials, powerfully affects its environment. Examples are familiar to us in people like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and many other high-minded, loving people of less renown.

So much of the condition of the world today derives from what H. P. Blavatsky described as ‘the heresy of separateness’

— the conviction that reality is composed of countless separate, isolated atoms, or beings, or worlds. There is an expression that, ‘You must not only learn the truth; you must suffer it.’ If our experience of the Ageless Wisdom reveals anything to us, it is that consciousness is the ground of reality. Whether it is the limitations of the strict material world view, or the expansiveness of some higher perception, essentially it all arises from consciousness.

This realization is liberating and provides a direction for our work in the world. The theme for this year’s Convention seems to focus on two things, compassion and responsibility, but the distinction is only apparent. The two are inseparable. Compassion necessitates responsibility. Responsibility assumes compassion. Both are the natural expression of a mind that has some depth of experience of a non-separate reality. It is not our work to *become* compassionate, but to remove those barriers to the ever-present, and completely unforced expression of our nature, which is compassionate.

Before we turn to the individual activity reports, the overall membership for the Theosophical Society based on the information received so far stands at 25,933, a two percent drop from the 26,497 reported last year.

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Beginning this year with the Indo-Pacific region, the Indian Section reports no change in their membership, still at 11,327. The North India Study Camp was held at their Varanasi headquarters

in October 2014. The study was on the late international President Mrs Radha Burnier’s contributions and approach to Theosophy, directed by Mr P. K. Jayaswal, National Lecturer. My first visit to the

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Indian Section headquarters coincided with this event, and I gave a public lecture on 'The Ever-Present Future' on 29 October. A two-day seminar on 'Education in the Light of Theosophy and Present Day Challenges' was organized by the Section in March 2015. It was structured on Dr Besant's Adyar Pamphlet no. 16, *Education in the Light of Theosophy*. The International Vice-President, Dr Chittaranjan Satapathy, spoke at this seminar on 'Educating the Poor and the Contribution of the Olcott Education Society'. A three-day study camp was also held in March by Prof. R. C. Tampi, based on Ms Joy Mills' *The Human Journey — Quest for Self-Transformation*.

The 92nd South India Theosophical Conference was inaugurated by me in Adyar in April on HPB's *The Voice of the Silence*. Mr S. Sundaram, General Secretary of the Section, welcomed the gathering and Dr Satapathy gave the concluding address. Several distinguished members also spoke on various topics related to HPB's book. In May the Section organized four events at the Himalayan Study Centre in Bhowali: a study camp on Clara Codd's *The Way of the Disciple*, directed by Mr Jayaswal; a Workers' Training Camp; a camp for the Uttarakhand Region; and a study camp on *At the Feet of the Master*, organized by the Marathi Theosophical Federation and conducted by Prof. C. A. Shinde, National Lecturer. A study camp on 'Virtues' was organized in Bhowali in October 2014 by the Karnataka Federation and study of *The*

Secret Doctrine was directed by its President, Mr B. V. Thippeswamy in April. A special session of the School of the Wisdom was organized by the International headquarters this year for the first time in Bhowali, attended by participants from the USA, Brazil, Spain, Australia, and India in September, and was based on Shirley Nicholson's *Ancient Wisdom — Modern Insight*. Dr Satapathy inaugurated the course and Prof. Tampi directed it.

Apart from visiting the Section headquarters in Varanasi, I also visited the Utkal Theosophical Federation in Bhubaneswar, the Bengal Theosophical Federation in Kolkata, and the Karnataka Theosophical Federation in Bangalore, where I delivered public talks. Dr Satapathy visited Bhubaneswar during the East Zone Theosophical Conference and delivered a talk on *Theosophy and Altruism*. He also addressed various theosophical gatherings during his visits to the Tamil, Assam, and Delhi Theosophical Federations, and conducted study camps in Guwahati and Delhi. The Section's journal, *The Indian Theosophist*, was published every month with an average monthly circulation of 3,200. A special number of the journal on Dr Radha Burnier was brought out in November.

Mrs Linda Oliveira, National President of the TS in **Australia**, reports that they had a successful annual Convention with keynote speakers and long-time TS members Drs Victor and Olga Gostin. Their Section's annual School of Theosophy was held at the Springbrook Centre in

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Queensland on 'Discovering Buddhist Wisdom: Philosophy and Practice'. They also received the award of the first annual prize to Studies in Religion at the University of Queensland, for research into the Perennial Philosophy in its Eastern and Western Traditions; commenced publication of their redesigned national magazine; had an active schedule of National Speakers around the Section, and also a successful tour of the Section by International Lecturer Vic Hao Chin Jr, who conducted a Self-Transformation seminar at the Canyonleigh Centre in New South Wales. The placement of the new national website online earlier this year, and an active programme of activities in Lodges, Branches, and Study Centres were other accomplishments. The **New Zealand** Section held its national Convention in Napier last January with guest speakers Mr Vicente Hao Chin Jr, from the Philippines, and Mr Barry Bowden from Australia on 'The Way Forward for Humanity: Achieving Universal Brotherhood'. A 'Process of Self-Transformation' seminar was also held in Napier, facilitated by Mr Hao Chin and others. Around 30 people attended this 3-day event. The School of Theosophy was held for four days at the HPB Lodge in Auckland with guest Dorothy Bell from Australia, on 'Theosophical World View — Window of a New Mind'. The Central Region held two events: a weekend seminar held at Palmerston North on 'Theosophy Foundations' facilitated by the National President, Mr John Vorstermans, and an

event held at Wellington entitled 'The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras', a study and meditation retreat. The Section membership went down by 28, from 704 to 676.

The TS is present in four countries in **East and South East Asia**. The Singapore Lodge is the largest in the region, with around 400 members. It had a visit by international President Mr Tim Boyd and his wife Lily, and is the base for the Chinese Project Team, which develops the Chinese website and translates theosophical literature into Chinese. The Selangor Lodge, in Malaysia, has 83 members. Japan has the Nippon Lodge in Tokyo with 37 members, and Myanmar (formerly Burma) has the Olcott Lodge with 45 members. Each Lodge has its own website. Their total membership is 555, an increase of 8.

There are 5 Lodges and 239 members in **Bangladesh**. Kusum Lodge continued its monthly study of *At the Feet of the Master*, and Chittagong Lodge organized biweekly meetings and meditation programmes. Olcott Lodge in Dhaka organized four meetings during the year and 6 members of this Lodge attended the international Convention at Adyar last year. Comilla Lodge continued periodical meetings. Mr B. L. Bhattacharyya, the Presidential Representative, visited Dhaka and Comilla in December, speaking at the various Lodges. On the 5th he attended the meeting as Chief Guest organized by Comilla Lodge. On the same day a new Lodge, 'Maynamati' was formed at Comilla, with 19 members composed

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of young advocates, professors, and teachers. On 7 December another new Lodge, named 'Proactive TS Lodge', was formed at Dhaka.

The **Philippine** Section participated in the international Convention at Adyar through its delegate, former General Secretary, Mr Vic Hao Chin, Jr, who gave a Convention talk and facilitated the strategic planning activities which took place at Adyar in a two-day meeting held right after the Convention. At the national front, Self-Transformation Seminars (STS) and workshops were held and well received during the year in the Mindanao State University, at the Section headquarters in Quezon City, and at various private companies. Many other lectures and study programmes were held throughout the country during the year, mostly by Mr Hao Chin. Two new Lodges were formed during the year, the Golden Link Lodge and Logos Lodge. Enrolment in TS schools during the school year reached landmark gains, with a total of 895 students enrolled in 4 schools and one college.

The TS in **America** (TSA) reports that under their Library Director, Marina Maestas, the Henry S. Olcott Memorial Library collection can now be accessed nationally through a cooperative inter-library loan arrangement, and often internationally. The TSA public programming operates seven days a week on a range of theosophical subjects with growing attendance. During the year, their IT/AV department increased the number of live webcasts of their Thursday night lecture

series. They are realizing the goal of their IT department head, Mr Chris Bolger: almost every talk is streamed live on the Internet. Now their online attendance is equal to or greater than the number of people physically attending the talk, and some are tuning in from other countries. Their TS Wiki — a Wikipedia-style reference on Theosophy and the TS, is approaching 4 million visitors to the site, which has now migrated to a new domain: <www.theosophy.wiki>. A growing body of Internet resources are being made available to the theosophical world through the TSA website, <www.theosophical.org>.

After almost 50 years in operation, publication of Quest Books will be ending at the close of the year. The TSA Board of Directors decided that substantial further investment of TSA resources in Quest Books would not be financially responsible. However, this creates new possibilities in the area of online activities. The TSA will continue to publish Theosophical books through their Theosophical Publishing House. The Audio-Video (AV) Department recorded 74 new titles comprising 89 audio CDs, and 70 new titles comprising 79 DVDs. Most of the titles may be purchased at <www.questbooks.com>. The TSA National Secretary, Mr David Bruce, reports that during the year 20 speakers gave over 60 presentations, most of which were well attended and enthusiastically received. Courses for the National Lodge, now in its 18th year of existence, are also selected and edited by Mr Bruce. The membership of the National Lodge remains steady at 370 and

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total membership for the Section is 3,357, a slight increase over the previous year.

The National President of the TS in **Brazil**, Mr Marcos de Resende, writes that they have 757 members, a decrease of 11, with 32 Lodges, making it the largest Section in Latin America. Their 34th Summer School was held over 6 days in January-February, with about 150 in attendance from 16 states. There were lectures, panels, and study groups about themes from Annie Besant's *A Study in Consciousness*. The Section has three active Theosophical Institutes and a Centre. The Brasilia Institute, directed by Mr Resende, held various lectures, seminars, and workshops. Its main event was the 19th International Theosophical School in July on 'The Transforming Path: In Search of the Diamond'. The visiting lecturers were Mrs Linda Oliveira, President of the TS in Australia, and Mr Pedro Oliveira, former International Secretary of the TS. The event was a success, with about 170 participants. The Raja Foundation Centre (Sao Paulo), held various activities, including a 4-day retreat with various lectures on 'Universal Compassion — the Practice of Brotherhood'. The Pitagoras Institute (SP) conducted 'An Introductory Course on Theosophical Thought'. Their bi-monthly magazine *Sophia* has reached its 13th anniversary this year, publishing its 57th issue of 5,500 copies per edition.

The **Cuban Section** is the second largest in Latin America. It has 558 members, a slight decrease, in 12 Lodges. Their National President, Mrs Barbara

Fariñas Piña, states that their two-day Annual Convention was celebrated in January with the theme 'Devotion'. The Lodges in Havana organized a two-day Summer School on the 'Gayatri Mantra' for more than 30 members. Some of the books studied by the Lodges were Annie Besant's *Thought Power, its Control and Culture* and *A Study in Consciousness*; Besant and Leadbeater's *Talks on the Path of Occultism*; and others. Their quarterly e-magazine, *Revista Teosófica Cubana*, continues to be published.

The General Secretary of the TS in **Argentina and Paraguay**, Mr Jorge García, tells us that in January they held a public conference given by visiting speaker from Canada, Dr Ravi Ravindra, on 'The Scientific Mind and the Religious Mind'. It was held in San Rafael, with about 300 persons attending. This was followed by their five-day 51st Summer School, with Dr Ravindra giving two seminars: 'The Yoga of Christ' and 'The Yoga of Krishna'. Their National Congress, held in January on 'The Golden Stairs and Our Task' was enriching. Their six-day Winter School was on 'The Value of Silence', consisting of introspection and reflection by 29 participants who were asked to remain silent from the end of dinner until after lunch the next day. The TS in **Bolivia** achieved Section status. Their General Secretary, Mrs Guillermina Rios de Sandoval, says that they also opened three new study centres with many young members in Sucre, Santa Cruz, and La Paz, representing the future of the TS in the Section and the

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growth they are experiencing. The TS in **Chile** had their Convention on 3 October with the theme 'The Truth: Essence of our Being', during which Mr César Ortega was elected Presidential Representative. Their Theosophical Electronic Brochure and the Chilean Theosophical magazine are sent monthly to different Spanish-speaking countries. The Presidential Representative of the TS in **Peru**, Mr Julio Pomar, reports that their two Lodges, 'HPB' and 'Verdad', gave a total of 17 public talks during the year. The Agency offered a free internet course on Theosophy to the public. Also, Lodge 'Verdad' offered a 'Basic Course of Theosophy', with 12 attending. Lodge 'HPB' also offered the course 'The Basis of Esoteric Philosophy' with 18 in attendance. They lost two members, but gained 10 new ones, for a total of 37. The Organizing Secretary of the TS in **Uruguay**, Mr Ramón García reports that all five Lodges met weekly. Books studied included HPB's *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Voice of the Silence*, and Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*.

The TS in **Mexico**'s new National President, Mr Enrique Sánchez, writes that their 155 members worked in 12 lodges and 5 study centres across the country, all of which he visited, giving a conference about the first Object of the TS. At their national headquarters, Mrs Lissette Arroyo gave nine courses on Theosophy during the year. They have been updating their webpage, <www.sociedadteosofica.mx>, every month and next year they are planning

to have a new link with a bookstore online where enquirers can buy some books and receive other books free of charge. Mrs Magaly Polanco, the Presidential Agent for **Puerto Rico**, writes that every Sunday morning they offered talks on theosophical subjects given by different members in Spanish, the language mostly spoken in Puerto Rico. In May they welcomed Mr Gaspar Torres, former National President of the Cuban Section. His talks generated interest and enthusiasm among the many who attended. The workshop he conducted on 'The Management of Emotions in Inner Development' was very fruitful. Their Agency building was thoroughly renovated. Mrs Polanco is also the Presidential Agent for the **Dominican Republic**. She reports that Atma Lodge, in Santo Domingo, received Mr Terry Hunt as guest speaker, who gave a successful public lecture with about 60 active participants. Mr Hunt also offered a retreat-workshop in Jarabacoa on 'The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett', with around 40 in attendance. The Lodge studied HPB's *The Key to Theosophy*, the *Dhammapada*, and began to study W. Q. Judge's *The Ocean of Theosophy*. Nueva Aurora Lodge in Puerto Plata focused on the study of the Mahatma Letters. The approximately 450 books belonging to the library of this Lodge have been indexed and members always have access to library services. The Presidential Representative of the TS in **Costa Rica**, Mrs María Orlich, writes that they have had a decrease of two

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members, bringing their membership to 64 in 5 Lodges that meet regularly throughout the year. In addition to several study courses based on classic theosophical texts, two three-month courses were offered freely to the public during the year: an introduction to Theosophy given by Mrs Orlich and others, and a Self-Transformation Seminar based on Vic Hao Chin Jr's book. The TS in **Central America** gave monthly public video lectures on a variety of theosophical subjects. It has 13 members in two Lodges, one in Nicaragua and the other in El Salvador, which manages its own web page: <www.sociedadteosoficaelsalvador.org>. The TS in **Venezuela** has 14 members in two Lodges that have been giving Sunday lectures three times a month, including a study on Annie Besant's *The Path of Discipleship*, given by Mrs Nelly Nouel.

Moving on to the largest Section in Europe, the **English Section** has a new National President, Mrs Jenny Baker, since April. She is grateful to Mr Colin Price for his 10 years of hard work and dedication to the Society in the post. Their Summer School was held near Birmingham, where I went to be their chief guest speaker, accompanied by my wife Lily and daughter Angelique. The School was attended by more than 100 people and was a joyous and uplifting occasion. Their Diploma Course is in its fifth year and continues to attract members who wish to study theosophical teachings in depth. Other Sections throughout the world have taken up the course and a Higher Diploma is in preparation. The

process of the Section attaining charitable status is ongoing. In September Mrs Baker was elected to the Council of the International Theosophical Centre at Naarden in the Netherlands. She hopes that the Section will forge closer relationships with their European cousins in the future. The TS in **Scotland** reports that they are on a more sound financial footing. Although membership declined slightly, there are new faces attending regularly. Dundee Lodge meetings are well attended. Mr Joe McIntyre, its President, is an inspiration to all, and Ms Ali Macqueen has put on an excellent programme on 'The Mind.' Edinburgh Lodge has had a good year. They have welcomed speakers from around Britain and even Australia, India and South America. Glasgow Lodge also had several visiting speakers. The **Welsh Region** Organizing Secretary, Mrs Julie Cunningham, reports an increase in membership from 72 last year to 78, distributed in 4 Lodges and 1 Centre. They are all active with meetings held twice a month, except for Conwy Lodge. Talks were given by visiting speakers sponsored by the Foundation for Theosophical Studies. Ten members completed the Diploma in Theosophy Course offered by the English Section. The TS in **Ireland** Organizing Secretary, Mrs Marie Harkness reports that membership has risen over the past few years and members throughout Ireland have formed solid friendships. The 10th All-Ireland annual Convention was held in June in centrally-located Dublin. Their guest

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speaker, Mrs Diana Dunningham Chapotin, spoke on the Convention theme, 'Serving with the Eyes of Spirit: An Infinity Within to Give', a most inspiring talk which was well received.

The Annual Convention of the **Finnish Section** was held at the Helsinki Headquarters in March. Mrs Mirva Jaatinen was elected General Secretary, succeeding Ms Marja Artamaa, the current International Secretary. The Summer School took place in June in Kreivilä on 'Cosmic Laws and Principles according to *The Secret Doctrine*'. Mr Ingo de Jong, from Sweden, was the guest speaker. In Estonia the Lodges also held their Summer School in June. The highlight of the year was the international President Mr Tim Boyd's visit to Finland and Estonia in August with his family. He gave lectures in Kreivilä, Helsinki, and Tallinn, in Estonia. In addition, members' meetings were held in Helsinki and Tallinn. The Section has 23 Lodges and 2 study groups with a membership of 402. The **Icelandic Section** held their summer school in Hveragerdi on 'The Kingdom — a symbol of mind and body', with the participation of nine Norwegian members, one of whom gave a talk. Their newsletter *Mundilfari* is published three times a year and their website is in both Icelandic and English. The **Swedish Section** membership stands at 162 and six out of their seven Lodges and study groups have been very active during the year. Their General Secretary, Mrs Ing-Britt Wiklund, reports that their Summer School had as its theme 'To Live Theo-

sophy', and 17 members participated. Their guest speaker was the International Secretary, Ms Marja Artamaa, who gave three outstanding lectures, and Mr Pertti Spets and Mrs Wiklund contributed with lectures on the theme. The TS in **Norway's** Organizing Secretary, Dr Saleh Noshie writes that their 14 members have kept up their studies and discussions through a web forum that includes 33 others who are also deeply interested in spiritual pursuits.

The National President of the **Italian Section**, Mr Antonio Girardi, tells us that they now have 950 members, a drop of 58 from last year, but this is still the largest Section in the European continent. Their 32 groups and 17 centres carried out meetings for members and public conferences and their website tracks a monthly average of over 3,500 visits. A dedicated section of the website contains videos of theosophical conferences taken during congresses and seminars. It has been recently upgraded by an added section dedicated to the Theosophical Order of Service. They publish their monthly magazine with 1,300 printed copies and over 1,000 subscriptions, and their monthly newsletter is e-mailed to over 3,000 interested readers. The TS in **France** headquarters continued to hold monthly Lodge meetings, free courses three times per month, quarterly videos of J. Krishnamurti, and fortnightly public lectures. In the summer the Vice-President and I paid separate visits to their Paris headquarters. I had an interesting question-and-answer session with the volunteer

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workers of the Section. The Vice-President's visit was also fruitful with private talks on the work in general and at Adyar. At their National Convention, Mrs Jeannine (Nano) Leguay was elected General Secretary from October 2015, replacing Ms Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu, who had served for six years. The latter was appointed Vice General Secretary in charge of European and international affairs.

The **Spanish Section** held a 4-day Silent Retreat in Girona on Annie Besant's Universal Prayer, 'O, Hidden Life . . .', directed by Ms Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu, with 44 in attendance. She also conducted a 3-day Seminar in Alicante on 'Self-Realization', attended by 40 people. At Easter the Section held its 37th 3-day 'Iberian Days' programme with 40 attending, on the theme 'The Unity of Life'. Their 7-day Summer School, with 107 participants, was on 'Karma, Dharma, Nirvana, and Mindfulness', and their guest speaker was Mr Chaganti V. K. Maithreya, from Chennai. Dr José Foglia, from Uruguay, visited Arjuna Lodge and gave a public lecture on 'Meditation vs Stress', which was appreciated by many. The TS in **Portugal** held public sessions in Lisbon with different formats, from public talks to panels and discussion groups. Ms Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu, Chairman of the European Federation of the TS, gave three public talks on 'The Science of Theosophy'. Ms Maria José Barrios, from the Spanish Section, delivered a public talk at Lisbon and Oporto on 'Reflections on the Path'. There are now

123 members in the Section, a slight decrease, as reported by Mr Carlos Guerra, their General Secretary.

Mrs Manuela Kaulich, General Secretary of the TS in **Germany**, writes that their Southern Meeting was held in September in Regensburg, with Mr Chaganti V. K. Maithreya as visiting speaker. The theme was 'Dharma, Karma, and Yoga'. Many members and guests came to listen to his five talks. At the end of his visit, he gave a public talk in Munich on 'Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science', attended by over 60 guests. The Section membership rose from 112 to 119, with younger people being attracted by our theosophical work. The **Dutch Section** held a members' National Board meeting at the end of May where a new General Secretary, Mr Wim Leys, was elected, succeeding Ms Els Rijneker. The Section's activities included two 5-day seminars, one in May with Prof. P. Krishna on 'A Revolution in Education' and another in June on HPB's *Esoteric Instructions* led by Michael Gomes. Another 'Dutch Day' was held on 23 August, an interactive programme for members only, that I participated in. On the previous evening I met with the younger members of the Dutch Society. The Section membership is now 330, a drop of 17 since last year. The TS in **Austria** stands steady at 49 members. All three Lodges offer weekly lectures throughout the year on classical theosophical teachings and related subjects and lectures are regularly uploaded on their website. In March the annual

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meeting of the Austrian Association was held, where Mr Albert Schichl was re-elected as Organizing Secretary. The **Belgian Section** and its Lodges strengthened activities and functioning during the year. They also welcomed international guests in their Brussels headquarters. General Secretary Sabine van Osta welcomed Mrs Nancy Secrest, International Secretary of the Theosophical Order of Service, who visited in May and rekindled the work of the TOS in Belgium. She also welcomed Dr Chittaranjan Satapathy, our inter-national Vice-President, in July, who gave two much-appreciated lectures. The Section has 92 members in 9 Lodges.

The TS in **Greece** reports that, out of their 11 Lodges, 'Apollon' Lodge in Athens and 'Kaviros' Lodge in Alexandroupolis are temporarily inactive. Study group 'Prokris' in the island of Cephallonia is working well, and 'Radamanthis' and 'Minos' Lodges in the island of Crete are doing very well. Their magazine is printed every three months, going to about 500 subscribers. **Slovenia** has 54 members. They held three Schools during the year: the Spring School, organized by Lodge Surya on 'Dignity in the Light of Theosophy', had 28 participants; the Summer School, organized by Lodge Adyar, was conducted excellently by Mr Bhupendra Vora on the *Bhagavadgītā* with 25 participants; and the Autumn School, organized by Lodge Understanding, was conducted by the Organizing Secretary, Mrs Breda Zagar; on *At the Feet of The Master* — 'Love', with 24 participants. The TS in **Hungary**

has 39 members, but a third of them are staying in the countryside, so they can take part in meetings only occasionally. There are only 12-15 active members living in or near Budapest and a few in or near Debrecen, in eastern Hungary. They had two General Meetings and 10 public lectures during the year, continuing the work in all three Lodges, one in the countryside and the other two in Budapest.

The work of the Regional Association in **Ukraine** continues with 95 members, an increase of 6, in 5 Branches and 3 study centres, with the formation of the third study centre, 'Proteus', in Dnipropetrovsk. Mrs Svitlana Gavrylenko, the Organizing Secretary, tells us that at four of the Branches and all study centres regular meetings are conducted and classic theosophical literature is studied. In November they had their 10th All-Ukrainian Convention in Kyiv on 'A New Mind for a New Time' with more than 50 participants. In July they held their 10-day Summer School in the Carpathian Mountains on 'Ethics as the Soul of Divine Wisdom' with 26 active participants. They have active TOS members and volunteers in five cities, and a Science Group in Dnipropetrovsk, where nine publications and eight reports are prepared. Their website, <www.theosophy.in.ua>, continues its work, and every Branch and study centre has their own page on the website. Mr Pavel Malakhov, Presidential Representative of the TS in **Russia**, reports that the theosophical movement in their Agency is getting stronger, with numerous gatherings and study activities

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throughout the year. They have 159 members, an increase of 4, in 6 Lodges. Anahata branch (in Moscow) gave 12 public lectures on theosophical basics. It uses SMS and e-mail mailing lists to inform about their activities. There was a Facebook page created to support the Museum, <<http://www.facebook.com/hpbhouse>>, and a variety of Internet activities involving Russian members in their official website, <<http://ts-russia.org>>, including a weekly, year round, Skype webinar on *The Secret Doctrine* conducted by Mr Malakhov.

The **East and Central African Section** has a new General Secretary, Mr Narendra Shah, elected from 2015 to 2017, at their annual 47th Convention, held in early April in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Mrs Ananya S. Rajan was the guest speaker at the Convention and she gave subsequent lecture tours in Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Kitwe, Mufulira, and Kampala. Their Section comprises four countries (or Regions): Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zambia. Unfortunately, out of their five Lodges, only two are very active and have a good number of members. Membership shows a decrease of 20 members from 155 last year to 135. This year's Annual Convention in **West Africa** was to be held in June in Accra, but the General Secretary, Mr John Boakye, reports that it had to be held in September in Koforidua due to serious flooding that followed their seasonal rainfall, causing a disaster with over 200 deaths. The Convention theme was 'Theosophy in a Changing World and the Cycle of Life'

and turned out to be quite worthwhile. The member in whose home the Convention was held, the Secretary of the Lodge in Koforidua, passed away six weeks thereafter. He had spoken on 'Theosophy in Daily Life' at the Convention and had been an indefatigable dedicated member. The number of members for the Section stands at 238. The TS in **South Africa's** General Secretary, Mr Jack Hartmann, writes that activities geared to spiritual growth of members were conducted mainly in the Lodges, including public meetings, study groups, and yoga classes on a regular basis. Thought is being given to attracting younger members. The Johannesburg Lodge has redesigned its library, holding 8,800 titles, and their Section magazine is to be published in an electronic form to reduce costs. Their membership is now at 174, a drop of 35.

Covenant Lodge, in Tel-Aviv, Israel, held 3 public meetings each month in their centres. They held members' meetings on a weekly basis, 3 meetings every month, with an average participation of 10. They also offer weekend seminars, courses, and workshops with up to 75 participating. Six active monthly study groups, with 7–14 members in each, focus on various theosophical subjects. Their membership is 71, a decrease of 3 members.

In addition to the Covenant Lodge, there are 6 other Lodges attached to Adyar, totalling 80 members, and 31 Fellows at Large included in our membership.

In the **International Headquarters**,

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a number of tasks were accomplished and are listed below. In general, the wages of all workers were raised by an average of 35 per cent, keeping in view the minimum wages fixed for Tamil Nadu state. The proceedings of the 2014 Annual Convention were live-streamed for the first time. A new website for the TS was launched in September 2015. The number of international volunteers has increased in Adyar. A long-term cover was placed over the Adyar theatre open-seating area with a significant donation from the TS in America. A renovation plan for the Adyar campus was initiated with the help of renowned architect, Mr Michiel Haas from the Netherlands, and fundraising for renovations has started. The Adyar campus has now two sets of new public toilets, one near each gate, and informative signboards have been placed around the campus. The dining area of Leadbeater Chambers was remodelled. The cover design for the monthly magazine *The Theosophist* was improved. A new National Section (for Bolivia) was chartered, the first new section in 22 years. The Anthroposophical Society held their annual conference in the TS campus for the first time this year.

The **Archives and Museum**, closed for several years, are now working with a team of four volunteers. An archivist from the TS in America visited our archives for one month. A range of materials was tested for toxicity and the results were found negative. The air conditioners have been repaired and are working on a 24x7 basis. Extra funding

has been provided for restoration of documents, photographs, pictures, and other objects. But more funding is required, and as the building is leaking, apart from being too close to the Adyar River, a new building is required for housing the archives and museum. At the **Adyar Library and Research Centre** the digitizing of palm leaf and other manuscripts was initiated. Funds were provided to computerize the Adyar Library catalogue. The staff has been strengthened with one director, one professor, two research officers, and one research associate. Mr K. Jaikumar was appointed during the year to look after the Library systems and their automation. The Shankaracharya Sanskrit University has been requested to grant affiliation to our Library as a recognized centre for undertaking doctoral research. The Adyar Library Bulletin, *Brahmavidya*, was published for 2014-15, and is now up-to-date. The first course of the **School of the Wisdom** in November 2014 studied H. P. Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence*, with Prof. R. C. Tampi. This was followed by 'The Psychology of Yoga' with Mr P. K. Jayaswal. Mr Vicente Hao Chin Jr, directed the course on 'Self-Transformation and the Spiritual Life', and Ms Trân-Thi-Kim-Diêu led 'The Science of Theosophy: Foundation and Practice' class in January 2015. The **Theosophical Publishing House** released 22 books (20 reprints and 2 new compilations). The Editorial Department prepared a special double issue of *The Theosophist* on Dr Radha Burnier, brought out on 31

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October 2014, her first death anniversary. Ms H. Sripriya took over as Secretary of the **Olcott Education Society (OES)** in January 2015. The 12th class commerce stream students of the Olcott Memorial School took their final examination this year. The humanity stream at the higher secondary level was started in the previous year, and the science stream has been started this year. Arrangements were made with the British Council for teaching English to the teachers and students of the School. The salaries for teachers and staff of the OES were increased further in addition to the increases made last year. The **Besant Memorial Animal Dispensary** remains open on Sundays and closed on Tuesdays. New surgical equipment for birth control was purchased by the new veterinary surgeon, Dr P. Ramachandran, who was appointed in July. There were a total of 3,116 cases attended during the year. The **Besant Scout Camping Centre** reported that 21 institutions and scout groups utilized the services of the Centre and around 1,350 children benefited through camping activities in line with theosophical values.

The **Theosophical Order of Service** experienced a major change this year when their International Secretary position passed from Mrs Diana Dunningham Chapotin to Mrs Nancy Secrest of Washington, USA, on 1 December 2014. Diana's 20 years of service saw a marked increase in the number of TOS Groups, programs, and activities around the world. Their website began under her watch as did the quarterly e-newsletter.

The TOS is currently present in 36 of the 55 countries where the TS is active. This year, their presence was added in Belgium and Israel. This year also saw the inauguration of a TOS International Facebook Page, <www.facebook.com/tosinternational>. Of special mention, the TOS members in Sundarban, India, formed a TS Lodge and built the Radha Burnier Memorial Hall, where hundreds of poor village women are receiving vocational training; and in November 2014, the TOS Urus Branch in Oruro City, Bolivia, was awarded a medal by the country's Legislative Assembly 'in recognition of its outstanding community service and commitment to the improvement of the material and spiritual conditions of humanity, including animals and Nature.'

As to **international visits** by Headquarters officers, I travelled to various countries and met TS members and groups in England, Finland, Estonia, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Singapore, the USA, and India. The Vice-President, Dr Chittaranjan Satapathy, visited the Section headquarters in Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, including the International Theosophical Centre in Naarden, and also participated in the International Theosophy Conference held in The Hague. Finally, the International Secretary, Ms Marja Artamaa, participated in Theosophical activities in Finland, Estonia, and the Netherlands, and also spoke at the Swedish Summer School.

I now wish you a fruitful and uplifting time at our Adyar campus.

TIM BOYD

Compassion as Radical Living

LINDA OLIVEIRA

IN China not so long ago, a free-diver called Yang Yun tried to return from the bottom of an arctic pool. However, she found that her legs had severe cramps and she could not move. She commented, 'I began to choke and sank even lower and I thought that was it for me — I was dead, until I felt this incredible force under me, driving me to the surface.' What had happened? A beluga whale named Mila had seen what was happening and sprang into action, guiding Yun safely back to the top of the pool. This heart-warming story seemed to be a fitting introduction to the topic at hand.

What does it mean to be radical? This word is often associated with anything 'counterculture', anything which goes against the grain of mainstream society. For example, some people may dress unusually, or else they may be labelled 'alternative' for holding attitudes which are at variance with those which are held by the majority. They tend to go against tradition, or the general norm. Then there are radical political parties, which advocate intense change. Certain radical attitudes result in the extreme

violence which we witness in terrorist acts today. But then, other people who seem radical may in fact be very virtuous; it is just that they do not conform to what is generally regarded as normal.

However, there are two further renderings of the term 'radical' which are of particular relevance to this exploration: (1) that which is radical is an inherent or fundamental part of the nature of someone or something; (2) the term refers to that which is thorough and intended to be completely curative. In this sense, the meaning is commonly used in relation to medicine, for example, radical or extreme surgery.

Two important questions now arise: (1) what is our radical or fundamental nature as human beings? and (2) is there a possibility that human consciousness, in its everyday sense, actually requires radical surgery? These are questions which cannot be addressed by an engineer, a mathematician, or an IT specialist. They are alluded to by students of Theosophy or Divine Wisdom, and by various poets, mystics, and philosophers. In other words, they are the preserve of those who

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are genuinely interested in the deeper questions of life and what it means, in a fundamental sense, to be human. We will return to both questions later, after considering three points:

1. Unity which binds us all
2. Ordinary or mediocre living, and
3. Radical living

Deep and unshakeable Unity

We will commence a premise: that we are all seamlessly interconnected. We dwell in an interconnected universe. Nothing exists in isolation, even if it may seem that way at times. Whether we acknowledge it or not, and whether we like it or not at a particular time, we are inextricably interwoven with every other life form in all fields of consciousness.

Deep and unshakeable Unity binds us — that noumenal consciousness which permeates and nourishes each and every one of us. It registers more consciously at certain times — perhaps as a sense of oneness with a rock, or a flower, an insect, an animal, the ocean or another person. There are so many such instances.

Unity means just that — ultimately, a singularity. It does not translate into a mathematical equation such as: the universe = me + everything else. The equation in the Vedānta tradition is $\bar{A}tman = Brahman$. In other words, the highest or subtlest aspect of a human being is also mysteriously rooted in, and synonymous with, Brahman or universal Spirit.

We are considering here the existence of one Entity, of which we are each aspects, deeply and inextricably con-

nected or related to every other aspect.

Madame Blavatsky put it this way in *The Secret Doctrine*:

The radical unity of the ultimate essence of each constituent part of compounds in Nature — from star to mineral atom . . . and whether applied to the spiritual, intellectual or physical worlds — this unity is the one fundamental law in Occult Science. (Hoskins, p. 13)

In fact, this is the basis of Esoteric Philosophy — the insistence that beneath our world of experience there is ‘a single Reality which is both the source and cause of all that ever was, is and is to be’. (ibid., p. 12).

We have a sense of this single Reality deep within us. The need to experience it plays out in different ways, such as the human longing for a sense of connection. For example, there is the sense of connection we experience through being part of a family. At its best, a family provides a sense of well-being, encouragement, and support, as well as a bedrock of spiritual values which help a decent, intelligent, and fulfilled person to emerge into adulthood. There is also the sense of connection with our culture and nation. Given the plight of so many refugees in recent times, we are indeed fortunate if we do experience such a connection.

Ordinary or mediocre living

However, a sense of Unity seems to be virtually invisible in the lives of many. This results from the kinds of connections we choose to make. The

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microbiologist Charles Birch wrote about relationships. To him, relating simply involved making connections, of which he described two essential types:

1. When railway carriages are connected, the only difference the connection makes is that one carriage pulls the other along. This is a mechanical kind of relationship, perhaps a relationship of convenience, with one carriage having the power to determine exactly where the other moves. The carriage being pulled along is therefore powerless.
2. He described the second main type of connection using one word, and one word only: compassion. This is an internal relationship, contrasting strongly with the external way in which two train carriages relate to each other. Compassion therefore constitutes a very different order of relationship. (Birch, p. 11)

Birch continued: 'When we fail to make connections that are critical for our lives and the life of the world we become adrift like small rafts on the ocean.' We can think of this state of being adrift as ordinary living, living which possesses an inherent mediocrity. Why is this? Because if we are being pulled along like a railway carriage, following without question the mainstream currents of global society, then we are indeed adrift, rudderless, not thinking for ourselves. We would be highly egocentric, not given to contemplating *why* we think, feel, and act in certain ways. Most of the time this results in superficial action, as if we are

separate from the rest of life. In short, we are in a state of alienation from our spiritual roots. A deeper sense of connection simply does not exist.

Charles Birch made a comment relevant to this discussion when he mentioned that 'the worst thing we can do to fellow humans is to treat them as means only, and not as ends in themselves.' (Birch, p. 75) Sadly, many people use others for ulterior motives in order to gain wealth, all kinds of prestige, political ascendancy, career success, and so forth. People who are highly successful materially may therefore be living very ordinary lives in reality, despite outward indicators of success. This falls far short of success in the deeper sense; it is sad mediocrity.

Human suffering looms daily in the news, social media and print media. Violence towards women is widespread. Refugees have been pouring into Europe recently. Mass killings occur every day. Something is terribly wrong. In these cases, the connections forged in relationships are mechanical and callous; worlds away from that interior connection which is compassion.

Radical living

It is therefore very necessary to give serious consideration to a totally different kind of life. Far better than treating humans as means to our own ends, is the great virtue of valuing others for themselves. The understanding that all life forms have intrinsic worth helps to generate tolerance, acceptance, respect,

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and eventually a sense of reverence. For we each have intrinsic value. This has nothing whatsoever to do with what we earn, our general appearance, our career success, our religion, where we were born, or our status in society. The depth of this realization is Universal Brotherhood.

Compassionate living as interior relationship

Charles Birch goes further: *If we are successful in making appropriate connections we find fulfilment in life.*' (Birch, p. 11). In the introduction to *Regaining Compassion for Humanity and Nature*, he wrote: 'A proposition of this book is that the most ultimate encounter is to experience . . . at-one-ment. It is the opposite of being adrift and separate from the rest of existence.' The ultimate encounter, the experience of at-one-ment, is radical. Why? Because it is an encounter with our fundamental nature.

Recall, too, the description of compassion as an internal relationship, in contrast to the external, mechanical type of relationship between two train carriages. Compassionate living demands deep sensitivity to others and a sense of reverence for life. This is no small challenge. Probably most of us can think of at least one acquaintance about whom it is difficult, if not impossible, to sense the Sacred.

Compassion in the Buddhist tradition

Turning to the Buddhist tradition, its reality has been described as profoundly

ecological. All things, including humans, exist by their participation in other things. Contemplating this web of interdependence should fill us with gratitude for the opportunity of this life.

The theme of compassion has been strongly emphasised in the Buddhist and Jain traditions. It features both in the Theravāda and Mahāyāna Schools of Buddhism. In the first case, it is one of the four sublime states or *brahmavihāra-s* (divine abodes). They consist of: compassion (*karunā*), loving kindness (*mettā*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*). When one develops these four states, the Buddha counsels radiating them in all directions. Here is the description of radiating *karunā*, or compassion, in four directions, which appears in the Kālāma Sutta:

The disciple of the Noble Ones, Kalamas, . . . lives, having pervaded, with the thought of compassion, one quarter; likewise the second; likewise the third; likewise the fourth, so above, below, and across; he dwells, having pervaded because of the existence in it of all living beings, everywhere, the entire world, with the great, exalted, boundless thought of compassion that is free of hate or malice. (*Kalama Sutta*, p. 7)

The implication here is that certain states of mind are greatly beneficial to the world. The potency of compassionate thoughts can be harnessed and directed outwards. Their trajectory is swift. We may never know their precise effects, but every action — whether in the thought,

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emotional, or physical sphere — has a definite outcome. Compassionate action is not simply confined to altruism in the physical sphere, it also has a distinct manifestation in the mental world.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, *karunā* is also one of the two qualities to be cultivated on the Bodhisattva Path, along with enlightened Wisdom (*prajñā*). Shantideva was a Buddhist master from the University of Nalanda in India. He composed *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* in the eighth century CE. The ideal of the Bodhisattva in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition is well known. Let us consider a few verses from this work. First, on the awakening mind:

In brief, the Awakening Mind
Should be understood to be of two types;
The mind that aspires to awaken
And the mind that ventures to do so.

A definite distinction is made here between aspiration to awaken the Mind and boldly venturing to awaken it. (I:15)

A little later on, the text mentions that even the thought of relieving living creatures of merely a headache is a beneficial intention, endowed with infinite goodness:

This intention to benefit all beings,
Which does not arise in others even for
their own sake,
Is an extraordinary jewel of the mind,
And its birth is an unprecedented wonder.
(I:25)

Here, the motive to benefit others is a precious treasure; it matters a great deal. A little further on we read:

... with gladness I rejoice
In the ocean of virtue from developing
an Awakening Mind
That wishes all beings to be happy,
As well as in the deeds that bring them
benefit. (III:4)

The Awakening Mind is described as the 'supreme ambrosia' that overcomes the sovereignty of death, and the 'inexhaustible treasure' that eliminates all poverty in the world. To what does the sovereignty of death refer? Perhaps to the state of the ordinary or mediocre mind, which has yet to awaken. And the poverty in the world may denote poverty of mind. In contrast, the Awakening Mind results in a different quality of consciousness, and a spirit of boundless generosity. How, then, does one actually practise compassion in the world? Compassion exists in its pure state when a particular response to suffering is swift and natural, with no thought of personal gain.

Shantideva

We now turn to Shantideva, who gave some perennial advice about practising compassion. The advice is quite simple — but not necessarily easy. Consider these thoughts:

Guarding Alertness
If I happen to be present
While a senseless conversation is taking
place
Or if I happen to see some kind of
spectacular show,
I should abandon attachment towards it.
(V:45)

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Someone living an ordinary life might readily engage in a conversation which includes malicious gossip. But here the advice is to detach from such things. The Awakening Mind sees the wisdom in this. What about angry speech? Shantideva says:

Whenever there is attachment in my mind
And whenever there is the desire to be
angry,
I should not do anything nor say anything,
But remain like a piece of wood. (V:48)

Simply put: there are times when the less said, the better. Then there is consideration for others:

I should desist from inconsiderately and
noisily
Moving around chairs and so forth,
As well as from violently opening doors:
I should always delight in humility. (V:72)

This *sutra* speaks for itself.

Compassion in Jainism

To consider the Jain tradition now, its chief feature is ahimsa, which derives from respect for everything that has life. It is said that some practitioners of the Jain tradition sweep the ground as they go along, or walk along veiled due to fear of inhaling a living organism. Some may consider this extreme, but it is informed by a compassionate view of other life forms and a wish to preserve them. In this tradition there are nine ways of obtaining *punya*, or merit. These include giving food to the deserving, water to the thirsty, clothes to the poor, shelter to

monks, and so forth. On the other hand, inflicting suffering is considered as the great sin.

Virtue in Jainism consists of the five-fold conduct of one who has knowledge and faith: (1) innocence, or ahimsa, which refers not simply to negative abstention, but positive kindness to all creation; (2) charity and truth speaking; (3) honourable conduct such as not stealing; (4) chastity in thought, word and deed; and (5) renunciation of worldly interests. Through each of these five points of conduct runs the golden thread of compassion. To feel and think kindly towards others in a sustained way, based on a life grounded in ahimsa, is extremely rare.

H. P. Blavatsky

HPB's final literary gift to the world before her passing was *The Voice of the Silence*. This is a poignant reminder in poetic form of the Bodhisattva ideal, which includes the twin qualities of Wisdom and Compassion. Each is needed in order for the other to flower fully. Recall that Shantideva spoke of aspiration to awaken the mind, compared with actually venturing to awaken it. There is a similar contrast in *The Voice of the Silence*, where it states:

Let thy soul lend its ear to every cry of pain
like as the lotus bears its heart to drink the
morning sun.

Let not the fierce sun dry one tear of pain
before thyself hast wiped it from the
sufferer's eye. (I:59-60)

There is hearing, and then there is doing.

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If we hear the pain of the world truly, then the natural outcome of this is compassionate action.

J. Krishnamurti

The philosopher J. Krishnamurti mentioned that until each of us has a deep sense of compassion, we shall become ‘more and more brutal, inhuman to each other’. We shall have ‘mechanical, computer-like minds . . . and we shall miss the extraordinary depth and beauty, the whole significance of life’. This has similarities to the distinction made by Charles Birch, mentioned earlier, which contrasts connections that are external and mechanical (such as the connection of a train carriage with one in front of it), with connections which are internal, or compassionate.

Conclusion

We began with two questions: (1) What is our radical — that is, fundamental — nature as human beings? Some describe it as *Ātman*; some may think of it as Compassion fused with Wisdom. Yet words fall short of describing that which is essentially a profound and deep experience.

(2) Is there a sense in which human consciousness, in its everyday sense, actually requires radical surgery? The world of humanity is all too often coloured with mediocrity. Yes, radical surgery is required. But there is a catch: *we* have to perform the operation.

What has been mentioned here is not new; it is simply a slightly repackaged view of the human condition through a few different lenses.

Krishnamurti described compassion as being of the active present; it is ‘the verb and not the word, the name, or the noun’. This is an important distinction. A noun is simply a name. Compassion may be treated as a noun but, in order to be complete, it has to be an action in this moment. It is a state of consciousness which, according to Krishnaji, only comes into being ‘when thought has come to an end at its very root’. If this is true, then thought does not produce compassion, rather the compassionate state awakens from a state of heightened awareness.

It is clear that we need to ‘do’ compassion, rather than just talk about it; in other words, to act according to our deeper nature. This general sentiment has been presented in slightly different ways throughout the history of the Ancient Wisdom tradition, and its various representations. The need to live compassion, to do compassion, and not just talk about it, is urgent. Using the word as a verb we need to learn to ‘compassionate’.

When mediocrity is seen for what it is, there is a new possibility for refinement and excellence in the art of being human. This is an art which needs to be constantly practised. It has the potential to raise the quality of life all around us and transform our relationships from being instrumental, to relationships which are informed by truly compassionate responses in all walks of life — the family, the workplace, the community, the nation, the environment, and so forth. Is this not a supremely excellent thing to pursue, rather than being cast adrift like a raft

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on the ocean? Yes. In fact, is this not humanity's inherent collective responsibility, our collective dharma?

As Charles Birch mentioned, 'to respond to the Spirit of the universe, which is God, is to give up the security of habitual, customary, and socially approved actions,

and to live in terms of a radically new and open future.'(p. 234). Humans need to be radicalized in the very highest sense of the term, not in the sense which has gained currency today. Such radicalism implies living and breathing Unity. Are we up to the challenge? ✧

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Human society cannot change unless individuals change, and the change must be in the direction of universality of outlook.

Radha Burnier
Human Regeneration

Developing Character and Becoming a Leader

VICTOR PEÑARANDA

WHEN one becomes a theosophist, one gradually becomes aware that the life journey is never easy and not always what one wants things to be. We travel the smooth and the rough. There are times when we choose to take a road less travelled or make a sudden turn somewhere that, we find out later, will not bring us to our intended destination.

We gradually learn about ourselves by exploring our imperfections. We begin to recognize that being human is also being divine, and by this mystic illumination we humbly embark on the development of our character. It is this aspect of theosophical practice that is often appreciated for its practical applications. When we are clear about our commitment to the enrichment of character, life goals emerge with clarity from the sea of existence. From being perplexed, we learn to reflect and innovate while going through the process of self-discovery and self-renewal.

I learned from the Theosophical Society that life experiences offer lessons by which we are able to develop that precious potential in each one of us — human character. The dynamic enhancement and

enchantment of character involves the nurturing of the inner force that compels us to chart our destiny while performing our life duties. By dealing diligently with the necessary changes or improvements in one's character, self-transformation becomes a matter of conviction.

People are often curious about what useful or wonderful things happen in the process of crafting our character. It is safe to say the following: First, we gain a level of confidence, even serenity, by being aware that we live in a world of impermanence. We learn that we evolve in consciousness from life to life and the best way to prepare ourselves for each existence is to live according to the law of karma.

Second, it is possible to prevail over suffering and decay because of our awareness of what is divine in us. What is a mystery can be unlocked with creative imagination; what is mystical could be grasped by awakened intuition. There is power in kindness and beauty in the cycle of ebb and flow, in the cycle of living and dying.

Third, we must be honest with our-

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selves and others. We have to be aware, each one of us, of our limitations and weaknesses so we may grow from strength to strength. We have to examine the kernel of truth contained in every criticism we receive. Along the way, we learn that respect and trust follow honest acts. We learn that honest work is to give your best, to do better than what you have done before, and to equate your effort with quality or excellence.

Fourth, we begin to understand inner peace by being aware of our capacity to love. It is through love that we reclaim our profound respect for other people and what is sacred in life. Only by offering ourselves to unselfish service can we be transformed into touchstones of social consensus and wellsprings of harmonious relationships.

Fifth, we become imbued with courage to be able to love, be peaceful, be honest, prevail over suffering, and be serene. To be courageous is to be fearless in conviction and selfless in action.

By developing our character we also prepare ourselves to become leaders. Leadership is not being on top of a hierarchy, not about fame, not about wielding power or use of force. Leadership begins modestly with having a purpose in everyday life (in the family, in the neighborhood, in the workplace, and so on). One who has character is a potential leader or a leader in the making. Who are they? Those who are dedicated — heart and mind — to study, meditate and serve. Those with energy to accomplish, confidence to envision, creativity to

pioneer and capability to integrate various parts of our work into a substantial whole.

The Theosophical Society has to invest in developing leaders. And as a matter of theosophical practice, the mentoring of potential leaders is crucially linked to character-building. Allow me to mention some abilities expected of them:

- to be clear, calm, and resolute in considering choices and making decisions
- to be free of unreasonable attachment and negative conditioning
- to innovate under changing conditions
- to inspire by moral or ethical example
- to communicate clearly
- to manage resources effectively
- to motivate others to achieve results
- to gain the support of the people being served
- to persevere despite setbacks
- to create opportunities to unlock the potential of others.

Theosophists have to take the frontline if they are to mainstream Theosophy. This means that a new wave of leaders has to be mentored. We have to create an enabling environment for the moulding of leaders and for the transition of programmes in the organization.

In our Theosophical Society there are no followers — only seekers, volunteers, and messengers. Any one of them could be a leader. I have often mentioned to family and friends that taking the spiritual Path is one great adventure in living. And in this adventure, the enrichment of human character is decisive. As the mystery deepens in us, so does our commitment to love

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and serve those within our reach. A theosophist should be ready to guide and care for others when the situation calls for it. Remember: as we walk the Path,

we become pilgrims of unlimited possibilities. As we transform ourselves, we contribute to the transformation of anywhere we choose to be. ✧

Compassion is the awareness of a deep bond between yourself and all creatures. But there are two sides to compassion, two sides to this bond. On the one hand, since you are still here as a physical body, you share the vulnerability and mortality of your physical form with every other human and with every living being. Next time you say ‘I have nothing in common with this person’, remember that you have a great deal in common

The realization of this deathless dimension, your true nature, is the other side of compassion. On a deep feeling-level, you now recognize not only your own immortality but, through your own, that of every other creature as well. On the level of form, you share mortality and the precariousness of existence. On the level of Being, you share eternal, radiant life. These are the two aspects of compassion. In compassion, the seemingly opposite feelings of sadness and joy merge into one and become transmuted into a deep inner peace. This is the peace of God. It is one of the most noble feelings that humans are capable of, and it has great healing and transformative power. But true compassion, as I have just described it, is as yet rare. To have deep empathy for the suffering of another being certainly requires a high degree of consciousness, but represents only one side of compassion. It is not complete. True compassion goes beyond empathy or sympathy. It does not happen until sadness merges with joy, the joy of Being beyond form, the joy of eternal life.

Eckhart Tolle
The Power of Now

An Individual's Universal Responsibility

SAMDHONG RINPOCHE

I AM not going to talk to you about high philosophy or religion or about Tibetan mysticism, which is very marketable these days. I shall share with you some of my thoughts on modern, day-to-day human problems, particularly those problems which prevent humanity from evolving spiritually. Most people have become slaves of economic and monetary considerations, and lack freedom to think about their own responsibility and power to act to reach higher levels of evolution. Although a lot of my vocabulary is drawn from Buddhism, the basic subject of my discussion with you is neither Buddhist teaching nor a religious matter. It is just about ordinary human problems that we can think over and inquire into together.

According to Buddhist tradition, the universe manifests through the collective as well as individual karmic force of all its sentient beings. Favourable karmic force generates forms that are in tune with the life process, and the living universe creates a non-living universe in tune with it. This positive karmic force has the power to convert forms that are

not in tune with the universe into those which are in such harmony.

During the emergence, growth and mature life of an individual planet, there is cohesion between its living forms and its own nature. This is called the Golden Age, or Satya Yuga. But after a specific period of time this positive karmic force gradually recedes and a negative and non-cohesive karmic force gains strength, which creates conflicts and contradiction between living and non-living beings, and causes those beings and the planet itself to be out of tune with the universe, pushing it towards deterioration and total annihilation. This is called Kali Yuga, or the Age of Decay.

Today, this small planet Earth is suffering from a lack of cohesiveness resulting in conflicts, and its sentient beings are subject to untold miseries and fear. This is basically due to the collective black karmic force of living beings, which is not very easy to improve or correct. However, we cannot wait for the transformation of the collective karmic force of society as a whole to solve the

Reprinted from *The Theosophist*, May 2001. His Eminence Professor Samdhong Rinpoche, former Director of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, in Sarnath, Varanasi.

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problems we are experiencing in our day-to-day lives. Therefore, we must be more attentive to an individual approach, rather than a collective one, in order to regenerate ourselves and the world at large.

The 'stepping out of the stream' method is the only practical and feasible one for individuals in the current situation. When the powerful current of a flood carries someone away, he may not be able to stop or reverse the flow of the flood, but he has the freedom, the ability, and perhaps the responsibility to swim towards the shore and hence step out of the current. Once an individual is able to do this, he or she might be able to help and rescue many others. Today, each one of us, individually, must step out of the current of modern civilization and fulfil his or her universal responsibility. In this way each individual can attune himself with the universe, and also put the universe in tune with himself.

At present, there seems to be no solution to the innumerable problems afflicting our globe and its sentient beings. Mahatma Gandhi, the secular saint of India, rightly said that our problems are the direct result of modern civilization and its materialism and greed. Among contemporary thinkers and spiritual leaders I have come across, only he has had the vision and courage to decry the blight of modernity as a whole.

A similar idea was expressed in the famous words of the American Indian Chief Seattle to the President of the USA about one hundred and fifty years ago. His speech, a classic piece of literature, and Mahatma Gandhi's small book of

1909, *Hind Swaraj*, are written in a simple yet profound manner, calling a spade a spade, and diagnosing the present-day human tragedy and its root causes, as well as its remedies.

Today's world is facing five great challenges:

1. Uncontrolled increase of human population, particularly in the so-called third world countries.

2. The ever-increasing economic disparity between the rich and the poor.

3. Violence and torture, wars and fear of war, many forms of terrorism, ever-escalating use of weapons of mass destruction, and the aftermaths of wars.

4. Environmental degradation, such as global warming, damage to the ozone layer, and ever-growing scarcity of clean air and water, which are basic needs to sustain life systems.

5. Last, but not least, cultural and religious intolerance. Religion, which should be the source of salvation and happiness, is converted into a source of conflict and division.

Everyone knows about these problems, because we experience them every day of our lives. Each one of these is a challenge threatening the peace, happiness and well-being of living beings, which may end in their, and the Earth's, total annihilation. Each challenge has diverse, interlinked and interrelated facets. As mentioned earlier, the ultimate cause of these problems might be the collective and individual negative karmic forces; but the immediate conditions which facilitate the ultimate cause to generate its effects

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in fullest form is the so-called modern, ultra-modern and post-modern civilization or, more accurately, decivilization, based on science and technology.

The development of modern science and technology has provided two unprecedented and unholy powers to a select section of humanity. These powers are:

1. The production of superfluous commodities in excess of the real needs of the people; and

2. The monopoly over such production in the form of capital or so-called technological know-how.

These two powers have paved the way for the few to accumulate wealth and exploit Nature and living beings indiscriminately and constantly. A few unenlightened, power-hungry individuals, irrespective of political ideology and social systems, are wielding those powers. Accumulation of wealth by these few has become easier, and the natural process of equal distribution on the basis of one's own ability to produce has been completely destroyed. People have gradually become dependent on others for various commodities, degrading the dignity of labour and the will to do physical work. Industrialized mass production of commodities demands consumers, and market promotion is its logical consequence.

Crafty producers find it handy to exploit humanity's negative emotions in their own favour — emotions such as the longing for physical comforts, attraction to the mirage of leisure, and shrinking of physical labour, which are direct manifestations of attachment (*rāga*) and

craving (*trshnā*). The basis for endless multiplication of attachments and cravings is modern education and the modern social structure indoctrinating people into competition right from childhood, and generating hate (*dvesha*), in various forms. Competition simply means *the victory of self over others*, and that is nothing but selfishness and disregard for others. Hence, no competition can be free or fair. From the Buddhist perspective, competition is immoral, and is one of the worst possible forms of human behaviour. In order to be fair, equality should be the prime objective, because no one competes for self-defeat or in order to let others win.

In today's world people have lost the power to discriminate what are and what are not their real needs; which things are good and which are bad. What is supposedly good for us is determined by the producers, and they tell us what our needs are — and that too at our cost. Using modern terminology, this is a violation of our right to self-determination. One should be free to determine what one's real needs are, and what is superfluous. But that right has been taken away. One is made to believe that one needs twelve pairs of shoes and sixteen suits in order to move in present-day society and maintain one's social status.

If a person accumulates wealth for unnecessary consumption, he has necessarily to take from the share of others; he is no less than a common thief. It is impossible for such a person to practise right livelihood. If one is not able to

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accumulate wealth, according to modern reckoning, one cannot lead a 'dignified life'. Such a person gets classed with those who are below the poverty line, for whom more relief, more development funds, and more employment opportunities must be found. Therefore more aid, more loans, more technical know-how are necessary on the terms and conditions determined by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, WTO or the governments of so-called developed nations. Thus the third world nations would always be burdened with the weight of aid and debts resulting in a loss of political and cultural sovereignty.

The modern economic system not only deprives us of our wisdom and discrimination; it also takes away our sense of dignity and self-respect. Today, most educated young people are not able to think how to be their own masters and be self-sufficient. They are all looking for employment, wanting to become servants of someone else, and wage earners at the mercy of some capitalists. The entire present age geopolitics and socio-cultural systems are governed by a single factor, that is, the market economy. The other political and social ideals such as democracy, human rights, cultural diversity and freedom of conscience are mere words, devoid of meaning, used ornamentally or metaphorically and, if necessary, as lip-service.

The political colonialism of the past came to an end due to the awakening of people subjected to such domination during the last few centuries. Today, this

has been replaced by economic colonization, which is much more dangerous. Political occupation may be overthrown within days, but it requires several decades or centuries to recover from economic domination, presuming there is a chance of regaining economic freedom.

As economic priorities have surpassed all else in the present time, this makes an individual selfish, violent, and devoid of moral and ethical foundations. Negative influences cause people to become self-centred and wealth-oriented. Modern lifestyles have destroyed the spiritual inclinations of most people and have made them irreligious. The essence of religion has been ignored, and religion and its institutions are being misused to increase and strengthen egoism, hatred, intolerance and conflict. Most people think that spirituality, morality and ethics are hindrances to development and material advancement. Many openly say 'religion is poison' in terms of progress. A tiny minority may not totally agree with the above, but they also meekly say that since they must survive, there is no way out but compromise. In the absence of wisdom and courage to oppose evil, the natural question is, 'What can we do?' This is a very important question. Here, I remember the Tathāgatha's utterance: 'One is one's own Master; who else can be the Master?' (*attā hi attano nātho, ko hi nātho paro siyā*).

Similar is Mahatma Gandhi's principle of individual Satyāgraha, inspired by which I recommend individuals to step out of the materialistic modern lifestyle,

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with its excessive and immoral consumerism, and realize what is their individual responsibility towards universal well-being. The macro universe is constructed by the micro universes of individuals, and whatever an individual does has a relevance to, and an effect on, the universe. Therefore, by individual dissociation from evil, a disharmonious universe can tune itself, and a planet out of tune with the universe can regain its harmony with it.

Some practical suggestions arise from the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha. This Path is not only for spiritual upliftment, but also for living in a righteous manner, creating a cohesive and non-violent society, thereby promoting spirituality. The first step is to have a right view and clear perception of today's materialistic and selfish society with all its demerits and also a vision of how to dissociate oneself from it.

After obtaining such a view, the second step should be right determination. One should start a non-violent, non-consumerist and self-controlled way of life, accepting and enduring all the hardships and inconveniences, including physical pain, which may occur on the way or may be inflicted upon by negative forces.

The third step would be to speak about it without fear. The first two steps pertain to the individual. To share it with fellow living beings means to communicate one's view and determination through right speech. If one does not speak about the ills of our violent society, one might be considered to be a party to it.

The fourth step would be to con-

solidate and stabilize effort. Laziness and carelessness should not be allowed to deter the effort to live rightly, particularly in the present day. Right living requires great effort. Otherwise, one may easily be carried away by evil forces.

The fifth and most important step is right livelihood. That is the basic action of 'stepping out' as well as the actual fulfilment, individually, of universal responsibility. It is most difficult today to pursue right and untainted livelihood. Mahatma Gandhi's practical teaching of 'self-sufficiency' and the principles of village self-rule in my view, are the only answer to the present consumerist way of life.

The sixth step is to inculcate right mindfulness. In today's world, violence and dishonesty are the norm. Without right mindfulness, one may fall into the materialist pit without realizing it. The seventh and eighth steps, namely, right concentration and right action, are also consistently required for a non-violent way of living.

In a nutshell, if the Noble Eightfold Path is put into practice, one can emerge from the present unwholesome system of living and lead an exemplary life. And perhaps, in this way, we as individuals can step out and fulfil our individual universal responsibility.

We may put into practice the following suggestions in order to have a spiritual or religious mind, a transformation of mind:

1. Be aware of the demerits of modern civilization as a whole and its direct, indirect and structured violence and

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exploitative nature. This is right view.

2. Be determined to remain dissociated from this greedy and selfish way of life in spite of inconveniences and difficulties. This is right determination.

3. Reduce needs to the basic minimum level and avoid any wastage of resources. Mahatma Gandhi rightly said that Mother Earth is capable of satisfying everyone's needs, but can never satisfy a single individual's greed. We must realize what are the needs and negate the greed.

4. Renounce modern norms of affluence, and selectively accept what is fit for ultimate rejection. Selective acceptance includes the means of communication, travel, computers and other lesser evils without which one might not be able to function in the modern world.

5. Innovate appropriate technology and the means and methods for sustainable consumption, or else the earth may not survive.

6. Foster a genuinely spiritual mind that is able to transform the individual and thereby his or her universe. That is the ultimate object of human life. This does not necessarily involve following any known religious tradition. Even a non-believer, someone not following any religious tradition, can have a religious mind.

Today even people who claim to be authorities in religious traditions have become very mundane and base, tainted by various negative emotions. The practice of a religious tradition has become ritualized and institutionalized, which is why J. Krishnamurti consistently rejected all tradition. He did not reject the

essence of tradition, but only the prevailing tradition. It is, therefore, necessary to realize what is a truly religious mind and what is real religion, free of all dogmas and rituals, tradition, and lineage. In a very short statement Krishnaji sums up the entirety of religious teaching, and I would like to share it with you:

Religion is something that includes everything, it is not exclusive. A religious mind has no nationality. It is not provincial; it does not belong to any particular organized group. It is not the result of ten thousand years of propaganda or two thousand years of propaganda. It has no dogma, no belief. It is a mind that moves from fact to fact. It is a mind that understands the total quality of thought — not only the obvious, superficial thought, the educated thought, but also the uneducated thought, the deep-down unconscious thought and motives. When a mind inquires into the totality of something, when it realizes through that inquiry what is false and denies it because it is false, then the totality of that denial brings about a new quality in that mind, which is religious, which is revolutionary.

The sentence 'It is a mind that moves from fact to fact' is very important. We repeat the motto: 'There is no religion higher than Truth', but in actual life, we are trapped in one or another religion. The denial of falsehood and the realization of truth, of the fact, which brings about a revolution, a transformation, *that* is actually a religious mind, and we must try to cultivate such a mind for the benefit of all sentient beings. ✧

The Cause of Suffering

BHUPENDRA R. VORA

THERE is much suffering in the world, as can be witnessed from events around the world. Human life is full of sorrow in many ways. There is the suffering at the physical level arising from conflicts, natural disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis, and so on, and diseases that affect human beings and other life in one part of the earth or the other. The death and displacement of entire groups of people in the Middle East and Africa are examples of this tremendous suffering that we are witnessing at the moment.

Then there is the great suffering of animals that are being hunted for their horns, tusks, and other products whilst some are subjected to great cruelty in the laboratories that test products on animals. By this cruelty to animals mankind is creating further karma that will result in suffering for it in the future. The sum total of sorrow and suffering in the world is immense and due to ignorance of the laws of Nature, causes for further suffering are being created endlessly.

But there is another kind of suffering at the psychological level that is the cause of great distress and sorrow for human beings, from desires and expectations

that remain unfulfilled or are insatiable. It is the ever-going struggle of human beings, to seek happiness through material things which eventually become the cause of much unhappiness. Through ignorance men believe that objects of pleasure or wealth can provide the security and happiness that everyone aspires for. The mind creates desires for objects of sense-gratification. These are not always realized or fall short of the expectations imagined by the mind and thus result in sorrow. It is the experience of all that objects of sense gratification provide happiness for only a limited duration and then cease to amuse or provide joy.

The great teacher of mankind, Lord Buddha said that *trishna* or desire for sentient existence was the cause of suffering. The enlightened one analysed the condition of human existence through the four 'Noble Truths' that state that there is suffering, that there is a cause of this suffering, that there is a way to end the suffering and the way is the 'Eightfold Noble Path'. His analysis of *trishna* goes to the root of the human condition. It is through desire that the chain of earthly bondage and sorrow are created. The

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Buddha was like a doctor who found the cause of the disease that is called suffering and prescribed the medicine of restraint in life.

The mind is the source of desires that have their roots in greed, hatred, and delusion. It creates expectations in relationships with others within one's family, friends, society, and so on, and when those expectations are not fulfilled there is unhappiness and sorrow.

What the core issue is in the breakdown of relationships, is a question that needs examination. On deep contemplation it is realised, that it is selfishness. When there is no accommodation for the needs of others and a self-centred view of one's own needs and desires, conflict and pain become inevitable. So in everyday life we find issues with people with whom we have interaction. Our view of life is from our own point of view and aspirations, that do not have consideration for the needs and aspirations of others, and therefore there is so much pain and sorrow in the world. Why is there so much sorrow when expectations are not realised! We need to reflect on this deeply.

Suffering is not restricted to those who do not possess wealth or the material comforts of life and amenities. It equally applies to those who are wealthy and have everything to enable them live very comfortable lives. The cause of suffering is the absence of contentment in life. The Buddha advocated moderation in all aspects of life. It is not possible to live in the world, without money and many of

the things that the modern life requires. However the right mental attitude to them is important. The cultivation of an attitude of non-attachment to objects of comfort, creates inner peace that is not dependent on anything that is external.

Mahatma Gandhi was once asked to give his life's message in just three words. He said 'Renounce and enjoy'. In the words of the *Ísa Upanishad*, 'you should enjoy all things, after giving up the desire for them'. This message has a deep import in it; contentment with whatever Nature provides at the moment of need. Some of the poorest people in the world often express contentment and happiness with their simple lives, which is exemplary. They are happy when their daily needs for food and shelter are met and are ready to share their meal with others. They do not express concern as to where the next meal is coming from and express confidence in their ability to earn enough for the next day's needs.

On the other hand many rich people do not part with any money or help anyone in need. The greed for accumulating more and more wealth becomes an obsession that consumes them. Happiness is an inner state of mind that is not dependent on external objects that create illusions and only momentary joys. There are some people however, who understand the responsibility that great wealth has put upon them and discharge this benevolently by helping society generally. This they do by setting up educational facilities, hospitals and other similar institutions. These compassionate

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acts give a meaning to life and help alleviate suffering in the world. The inner joy and contentment felt from acts of sharing whatever one has, gives meaning to life, and is much more profound than mere self-centred living.

Now, the mere knowing that desire is the cause of suffering does not help remedy the condition. It is necessary to understand the cause of desire itself and the way of freeing oneself from it. All suffering is born out of desire and all desire is born out of ignorance. In this state of ignorance karma ensues in the form of action and reaction. These result in suffering. So to understand the cause of suffering it is necessary to understand desire and the illusions of the world that cause desire. When the cause is understood it is possible to remedy the result that is suffering. Through ignorance of the laws of nature, human beings create much negative karma in the process of seeking wealth, fame and material things of the world. This brings suffering which is meant to teach lessons of life that real contentment and inner peace cannot be attained through external objects.

This human condition called craving or desire is like a great tree with many branches and sub-branches. There are branches of greed in its many forms; of ill will, dislikes and anger that bind the soul to the world of suffering. It is important to realize that the growth of this tree of craving arises from ignorance; ignorance about the real nature of things, about the transiency of the objects of the world and the truth that desire eventually

results in suffering. Most human beings are full of lower desires of various kinds that are not necessarily wicked, but these desires when not realized cause anxiety and eventually sorrow. It is possible to escape from sorrow resulting from such desires by restraining them. It is possible to live contentedly without many of the things that are available in the world but the fire of human desires burns incessantly and causes untold suffering in the end.

When there is an understanding of the illusionary nature of things of the world and their impermanence, a real inner shift in consciousness takes place. The wish then is to be of service to others and for contentment with whatever conditions of life one may find oneself in. It does not however mean people should not have aspirations. Nor does it mean that amenities that our good fortune or karma brings us should not be enjoyed. It means that enjoyment should be without attachment. Similarly all actions should be performed with care and a sense of duty. When a life of restraint is lived with performance of duty, without expectation of results, the cause for suffering is avoided.

We have to live in this world, with its problems and the suffering that is all around us. But how we live our lives and what our mental attitudes are to our own trials and tribulations in life, is important. With awareness about the inner working of the mind that creates attachment, suffering may be avoided and tranquillity established. If we take this outer life with

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all its ups and downs philosophically, it may be possible to almost cease the sadness that we experience.

The first step is to understand that there are laws governing the Universe. That evolution of consciousness proceeds under the operation of the Laws of Cause and Effect, and Reincarnation. As units of this universal consciousness, we are on a journey of evolution, which takes us through many incarnations. The final objective is the perfection of the human being and the evolution of all life.

Under the operation of the Law of Cause and Effect, all our actions will produce effects and therefore actions that have hurt others will certainly result in suffering in the future. Therefore living with care and consideration for others ensures that we do not create further suffering for ourselves in the future. Karma is created at the level of the *kāma-manas* by our desires and thoughts that then get acted upon at the physical level. Restraint at these levels is necessary. The Buddha taught that right thoughts must arise from the knowledge of the Laws of Nature.

The cause of suffering is the ignorance about the workings of Nature and the ability to see things as they are. With the development of the mind and the acquisition of wisdom through study, contemplation and meditation, the cause of suffering can be seen. For instance many people in the world are able to perceive the cause of climate change, environmental damage and so on through human self-centredness. It is also pos-

sible to perceive the suffering this causes to large populations who suffer from flooding of homes, displacement of people through natural disasters and other natural calamities. At the individual level as well, the excessive greed and self-centredness of human beings cause much pain and suffering.

Happiness and contentment do not come from material objects but from within oneself. This tranquillity arises from perceiving the transiency of the things of the world. The way of wisdom is to live and perform in the world with a sense of detachment. Living amongst all the attractions and glitter of this age, can we live more contented lives with reduced desires and simpler lives? Desires are like fires that cannot be quenched. In fact by pandering to these desires more fuel is added to the fire, which burns even more powerfully.

The desireless person is not a joyless person. In fact, he has more joy than anyone else because he is attached and attracted to nothing, knowing that all things are passing, fleeting, and temporary in the world of the senses. In such a person no personal desire, no personal aims and ambitions, no personal goals and self-centred intentions exist. And therefore he enjoys all things that come in his life, while they last, knowing that nothing lasts forever.

The object of life is the unfolding of the divine potentialities that lie dormant within the human consciousness and the experiences of the world are meant to lead towards that objective. ✧

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