

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

VOL. 146 NO. 1 OCTOBER 2024

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Note: Articles for publication in *The Theosophist* should be sent to: <editorialoffice@gmail.com>

Cover: Svanen ("The Swan"), No. 17, Group 9, Series SUW, October 1914 – March 1915, painted by Hilma af Klint (1862-1944), a Swedish artist and mystic whose paintings are considered among the first abstract works known in Western art history. She was inspired by H. P. Blavatsky's and others' theosophical teachings. (See related article on p. 28 of our Sep. 2024 issue.)

This journal is the official organ of the President, founded by H. P. Blavatsky on 1 Oct. 1879. The Theosophical Society is responsible only for official notices appearing in this journal.

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.

Message in a Bottle: Do Something — III

TIM BOYD

RESPONDING to a recent interviewer who asked me for a “Message in a Bottle”, I offered a brief reply: “Trust. Be open. Do something.” Having considered the first two statements in previous articles, it is time to expand on “Do something”. The three parts of the message are brief, and the common question which they invoke is equally brief. Trust. In what? Be open. To what? And for “Do something”, the briefest question of all, “What?” It is a fair question, but a reasonable answer must be something more than a list of “Thou shalt . . .” activities.

The world we live in is action oriented. It is a world of causes invoking effects, which in turn become new causes. In the interest of smoothing relations among people every society develops rules of etiquette — sometimes quite specific and involved.

In French there are two forms of the word “you”. Years ago I spoke the language fairly well, but not well enough to be aware of some of its nuances. On one occasion I was in a park looking for a bench to sit and enjoy the outdoors. A man and his friend seemed to be getting up to leave, so I asked, “Are you leaving?” My mistake was that I used the more familiar form of the word “you”, which evoked an angry response in the

man. He felt I was somehow disrespecting him with my inappropriate use of language. For me it was an instructive moment, but to be honest, it also left me feeling a little proud that my French accent was good enough that he did not blame my rudeness solely on my ignorance and unfamiliarity.

In societies around the world much of our action is defined by cultural norms, to which we conform. In most cases our conformity is not actively harmful, beyond the fact of our acceptance of yet another layer of conditioning. However, the admonition in my message to “do something” was not intended to evoke etiquette. The fundamental issue for someone who has awakened to the possibility of an inner or spiritual life begins with trying to understand who or what we are, and how we got here. From the macro perspective all of us have our roots in a Universal consciousness and energy. The scriptures and myths of global spiritual traditions give indications of the process that has placed us here.

In the Yoga and similar traditions of India the descriptions are specific. In the short text, *Pratyabhijñā-hrdayam*, which I. K. Taimni translated as *The Secret of Self-Realization*, it says:

The Atma, or the individual Monad (each

of us), is merely a contracted or centralized form of universal consciousness. Even though it is nothing but pure consciousness, this is obscured by the mental world of the individual which fills it.

So, the process of awakening, or Self-realization is actually a returning to a non-contracted, non-centralized state by overcoming the obscuring influence of the mental world in which we find ourselves embedded. In contrast to the limitations of the diminished personal center of consciousness, the wisdom traditions assert our potential for a limitless expansion of awareness and power. The Bible story of the Prodigal Son is an allegorical depiction of that Path of Return — called in Sanskrit, *nivṛtti mārga*.

In all of this our actions are of supreme importance. Because action goes beyond the limits of the body and physical world, the quality of awareness that we bring to each action has an enormous effect. In the journey toward freedom, it can be said that there are actions that move us toward freedom, and actions that serve to deepen our involvement in the things, places, people, experiences, and desires that strengthen our bondage to the severely limited personal experience. This is the reason why spiritual and religious traditions place strong emphasis on “right” and “wrong”, or even “evil” and “sinful” actions. Even at the level of the person whose awareness of a spiritual potential is still dormant, guidelines which, at the minimum, prevent one from doing harm to themselves and others can help. An example in Christianity is the Ten

Commandments; in Buddhism there is the Pañchaśīla (Five Precepts) which list the things that one should not do.

Functioning in our world of duality, action and the conditions it precipitates are our prevailing experience. In HPB’s introduction to *The Secret Doctrine* she gives an extremely condensed description of the journey from an undifferentiated Absolute, to the manifestation of a Universe (necessarily dual in nature), and to the “obligatory pilgrimage for every soul” — the place where we all find ourselves. Her use of the word “pilgrimage” brilliantly depicts the process of our progressive involvement in a material world, our present condition, and the road “home”.

For any pilgrim the journey is intentional and has a specific destination. Along the way many things are encountered — upsets, delays, revelations, despondency, exaltation — and ultimately arrival at the sacred place, enriched by the travails and triumphs of the journey. She also emphasizes the all-important role of action — that it is by “self-induced and self-devised efforts” that we move toward the freedom of a return to our essential, undivided nature.

The brief essay at the end of *Light on the Path*, by Mabel Collins, titled “Karma”, uses a fascinating and instructive image to describe this pilgrimage. It is not an image of a human being, or even a soul, but a rope “formed of innumerable fine threads”. The rope is described as passing “through all places”, and in doing so it “suffers strange accidents”. Along its

journey some thread “is caught and becomes attached” and is only violently pulled away. In the image we can see that the effects of that entanglement disorders the rope, not just in that one spot. The image is also given that along the way some thread may be “stained with dirt or with color”. That stain spreads and affects other threads. Ultimately the threads and the rope “pass out of the shadow into the shine”, no longer colorless, but golden and level from their accumulated experience.

These threads, as a whole, are meant to illustrate the human being, our obligatory pilgrimage, and the relationship of action, embodied in Karma. Many people describe Karma as the “law of cause and effect” — a description which is not inaccurate. But Karma is much more. It is more than the cause-and-effect components of action; it is action itself. It could also be described as the “law of harmony”, or restoration of harmony.

There is an approach to action elaborated in the *Bhagavadgītā* that is said to lift one out of the realm of karma. Essentially it says that all actions engaged in as “sacrifice” to the Divine are freeing. A similar idea is emphasized in Buddhist practice as “dedication”. The practice is intended to diminish our normal pre-occupation with self, with “me”. It begins as an imaginative exercise.

For example, in our study, we can dedicate the action to developing knowledge that can be shared in healing and helping ourselves and others; when we engage in physical exercise, we can

dedicate the exercise session to the cultivation of a strong, healthy body usable for the upliftment of all beings. As an act of imagination there are few limits to the normally self-centered actions that can be elevated and offered to the Divine.

Obviously, it would require a twisted imagination to fantasize the manufacture of weapons intended to destroy life, or the production and sale of substances that degrade health and consciousness as activities dedicated to the Divine. Although our initial practice begins as an act of imagination, over time it can become the set point for our living. In the words of the poet William Blake: “What is now proved was once, only imagined.”

Returning to the beginning, when I say “Do something”, what do we do? In answer to this question St Augustine is widely quoted as writing: “Love and do what you will.” For some this statement only adds to their confusion. “Are you saying that all I have to do is love and then I can rob a bank because of my family’s need and my love for them? Can I lie to a neighbor because I want to keep the peace?” Such a line of thought reflects our unlimited capacity to rationalize and our limited comprehension of Love. Yes, under the influence of the unifying power of Love one is free to act as they will. But what is the nature of that love?

The full context of St Augustine’s statement gives a richer picture.

If you keep silent, keep silent by love; if you speak, speak by love; if you correct, correct by love; if you pardon, pardon by

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love; let love be rooted in you, and from the root nothing but good can grow. Love and do what you will.

So, back to the Message in a Bottle: Trust. In what? Trust in yourself; not the impermanent personality which is continually stumbling its way through the world, but in the Higher Self, the unobscured Universal Self whose consciousness and power have

brought this personality into being.

Be open. To what? Be open to the “still, small voice” of that Higher Self which is continually whispering, as intuitions within us, messages of Oneness, of Love, of Inspiration, and possibilities.

Do something. What? Every action rooted in Love is freeing and moves us closer to our true identity as divinely empowered messengers of the Highest. Such action is dedicated; it is sacrificial. ✧

Those who do not practice altruism,
who are not prepared to share their last morsel
with one weaker or poorer than themselves;
those who neglect to help their brothers or sisters,
of whatever race, nation, or creed,
whenever and wherever they meet suffering,
and who turn a deaf ear to the cry of human misery;
those who hear innocent persons slandered,
whether a theosophist or not,
and do not undertake their defence
as they would undertake their own —
are not theosophists.

H. P. Blavatsky (1831–1891)

Unity: The Eternal Principle as a Force for Change

LINDA OLIVEIRA

WITHIN its more pristine areas, our planet reminds us of the fundamental harmony underlying life when it is relatively undisturbed. Nature makes her adjustments as she sees fit, in order to restore order. We cannot but be affected deeply by oceans, deserts, mountains, flora, rock formations, beautiful landscapes, and so forth. These immersions, which are essentially experiences of the Divine, can help us regain a sense of wholeness. Humanity modifies this natural world, creating potentially significant repercussions.

Individual lives tend to be full of hopes, fears, dreams, joys, and sorrows. We are by no means isolated, even though it might feel that way at times. The fact is that we are inextricably interrelated in a complex web of planetary life. We find ourselves impacted daily by the collective human world, with its constant ripple effects. What happens in one part of the globe — whether it be a natural disaster, another war, the suffering of various

nations, or an economic downturn — affects those elsewhere on the planet, even in unseen ways.

Sadly, the negative aspects of our human world are more prominent than the positive ones. It would be easy to become disheartened — even crushed — about the state of things today, if we were to limit our awareness to the news stories which impact us daily. We may feel overwhelmed at times by violence reported in the media, or the repercussions of humanity on our planet today. Many people have become cynical about the world, and one can sympathise with this view.

The immediacy of communication can be a daily challenge. The more sensitive individual, taking note of the news, may be struck by today's deep materialism, the apparent supremacy of self-image, greed, the thirst for power, religious and cultural antagonisms, wars, terrorism, and so forth. It may be helpful to remember the theosophical teaching that we live in

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a long human developmental stage which is marked by pronounced mental evolution. The mind must, and can, search and explore life in numerous earthly directions, before dissatisfaction inevitably turns it in search of the Divine and the deeper significance of life. It is therefore important to maintain perspective and balance. When the mind is sensitive, it behaves differently. It can be useful to remember here that there are still numerous individual and collective efforts around us which are helping to make a positive impact on the world. They emanate from a mind which is less ordinary and do not routinely make the news headlines.

There is so much more to life than our relatively brief experience of it during a single incarnation. The Wisdom Teachings provide an overarching, deep, and meaningful approach to this.

Theosophy and the Unity Principle

Put in simple terms, the main Principles of Theosophy are:

- ◆ Unity
- ◆ Cyclicity and
- ◆ Our fundamental identity with the Universal Oversoul, ultimately motivating our pilgrimage of return to the Source.

The principle of UNITY — capitalised throughout, because it is absolutely fundamental to life — may be noted mentally and then largely set aside, but it is worthy of deep reflection. The Absolute is that Principle which never changes, but which underpins and sustains the whole cosmic drama. According to the Ageless Wisdom, the One essence becomes the manifested

universe. During the cosmic process it becomes the Many. The One is therefore also the Many — it is present in everything that exists, including each of us. During the night of the cosmos, or *pralaya*, the Many are said to return to the One — which, in reality, they never have left. It is devoid of qualities or attributes, underlying all of manifestation. Many sense intuitively that they come from a common Source which may be referred to in terms such as Brahman, or Tao, or God. “The Supreme” is the description used in the *Bhagavadgitā*. Mystics throughout the ages have experienced great heights of immersion into a state of Oneness, into Divine Consciousness. We can understand our common Source as being this undivided Unity.

In *The Tao of Physics* the physicist Fritjof Capra wrote:

The argument of this book could therefore be phrased more generally, by saying that modern physics leads us to a view of the world which is very similar to the views held by mystics of all ages and traditions. Mystical traditions are present in all religions, and mystical elements can be found in many schools of Western philosophy.¹

Unity and Scientific Thought

Various modern scientists have also had some wonderful insights into this subject. The physicist, Professor Kurt Dressler, wrote:

I claim that the concept of unity is the answer to the fundamental philosophic search for the origin, essence, and end of our puzzling existence in a multifaceted world. . . .

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But now we realize of course that our *normal* state of consciousness is but a small cut out of much vaster possibilities of human consciousness. And *physical* reality is but a small cut out of much more encompassing aspects of the whole of reality. The whole of reality has a timeless and non-local quality which reveals itself in mystical union but not in our normal state of consciousness.²

The student of Theosophy could resonate with these insights. For one thing, our physical experience is indeed relatively insignificant compared with the vastness of life.

It follows from this Oneness that all life forms are related at the most fundamental level. The Buddhist, Thich Nhat Hanh, used the term “interbeing” to describe our deep interconnection with everything else. It is extraordinary to contemplate this immense concept — that *all* things are connected and bound together, as by an invisible thread; that One Life permeates everything from quark to galaxy. Further, he mentioned the biologist Lewis Thomas, who described our human bodies as “shared, rented, and occupied” by countless other tiny organisms, without whom we could not “move a muscle, drum a finger, or think a thought”.

He described the body as a community, the trillions of non-human cells within us being even more numerous than the human cells. Without them, we could not be here in this moment. (As an aside, it also poses the question of how we actually take responsibility for this “community”, which comprises our body.) Extrapolating from this, Lewis Thomas affirmed that

there are no solitary beings. Rather, the whole planet is one giant, living, breathing cell, all its working parts being symbiotically linked.³

Further, there is the question of our biological relationship with the universe itself. Science asserts that we are all “stardust”. Carbon, born inside mature stars billions of years ago, catalysed life on Earth. Australian astrophysicist, Professor Tamara Davis, mentioned a scientific observation that if such stars are large enough, they explode in a “catastrophic supernova” and send the ingredients for new galaxies shooting across the universe. It has been said that most of the carbon that makes up the Earth, and us and all of the life around us, comes from the inside of stars.⁴ This is incredible to contemplate.

The Experience of Unity and its Effect on Our Lives

Yet, venturing further still, the Wisdom Teachings indicate that our true common origin is non-physical. If we *do* sense a deeper consciousness, and extrapolate inwards from the spread of physical carbon throughout galaxies, then the concept of a common non-physical root, our fundamental Unity, is not such a difficult stretch for the mind. It can also have a profound impact on the deeply aware individual.

Professor Kurt Dressler also wrote these heartfelt words:

In my own personal experience the unity of physical reality and consciousness reveals itself not in equations nor in a theory

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but in a way of thinking and living. . . . I used to believe that I am responsible for my way of living, for what I do, for my actions, but not for what I think. But the truth is that we are responsible for our thoughts, because our actions flow out of what we think. . . . There is something that accompanies the experience of unity that is at least equally important: that is the experience of purification of the heart; that is the experience of total and unconditional forgiveness.⁵

The transformative force of Unity becomes apparent here. It has the capacity to change us radically. A most significant implication of an authentic experience of Unity is its potential for everyday expression in *how* we think and, therefore, *how* we live — for as long as we allow that experience to remain fertile. The more self-absorbed our thinking is, the less we will pay attention to the needs of the world around us and those who come within our daily orbit. Conversely, a more universal outlook can be nurtured through reflection, meditation, deeper study, service, greater sensitivity, and a relatively simple lifestyle.

Miss Clara Codd wrote, emphatically:

Nothing in all the world matters so much as the growth in each one of us of a spiritual outlook upon life. Dr Annie Besant has defined spirituality as “the intuitive perception of Unity”.⁶

The translation of a conviction about the reality of Unity into daily living allows for its natural fulfilment in human affairs. It presents many opportunities for doing

good, however small, if we remain alert.

Relationships

Problematic relationships abound, in all walks of life. But when the light of *buddhi* starts to penetrate the mind, it makes a world of difference. The following points, while not new, are worth revisiting, for they are fundamental contributors to transformation:

- ◆ An awareness of the effect of our thoughts:

Thoughts can, and do, take on a life of their own. They are living entities which we create. When done so with strong intention, and when repeated often, they have far greater potency than we might imagine. The book *Thought Forms*, by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, included visual illustrations of the effects of our thoughts in the emotional and mental fields, as perceived by them. The paintings themselves have seen a recent resurgence in popularity.

- ◆ An awareness of the effects of our speech:

Theosophical teachings suggest that speech also has a potency of which we may not be aware. Every word we utter has its own vibration and effects at subtler levels, which are modified further by our tone of voice, intensity of purpose, and so forth. As we know, language is too often used idly.

- ◆ A deep sense of the sacredness of all life, without which the above two points remain largely mechanical: This is accompanied by an opening of the heart, through which compassion flows. It can bring about

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greater humility, as we contemplate our relative insignificance in the vast cosmos.

Reasoning indicates that the first two points above are helpful aids to relationships. However, what most deeply transforms our relations with others is the flowering of compassion. This is not simply a question of sympathy. While compassion embraces both sympathy and empathy, it is inevitably accompanied by some kind of action — even a simple, uplifting thought.

Every compassionate act, which we do or say or feel or think, benefits this vast whole of which we are a small fragment. It is like adding a tiny drop of coloured liquid to a bucket of water — the water is never the same again. There is a fundamental satisfaction associated with compassionate action which goes beyond the need for visible recognition; a sense of *dharma*, of rightness. At times we may have felt sympathy for a person or some cause, but not done anything to help. However, the flowering of compassion is transformative and reverential.

The Voice of the Silence calls to the compassion within the spiritual aspirant with these familiar words:

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

60. Let not the fierce sun dry one tear of pain before thyself hast wiped it from the sufferer's eye.⁷

The fact is that we are tested repeatedly in our closest relationships, our relationships with animals and the plant kingdom, in the workplace, in our service

alongside others, and so forth. Yet if we sense more deeply that commonality which unites us all, then a fundamental shift occurs. We will naturally become less self-centred. We will not focus on divisions and differences, but on what we have in common with humanity and the life of this planet. A natural awareness will develop, based on our sense of Unity and the need for harmonious coexistence which flows from it.

Unity has its own force and grace. It binds and strengthens. The awakening of this sense within us also leads to a natural cultivation of ethics, which we find interwoven through theosophical teachings. Their presence in us indicates a conscience which is alive, but which must also be alert. On the one hand, if we are dominated by feelings of division, separation, and competition, then there tends to be an almost constant attitude of “me versus the world”, of trying to get ahead at any cost.

However, if we deeply hold the truth of life's oneness, then we desire to act with integrity towards other beings. Ethics become the cornerstone for action. Consequently, we will act in an upright way, with a developed sense of right and wrong — in our relationships, our place of employment, in our financial dealings, and our general approach to life. It must be noted that a mere intellectual knowledge of Theosophy, alone, will not achieve this.

The person whose life is underpinned by ethics will be more likely to speak truth, to do what is right according to his

or her conscience, to act responsibly, and to consider adopting a lifestyle which is governed by ethical principles which causes the least possible harm to the planet. The adoption of some form of vegetarian diet by many people is only one corollary of this. Ethical action can be reflected both in the smallest of acts, as well as larger life decisions.

Our Material Age: an Opportunity for the Sincere Seeker

For Professor Robert Ellwood, our purpose in this world is to experience the material level fully but not to get trapped in it. He has written:

A simple life is the most natural . . .

For, such things as money, prestige, status, and compulsive hedonism are not grounded in Nature but in twisted passions of the mind and emotions. They are really abstractions, symbols, rather than the “hard” naturalism of wholesome food, the beauty of trees and sky, and human warmth.⁸

Indian philosophy teaches about the Yugas, vast periods of human development. It is said that the current Kali-Yuga, whose first five thousand years were completed in the late nineteenth century, is an immensely long period denoted by great material advance and spiritual darkness. According to this teaching, only “one quarter” of truth remains in the world.⁹ Consequently, morality is considerably diminished. In other words, goodness is still present; however, it is overshadowed by the flourishing of individual and group self-centredness. Gazing at today’s world,

we do find a very strong emphasis on the individual, reflected in social media and self-centred effects of materialism, to give two examples.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, while explaining the esotericism of the Rig-Veda, H. P. Blavatsky further mentions:

[Divine] aspirations are no more general but have become abnormal through a general spread of *Ahamkāra* (the feeling of Egotism, *Self*, or I-AM-NESS) and ignorance.¹⁰

There is hope, though. In a conversation between a sage and a student, in *H. P. Blavatsky’s Collected Writings*, the sage observes:

There is one thing peculiar to the present *Kali-Yuga* that may be used by the Student. All causes now bring about their effects much more rapidly than in any other or better age. A sincere lover of the race can accomplish more in three incarnations under *Kali-Yuga’s* reign than he could in a much greater number in any other age.¹¹

This is a striking statement, not to be overlooked. In other words, for the individual with sincere spiritual inclinations, the actual opportunity to unfold spiritually and be a force for good in the world is said to be *greater* in this cycle than any other. This requires of us, among other things, a very real conviction of life’s Unity, and the possibility of rediscovering and nurturing such a state, in contrast to the inherent separatism of a self-absorbed life. The opportunity is there, if we are willing to seize it unwaveringly. If even a few more individuals can

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begin to live in such a way, it will be highly beneficial to the world, for we affect the life around us not just physically, but at subtler levels as well.

We can each become a changemaker for the greater good, making a transformative difference through the way we live our life. Goodness is contagious. What we do, and how we live, matter. If we pause

every so often and ask ourselves whether we are acting from the point of view of Unity, it can make a substantial difference, for to sense Unity means to touch the sacred.

As N. Sri Ram elegantly observed: “The present mental phase must be succeeded by a cycle in which there is a sense of the unity of life, its sacredness, its essential goodness and beauty.”¹² ✧

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**He who embraces unity,
All men should imitate;
Not self-displaying, he may be
Enlightened, free, and great.**

Lao-tzu (B.C. 604),
The Tao Te Ching

Annie Besant and Indian Nationalism: *New India and The Commonweal*

R. PRICILA & LETITIA K. VINOY

MRS Annie Besant, before she arrived in India, had already won public recognition as a great leader in the West and other parts of the world, by her outstanding oratorical skill, and her writings on religious, social, philosophical, and political work. Her active and tireless work in several fields for human freedom and her sympathy for the poor and downtrodden was well known. During the first twenty years of her life in India between 1893 to 1913, she did relentless work in various fields like education, religion, and society.

Her participation in Indian politics synchronized with the commencement of the First World War. It had broken out on 4 August 1914, and to that colossal struggle the world began to give its attention, little dreaming that it was to last for four years, would dislocate all familiar ways, and leave the world with a new set of circumstances to adjust itself to.

Besant threw in the weight of her opinion on the side of the Allies. She declared afterwards that she knew that the Allies would win, so she did not need to



Annie Besant (1 October 1847 – 20 September 1933) was an Anglo-Irish orator, writer, and social rights activist.

concern herself with that problem. Instead she took advantage of the conditions created by it to press forward for the political emancipation of India, while

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idealism ran high, and India was giving of her utmost in the struggle. So far as the war itself was concerned, she called upon “all who are pledged to universal brotherhood, all Theosophists the world over, to stand for right against might, law against force, freedom against slavery, brotherhood against tyranny”. There were objections to these views and the alienation of some, but Besant held firmly to them.

Rise of *The Commonweal*

Besant came to understand that unless a powerful movement was launched, her efforts would not be crowned with success. To begin with, she thought of associating the All-India Congress Committee with her work. She wrote to Pherozeshah Mehta and Dadabhai Naoroji to ask whether the Congress would put itself at the head, and take the direction of a national movement embodying religious, educational, and social, as well as political, reforms.

Pherozeshah wrote back that the question had arisen very early in the life of the Congress, and as opinions differed so much on religious, educational, and social questions, it was thought best to drop all issues excepting the ones connected with political reforms. Naoroji also agreed with Pherozeshah on this point. It seems that these veterans in the Congress believed in the secularization of politics.

As was expected, Besant was somewhat disappointed by the approach to these problems adopted by the Congress leaders and decided to go it all alone. She launched an ambitious programme “to re-

generate India”. To begin with she started a weekly newspaper, *The Commonweal*, on 2 January 1914 to spread political ideas and to focus the attention of the public on their problems. It was a weekly journal dealing with issues of national reform. The yearly subscription was Rs (Rupees) six, half yearly, Rs 3-8, and quarterly, Rs two. The special supplements were sent free to all subscribers.

She explained the reasons for entering into the publishing field:

The futile efforts made by a small knot of people, using *The Hindu* as their organ, to drive me out of the public work in India to which I have devoted my life, money, and work since 1893, have led to the intensification of that work in Madras, and to my greatly increased popularity in Southern India, where I have hitherto been less known than in the North.

It advocated socio-religious reforms and emphasized the need for recreating Indian society on modern, scientific lines, while in no way cut off from its roots of ancient traditions, norms of behaviour, and values. It championed the cause of freedom of thought and action and put great emphasis on human dignity, equality, and social justice.

In her writings, in both the weekly *Commonweal* and the daily *New India*, which she started soon after, Besant not only roused public opinion to support the self-rule movement, but also showed Indian journalists the technique of writing effective, leading articles denouncing the action of the British authorities in England and India. In particular she taught them

the method of criticism to be strong and forceful based upon facts, and not wild imagination. Her writings became a mainstream line of propaganda for India's freedom. Her series of stirring articles created a new atmosphere and influenced the thinking of nationalists. She argued:

We claim liberty, not favour. We claim freedom — not the goodwill of the Government. Freedom is the right of every human being and without the process of law none should have the power to take it. Unless a government is in sympathy with the legitimate aspirations, the legitimate desires of the people, then that Government, in the presence of the true Justice of God, has no right to govern.

For political regeneration, the newspaper advocated “the building up of complete Self-Government from Village Councils, through District and Municipal Boards and Provincial Legislative Assemblies, to a National Parliament, equal in its powers to the legislative bodies of the Self-Governing Colonies, by whatever name these may be called; also at the direct representation of India in the Imperial Parliament”.

Besides this, the newspaper claimed “an open path for Indians to every post in their native land, as promised by the Proclamation of 1858, and the abolition of every law that places them in a position inferior to that enjoyed by the English”. Above all, the newspaper vociferously demanded the strengthening of human bonds between India and Britain: “One

thing that lies very near to our heart is to draw Great Britain and India nearer to each other, by making known in Great Britain something of Indian movements, and of the men who will influence from here the destinies of the Empire.”

This newspaper also embodied a set of four-fold ideals, namely, religion, education, social reform, and politics. In the realm of religion, it stood for individual liberty and mutual respect. In education it pleaded for flexibility in examination, and advocated physical, moral, religious, and cultural education, lowering of fees, and encouragement of the vernaculars and classical languages of India. It also pleaded in favour of technical education, on national lines. In social reform it advocated foreign travel, upliftment of women, and uprooting colour bias and caste system. The political ideal has been discussed in the previous paragraph.

In sum, Besant was speaking for the millions of Indians through her paper and she was expressing both in her speeches and publications the sentiments of Gladstonian liberalism which had become the alpha and omega of the British liberals and humanists. Her constant reminder was a quotation from her favourite American poet, James Russell Lowell, which almost every issue of her paper carried:

They are slaves who fear to speak
For the fallen and the weak.

She did not work merely through the columns of the *Commonweal*, but went to the extent of carrying her struggle even to England. To quote her own words:

In politics I worked more in England for the recognition of the rights of Indians than directly in India itself while knowing that until pride in India aroused pride in her past and hope for her future, until social self-respect and independence were awakened, no strong basis existed for true political liberty.

However, she explained India's grievances and her needs through various other forums. Speaking to an audience in the great Queen's Hall, she declared that "the price of India's loyalty is India's freedom". She believed that the ignorance of the English public about India, and indifference of the House of Commons — as shown by the empty benches when Indian questions were before it — were grave dangers to the Empire. "India is asking," she said, "for self-government such as is enjoyed by the Colonies."

She condemned the Government's repressive policy in India, and acquainted the British public with the misdeeds of their representatives in the great ancient land. She declared:

How can she believe in England's love of liberty in face of the Arms Act, the house searching, the espionage, the autocracy, the frustration of her dearest hopes, the treatment of her noblest as inferiors, the utter disregard of the promises made in 1858?

Thus, *The Commonweal* emerged as an important journal, at that historical juncture, instrumental in spreading the national consciousness among the people, particularly the educated elite.

Rise of *New India*

Besant tried to create a suitable atmosphere for Indians to gain some vital concessions from England by moulding public opinion through several media. And after having made a case for India in England she returned to India.

In July 1914 she purchased *The Madras Standard*, an Anglo-Indian paper. It was the oldest paper in the city, founded in 1841. But it was unknown and quite unpopular. It was neither edited nor even printed properly. Annie Besant did wonders. She said: "It was a rag . . . I expect to make it good." Her hopes were realized. From a circulation of a few hundreds, she built it up with astounding rapidity, and it reached a circulation of 30,000, the largest Anglo-Indian paper at the time.

On 1 August 1914, Besant gave a new name to the paper, *New India*. This was not merely a change in name, but something more. The motto of the new paper was "For God, Crown, and Country". As Besant wrote in a *New India* editorial on 8 June 1916, her purpose in buying the paper was "to press forward the preparation for the coming changes in India, and to claim steadily India's place in the Empire". The paper announced that it would not publish any verse or quotation.

The popularity of *New India* can be understood by comparing it with an English journal established thirty years earlier. C. Karunakara Menon, who was formerly on the staff of *The Hindu*, started *Indian Patriot*, which had a pronounced nationalist zeal. But in 1916 he attacked Besant for causing discontent and division

in the Congress and asserting that “She had absolutely no claims upon us, no right to expect us to follow her. . . . She came into our politics only yesterday. The editor of *Indian Patriot* has been in politics for nearly thirty years. She is after all an Irish woman whom nobody beyond the Theosophical Society is bound to revere; and her claims to lead the whole of India, setting aside old leaders and public workers is most preposterous.” However, *New India* outlasted *Indian Patriot*, which fell to lean years by 1920.

In politics this paper was to insist on the ideal of self-government for India along the colonial line, remembering that the mission of every man and institution in the country was to bring about the speedy attainment of the triumph for which the Indian National Congress had steadily striven, namely, government by the inhabitants of India for Indians, but under the educative guidance of British statesmanship until colonial autonomy was attained.

This newspaper was to work for abolition of all racial privileges, and the promotion of healthy cooperation and of the feeling of comradeship and solidarity between the various Indian peoples. To achieve its end, it was to press for such amelioration of the conditions of life among the various classes of the community, and such measures of social uplift and reform, as were essential to real progress and were at the same time in consonance with the truest national ideals. Though the newspaper declared itself to be non-sectarian and non-partisan in

its outlook on religion, it was to yield to the religious instinct, its proper and dominant place in the life and thought of the nation. Its ambition was to strive for a rejuvenated and united India, which would be quickened with the breath of a larger and more robust national life.

In an article, “Trust India”, she wrote that it was on the loyalty of the English-educated Indians “that the stability of British rule in India depended and they alone gave an understanding loyalty, based on the education they had received from England, the admiration they felt for English institutions, and the hope they cherished that England would help them in building of such institutions in their own land”. She decried the government for distrusting the English-educated Indians who were otherwise loyal to the empire.

Besant wrote a series of political pamphlets through *The Commonweal* and *New India*. From 1915, she published continuously on political, social, and educational affairs. *The Commonweal* and *New India* were destined to range themselves with the battle for home rule for India. She published a political pamphlet in August 1914, called *India, a Nation: A plea for Indian Self-Government*. In the same year she published a series of articles in *New India* entitled “How India Wrought for Freedom: The Story of the National Congress Told from Official Records (1885–1914)”. There Besant said:

It is a plain story of India’s constitutional struggle for freedom, a story so pathetic in its patience, so strong in its endurance,

so far-seeing in its wisdom, that it is India's justification — if any justification can be needed for asserting the right to freedom — for her demand for Home Rule.

Apart from these, she published various pamphlets on political affairs, such as *Shall India remain a Nation?*, *What is Swaraj?*, *Steps for Freedom*, *Educate for Home Rule*, and so on. The entire nation was impressed by the writings of Besant through *The Commonweal* and *New India*. The demand for *swaraj* (self-rule) spread to every part of the country. She was increasingly becoming popular for her criticism of the colonial government.

Conclusion

Mrs Annie Besant was attracted towards the spiritual treasure and heritage of India. As a Theosophist she wanted to

work for the development of India. The context in which she arrived in India was the era of social and political awakening. Nationalism was heightened and spread throughout India. It had reached all sections of people with the help of the Press. Realizing the urgency of having newspapers to fight against the British, Mrs Besant started *The Commonweal* and *New India*. And through them she attempted to reach out to the people. As an active and prominent member of the Indian National Congress she contributed to the national movement in the early decades of the twentieth century. The emergence of *The Commonweal* and *New India* along with other vernacular and English newspapers, no doubt speeded up the process of India's national movement. ✧

The Masters of the Wisdom are compassionate, supremely so, but not according to our wishes and notions. They seek to awaken us, not to reward us. As their compassion is far-reaching, their aim is to set us definitely on the path. They do not want to provide temporary compensations and satisfactions. So, as H. P. Blavatsky said, each receives by way of inspiration and guidance strictly what they make themselves worthy to receive. From the beginning of the path, the aspirants must try to fill themselves with “goodwill without measure”, a deep concern for all of life. When compassion begins to move the heart and the aspirants learn to seek the good of all others, not just their own, they ensure their own good.

Radha Burnier (née Radha Sri Ram) (15 November 1923 – 31 October 2013) was the 7th international president of the Theosophical Society, Adyar. Having taken office in 1980, she was the longest serving president of the Society (33 years).

Meditation and Love

CECIL MESSER

IS there an intimate relationship between meditation and love, or devotion? The word “devotion” means to consecrate or make sacred, and often refers to religious worship of a deity. It may also encompass love and commitment to spiritual teachings. If love is a golden coin, then one side is compassion and the other side is devotion. Devotion opens our heart to receive blessings from the teacher and the dharma.

The word “love” has many usages, some of which veil deeper meanings. It ranges from emotional attachment and affection for a person or object to an all-encompassing feeling of union with the Divine. The Abrahamic religions teach: “God is Love.” This latter sense conveys an attitude of attunement that is universally beneficent. Ineffable love is approached through surrender of one’s self. Then only may the power of devotion manifest as communion with an aspect of meditation.

Witness the example of Brother Lawrence and his experience of devotion. He was an uneducated footman prior to becoming a lay brother among the bare-

foot Christian Carmelites. His conversion was the result of his relation to a “dry and leafless tree standing gaunt against the snow”. He contemplated deeply the new life promised by the coming spring. From that moment on, he blossomed forth in communion with Love, endeavoring “to walk as in Love’s presence”.

Excerpts from a letter to his priest convey a sense of abiding devotion while he was engaged in mundane duties and formal periods of prayer or contemplation. Brother Lawrence exposes his heart:

And I make it my business
Only to persevere in Love’s holy presence,
Wherein I keep myself by a simple attention,
and a general fond regard to Love,
Which I may call an actual presence of
Love, or better,
an habitual, silent, and secret conversation
with Love,
which causes me Joys and Raptures
Inwardly and outwardly.

Then with ingenuous humility:

I consider myself as the most wretched of
men
Who has committed all sorts of crimes

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against his King.
Touched with a sensible regret,
I confess to Him all my wickedness,
and ask His forgiveness.
I abandon myself in His hands
that He may do what He wishes with me.
My King, full of mercy and goodness,
Very far from chastising me,
Embraces me with love.
Thus am I from time to time in
His holy presence.

And the internal sensation when he
applies himself to prayer:

I feel all my spirit and all my soul lift
itself up
without any care or effort of mine.
It continues as it were
suspended and firmly fixed in Love,
In its center and place of rest.

Finally, the soul's desire:

I cannot bear that this should be called
delusion,
Because the soul which thus enjoys Love
Desires nothing but Love.
If this be delusion in me,
It belongs to Love to remedy it.

This example from the Christian tradition intimately illustrates the power of devotion to open our heart to the ineffable beyond concepts.

St John of the Cross in his "Dark Night of the Soul" speaks of a meditation that brings an inner peace. "This peace — so delicate and subtle — does its work in stillness and solitude. [It] begins to come through pure spirit, through simple contemplation, untainted by discursive

thought." Referring to the infused contemplation, he says: "Contemplation is nothing other than a secret, peaceful, loving inflow of [the ineffable]. If given room, it will fire the soul in the spirit of love."

From the tradition of Islam, Sufis emphasize a devotional approach to the ineffable, the very essence of love and light. The Sufi Saint and poet, Rumi, embraces the highest form of this love as the path to the divine. He expresses this mystical devotion in verse:

O my soul, I searched from end to end:
I saw in thee naught save the Beloved;
Call me not infidel, O my soul,
if I say that thou thyself art He.
Ye who search of God, of God, pursue.
Ye need not search for God is you, is you!
Why seek ye something that was missing
ne'er?

Save you, none is,
but you are — where, oh, where?

The Muslim saint and Sufi mystic of the eighth century, Rabia Al Basra, embodied this passionate devotion and love. She famously declared, "I want to pour water into Hell and set fire to Paradise so that these two veils disappear and nobody worships [the ineffable] out of fear of Hell or hope for Paradise, but only for the sake of eternal beauty."

The Hindu scholar of the third century BCE, Patanjali, considered devotion to be one of the necessary preliminary practices leading to meditative integration. It involves self-sacrifice and helps to unite our conditioned consciousness with

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pure awareness. Paraphrasing from the *Bhagavadgitā*:

When the yogi's attention is fixed on the
Beloved,
Free from hope or fear or desire,
Then is one said to be harmonized.
As a lamp sheltered from the wind does
not flicker,
Just so is the yogi of subdued mind
Absorbed in devotion to the Beloved.

In his book, *Self-Realization through Love*, the eminent theosophist Dr I. K. Taimni notes two stages on the Hindu path of devotion. The first stage involves constant effort and self-discipline to prepare and purify oneself for the expression of devotion. The second stage is reached when the aspirant has the experience in which love wells up from within naturally, constantly, and effortlessly. This is the direct awareness of reality.

The *pāramitā-s* taught by the Buddha are grounded in love and compassion.

The practice of generosity graces the endeavor of meditation with love and gratitude. The attainment of wisdom — the fruit of meditation — provides the insight to truly benefit ourselves and others. If trace elements of unconditional love and compassion for the suffering of all beings are not present in the soil of our heart, then our practice will be barren and its potential harvest will wither and dry.

Perennial wisdom recognizes that the paths of devotion and meditation ultimately join and yield the epiphany of love. Empathizing with the inner state of these wisdom teachers and mystics empowers our meditation by enabling us to receive their blessings. Devotion renders gratitude palpable so that we may feel open, receptive, joyous, and selfless. These four — openness, receptivity, joyfulness, and no self-cherishing — invite us to enter the sanctuary of our innermost being. ✧

**Our task is not to seek for love,
but merely to seek and find all
the barriers within ourself
that we have built against it.**

Rumi

Scientific Research on Children's Reincarnation Memories

ANTTI SAVINAINEN

REINCARNATION is among the most central teachings of Theosophy and Anthroposophy, which portray it as an opportunity to evolve as a human being from one life to the next. Our understanding of reincarnation has been shaped by the teachings of Eastern religions and spiritual teachers, which are thought to be based on experiential spiritual knowledge. Understandably, this is not convincing to a person outside spiritual movements.

Even so, there is empirical evidence for reincarnation independent of Eastern religions and spiritual movements. It has been suggested, for example, that past-life memories can be activated by hypnosis. But the results obtained with hypnosis seem very unreliable from the point of view of both scientific and spiritual research, so I will not investigate them further. Here I will focus on scientific research on children's reincarnation memories and its criticisms. Finally, I will evaluate the results from the perspective of Theosophy.

Ian Stevenson's Groundbreaking Work

Ian Stevenson (1918–2007) pioneered the systematic study of children's reincarnation memories. Stevenson's mother

was a Theosophist, and her large collection of books introduced him to Theosophy and Eastern religions at a very young age (Stevenson, 2006).

Stevenson's scientific career began in medicine and psychiatry. After receiving a scientific education, he became interested in paranormal phenomena and wondered whether there was any scientifically sustainable evidence for them. This interest led him to research children's spontaneous reincarnation memories in the late 1950s. The work took off when Stevenson received an endowed professorship in 1964 from the University of Virginia. With a donation from physicist and inventor Chester Carlson, he established the Division of Perceptual Studies, which aimed to explore "the scientific empirical investigation of phenomena that suggest that currently accepted scientific assumptions and theories about the nature of mind or consciousness, and its relation to matter, may be incomplete." Carlson's bequest made it possible to undertake fact-finding missions to India, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and many other countries.

Stevenson published his research in peer-reviewed scientific journals and wrote

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several books on his methods and results. Some critics considered his methods unscientific, but most members of the scientific community simply ignored him. He did gain some supporters within the community; although they did not necessarily find reincarnation a plausible explanation, they found Stevenson to be an accurate and honest scientist. One psychiatrist wrote, "Either he is making a colossal mistake, or he will be known . . . as the Galileo of the 20th century." (Lief, 1977).

Stevenson's research institute has proved to be very active, carrying out scientific research on many children's reincarnation memories and near-death experiences. Stevenson retired in 2002 and was succeeded by Jim Tucker, so the work continues. By 2005, about 2,500 well-documented cases of reincarnation had been recorded. Most come from non-Western countries and communities, where belief in reincarnation is common.

An essential part of the research method is the interview. When a case comes to the attention of the investigators, they travel to the scene and conduct a thorough interview with family members, usually through an interpreter. The researchers use general, open-ended questions. Both correct and incorrect answers (which do occur) are reported. Interviewees are not paid, as this could encourage cheating. Often current and former families have already met, but there are cases where researchers have had the opportunity to interview both families separately. Such cases naturally carry more weight.

I will present two cases of the re-

incarnation type from the United States so that the reader can see children's memories of their alleged past lives.

Children's Stories of Reincarnation

John McConnell

John McConnell was a retired New York City police officer (Tucker, 2005). In 1992, when he was returning home from guard duty, he happened to see two men robbing a store and drew his gun. One of the men shot John dead: the bullet destroyed a vital pulmonary artery. John was close to his family. He had told his daughter Doreen, "Whatever happens, I'm going to take care of you." Five years later, Doreen gave birth to a son named William. The boy had fainting spells shortly after birth. William was diagnosed with a congenital blockage of the heart artery, which had affected the formation of the right ventricle of his heart. It turned out that his birth injuries were very similar to those caused by the bullet to William's grandfather, John. Surgery and medication helped.

When he learned to speak, William started talking about his grandfather's life. He also told his mother about his grandfather's death. When he was three years old, Doreen ordered him around, threatening to whip him if he didn't calm down. William responded: "Mummy, when you were little, and I was your father, you misbehaved many times, but I never hit you!"

Once William asked what his mother's cat's name was. Doreen asked, "Do you mean Maniac the cat?" William replied, "No — the name of the white cat?"

Doreen remembered that the white cat's name had been Boston. William said it was, but he called it Boss. Only John had called the cat Boss. These details convinced Doreen that William had been her father.

Doreen asked her son if he remembered anything about the time before his birth. William said he had died, gone to heaven, and talked to God. He told God he was ready to return and was born as William. William also said that a person does not go directly to heaven but through various intermediate states. He had seen animals on the other side, and he said that animals also reincarnate.

Although John had been an active member of the Catholic church, he believed in reincarnation. He had said he would take care of animals in his next life. William has said he intends to study to become a veterinarian and will work with large animals in a zoo.

McConnell's case is typical in that the child with the reincarnation memories has birthmarks and even injuries in the same places that the person in the previous life had received when he died accidentally or violently. One third of the cases found in India have birthmarks, 18 percent of which have been verified by medical sources. These figures are pretty high, partly because birthmark cases are the most interesting for researchers. In his book, Stevenson (1997) presents 225 cases of birthmarks associated with reincarnation memories.

Another typical feature of William's case was that he started talking about his

former life as soon as he learned to speak. Often children talk about their past lives between the ages of two and four; they usually stop at ages six or seven and start living normally. The third common feature in William's case was the violent way he had died in a previous life. Of the cases studied, 75 percent reported violent or sudden deaths. Many of these children experience a deep fear associated with a previous life death.

James Leininger

James Leininger was born in 1998 (Tucker, 2016). When he was one year and ten months old, his father took him to the Cavanaugh Flight Museum, where there was an exhibit on World War II. James took home toy airplanes and a video of the Blue Angels, a flight demonstration squadron of the US Navy. James watched the video numerous times.

The visit was the beginning of his love affair with flying. James later made another visit to the same museum. A couple of months after the first visit, James repeatedly said, "Airplane crash on fire!" He began having nightmares in which he would scream, "Little man can't get out." James said it was his memory of the incident where the Japanese shot down his plane so that it caught fire. He said he had flown a Corsair during the Second World War.

When he learned to draw, James drew hundreds of battle pictures with planes. He signed his drawings "James 3" and said that the number 3 did not refer to his age at the time but to the fact that he was the third James. The same signing

continued even after he turned four.

When James was less than two-and-a-half years old, he talked about flying off a ship. His parents asked him the ship's name, and James replied, "Natoma". His father used the Internet to find a ship called the USS *Natoma Bay*, a World War II aircraft carrier based in the Pacific Ocean.

The parents asked the pilot's name, to which James replied, "I" or "James". The parents asked him if he remembered anyone else who had been on board. James replied that Jack Larsen was there. A short time later, James' father bought his father a book called *The Battle for Iwo Jima, 1945*, as a gift. James pointed to an aerial view of the island with a dormant volcano and said, "My airplane got shot down there, Daddy."

James' father attended the *Natoma Bay* crew reunion. There he learned that Jack Larsen had survived the war and was still alive. James' father went to see Larsen. He also learned that only one American pilot had died in the battle of Iwo Jima: twenty-one-year-old James M. Huston Jr from Pennsylvania. So James Huston Jr was the second James (presumably the father of James Huston Jr was James Huston Sr), and the "little man" James Leininger was the third James, so the signing was correct.

James' father found information about James Huston's death. His plane had crashed at the exact spot James had pointed out in the picture. Jack Larsen was flying next to James Huston when Huston's plane was shot down, according to the

report. Since Huston was the only US pilot shot down in the Iwo Jima fight, James' parents concluded that it was the same person James had memories of.

James' parents could get in touch by telephone with James Huston's elderly sister, who confirmed the information about their family life given by James Leininger. Researcher Jim Tucker later contacted James Huston's sister again. She no longer remembered the details of her telephone conversation with James' parents five years earlier (she was ninety-one years old at the time). However, she remembered that James's mother had asked if James Huston's father was an alcoholic, as James Leininger had told. James Huston's sister remembered confirming that this was true.

Interestingly, James Leininger's father was an evangelical Christian, and reincarnation did not fit his worldview. His father tried to find errors in James' memories that would allow him to reject the idea of reincarnation. Indeed, one mistake was found: veterans of the *Natoma Bay* said that the ship had no Corsair aircraft. His father considered this the crucial error that would save his belief in a single life. But this hope was broken when James Huston's sister sent a photograph of James Huston in front of a Corsair (he had flown a Corsair during the Second World War, although he was flying another aircraft when he died). The sister also sent a drawing of James Huston by his mother. When little James saw the drawing, he asked, "Where is the other drawing?" James Huston's mother had also made a drawing of

the sister; the drawing had been in the attic for sixty years. Apart from his sister, only the deceased James Huston knew about the existence of the drawing.

Explanations and Criticisms

Ordinary explanations

Fraud would be one possible explanation (Tucker, 2005). Perhaps all the 2,500 cases investigated are fraud or, in some cases, the result of a large-scale conspiracy. But Jim Tucker states that there is no apparent reason for the families to come forward with fabricated stories, since they do not benefit financially from meeting the investigators. The reason could hardly be to spread a belief in reincarnation, since, especially in Western cases, the family often does not believe in reincarnation. One could think that the researchers have perpetrated a hoax that has been going on for fifty years. This is not plausible because nonscientists have also been in contact with some families when the cases have become public. Moreover, Stevenson, for example, was accompanied in several interviews by a respected *Washington Post* reporter who was initially skeptical about the reincarnation hypothesis (Shroder, 1999). He was particularly interested in seeing whether Stevenson was in any way leading the people he was interviewing. He found no signs of such a pattern.

In many cases, children have been able to provide information about the life of an earlier person, which could later be confirmed. Perhaps it is just children's imagination combined with coincidence? It could be that there are a lot of people with a certain name in a given area, which

increases the probability of guessing something correctly. Even this explanation does not seem plausible, since in the cases described above, the descriptions given by the children are very specific and not common knowledge.

However, we have Google and other search engines. One can find out a lot of things with a bit of googling. Perhaps children have got their information from the Internet or, before that, from reading magazines? Even this explanation is not convincing because, in the cases mentioned above, the information was not on the internet. Moreover, many children cannot even read when they start to tell about their memories of their past lives, sometimes when they are less than two years old.

The researchers' informants are parents and people from the "old" family: could it be that families are misremembering? Perhaps the narrative is generated by the child recalling a past life in another village, after which the parents excitedly look for another family and find one that seems suitable. As the families meet, the story is enriched with details that have emerged from their discussions and their desire to prove the case of reincarnation. This could be possible, but there are also many cases where investigators have found the other family before the families have had a chance to meet. In many cases, there have also been many witnesses to the children's communications other than immediate family members. Moreover, identifying the second family requires detailed information. There are also cases where parents have written down the child's accounts

before attempting to verify them.

Christopher French argues that children's memories are false memories created through interaction with their parents (Nathanson, 2021). Parents *may have* shown their children photographs and puzzled them about who they might have been in their past lives. He says that the false memories may have inadvertently been created from the parents' information. The reader can decide how well French's explanation fits the above-mentioned cases.

Supernatural explanations

Perhaps the child has unknowingly acquired knowledge through an extra-sensory route, such as telepathy. It has also been suggested that these children (but only these children!) have a super psychic ability at their disposal that enables them to find out anything. The explanation is suspiciously tailored to deal with reincarnation memories alone, because these children know no more about other things than other children. Moreover, this hypothetical ability is not present in any other group. Some children also have birthmarks or birth defects that appear to be related to the way the person died in the previous life. These are not explained by ESP alone.

The supporters of conservative Christianity have one supernatural explanation: perhaps spirits possess these children. Tucker does not find this plausible, because the children have not undergone a personality change or lost the memories of their present lives. It's the same child who lives in the present but remembers living in the past. Of course this explana-

tion will not persuade a certain type of Christian, who will remain convinced that the unbiblical concept of reincarnation is the work of the enemy of the soul in one way or another.

Philosophical criticism

The philosopher Steven Hales (2001) offers an interesting critique of the reincarnation hypothesis. Hales presents a fictional case of reincarnation. In it, a Japanese woman says she lived in the Bronze Age as a Celtic hunter and warrior. Based on her memories, she makes several predictions that archaeologists can verify. She says she wore a bronze necklace in her Celtic dress shaped like two fighting dragons. She remembers hiding the bracelet beside some particular megalith just before the battle in which she was killed. The archaeologists find a piece of jewelry that matches the place described. Their research also shows no soil was excavated from this site for two thousand years. Hales assumes that the hoax and all other possible naturalistic sources of knowledge have been eliminated as best they can. He also assumes that there are many similar cases. Hales notes that one can never completely rule out fraud as a logical possibility but assumes it is not the explanation in these admittedly imaginary cases.

Would it follow, then, that reincarnation is a plausible hypothesis to explain this and other similar cases? Of course not, in Hales' view: there is an infinite number of other logically possible explanations. He suggests one example: it could be a hoax by advanced aliens secretly observ-

ing the Earth. They would be able to produce realistic memories using advanced psychosurgery without the person or anyone else noticing anything. In principle, this hypothesis could be scientifically tested: the aliens could one day land on Earth and reveal themselves and the technology they use. Hales points out that the alien hypothesis would not in any way challenge the materialist theory of consciousness (since the aliens were physical rather than supernatural beings).

In Hales' view, it would be epistemologically more valid to consider the alien hypothesis as an explanation than reincarnation, since this would not require any changes to current scientific theories of the world and the human mind. He does not believe in the alien hypothesis but wants to argue that even an explanation as far-fetched as alien psychosurgery is superior to reincarnation. Hales also draws on the criticism by philosopher Anthony Flew that the evidence for reincarnation is not reproducible under laboratory conditions. Thus all evidence is anecdotal and can never reach a scientifically acceptable level.

For the reincarnation hypothesis to be plausible, Hales says, a scientifically valid theoretical explanation would have to be found to explain everything we know about the mind and brain. In addition, this theory must explain how the human personality could survive death and move on to a new life. Since no one has been able to put forward such a theory, it is more rational to believe in the current materialistic explanation and agree that there is something wrong with the evidence for re-

incarnation. Thus it seems that no evidence is sufficient to change the beliefs of the skeptical philosopher.

Theosophical Perspectives

The extensive data collected by Stevenson and others on the reincarnation of children is interesting from the point of view of spiritual teachings. Stevenson's studies suggest that rebirth occurs quickly, usually within a few years. Theosophical and anthroposophical sources uniformly describe a long process of reincarnation, in which a person is first freed from the limitations of their former personality in the various levels of the astral world and then lives most of their life after death in the heavenly world. This process can take up to a thousand years in earthly time. On the other hand, Theosophy suggests that humanity's helpers can be reborn more quickly directly from the astral plane. In this way, the personality of the previous life is reincarnated instead of the higher self, creating a new personality based on the old karma. This requires a renunciation of heavenly happiness; only highly evolved people can do this. In addition, reincarnation could occur quite rapidly from the astral plane in case of infant deaths.

But the cases studied by Stevenson do not appear to fit these theosophical specifications. Most of the cases involve violent or sudden death. In these cases, reincarnation memories could be explained by the fact that the person's etheric body, which preserves the previous life memories, would not have had time to "dis-integrate" into the general etheric world

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and could therefore remain in some respects unchanged.

Discussion

The research produced by Stevenson and others is impressive in its scope and very respectable in its attempt to approach reincarnation scientifically. As Stevenson points out, no “perfect” case has been found; even strong cases have weaknesses. This leaves room for legitimate doubt. However, as critiques by skeptical philosophers have shown, this is of little consequence, because even a perfect case (or however many perfect cases!) would not be enough to convince those for whom a materialistic philosophy of mind is an unshakable dogma.

Not all skeptics are so adamant. The

astronomer, author, and skeptic Carl Sagan (1997) argued that, although he does not believe in reincarnation (or what he describes as pseudoscience), the data collected by Stevenson provides at least some empirical support for the reincarnation hypothesis, suggesting that further research is warranted.

I appreciate Stevenson's courage in dedicating much of his life to studying children's reincarnation memories. The scientific community has not yet accepted his enterprise or his conclusions. But those who are willing to consider the reincarnation hypothesis can see him as the Galileo of the modern age. In such a case, his work was to help humanity, and I believe it will bear fruit in the future. ✧

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The Mature Mind

K. DAMODARAN

THERE is a world of difference between a mind which is mature and the one which is not. In H. P. Blavatsky's (HPB) *The Voice of the Silence*, it is stated:

Thy soul has to become as the ripe mango fruit: as soft and sweet as its bright golden pulp for other's woes, as hard as that fruit's stone for thine own throes and sorrows.

What HPB obviously meant is that with a matured (ripened) mind, one must be more concerned for others' sufferings, whereas one must face one's own sufferings with a stone-like will.

The maturity of the mind takes place either gradually, through the experiences of many incarnations, or, in exceptional cases, quickly at a certain stage by discovering where maturity lies — through sacrifice, selfless service, or self-knowing. From the spiritual point of view, maturity is certainly not fulfilment of the worldly kind. A fully matured individual is like a guiding lighthouse along the seashore, shining steadily, unaffected by adverse weather conditions. It is a matter of inner spiritual awakening, having set aside the mind into a sort of stillness. But the question is, how to tame the mind, so as

to become the lighthouse for the inner as well as the outer world?

The best way to tame the mind is not to have any concepts about how the mind should behave. With a positive attitude, watch whatsoever appears in the mind without making any choice or judgment. Go within, like an explorer entering a dark cave with a bright torchlight in hand. In this way, one will begin to have a feel of what the mind is. Drop all the feelings of conflict and struggle, and just create a loving atmosphere of wanting to know, wanting to observe, wanting to understand, wanting to experience.

Osho used to suggest the use of three keys that can help to critically understand the mind. He said: "To forbid is to attract, to refuse is to invite, to prevent is to tempt." In other words, he suggested to approach the mind indirectly, instead of directly, by way of making friendship with it and without any attempt to resist it. Similarly, J. Krishnamurti said: "A mind that is practising, struggling, and wanting to be silent, is never silent."

However, the enquirer can ask what HPB meant when she said: "The mind is the great slayer of the Real. . . . slay the

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slayer.” Her saying ought to have a profound mystical meaning. The intellectual mind is not capable of comprehending the real, where the “Real” here refers to the spiritual reality. Spiritual reality is much above or transcendent to the mind and the mind cannot, by analysis, memory, and so on, gain access to the truth in the higher realm. Therefore, when one is focused only at the mental or intellectual level, that very activity can block, screen out, or discount, leading to the slaying of the Real. It does not, of course, literally slay anything, rather it only means that the mind can act as a barrier to perceptions of the deeper truths of life.

In the *Bhagavadgītā* (2.55), Lord Krishna tells Arjuna: “When one discards all selfish desires and cravings of the senses that torment the mind, and becomes fulfilled in the realization of the Self, such a person is said to be transcendently situated, that is, a “*sthitaprajña*”. Such a man always remains in soul-conscious state, that is, in the “*ātma-bodha*”, free from body consciousness.

In the context of the mind’s maturity, let us, for now, accept that the words “ambition” as well as “desire” are more or less two sides of the same coin. When there are too many desires, life is complicated and burdensome. As desires are pruned and reduced, life becomes simpler. As if to make the journey of the disciple/seeker well-organised and disciplined, a priceless treatise entitled *Light on the Path* was gifted to humanity in the year 1885 through the mediumship of Mabel Collins. The contents of the book were

conveyed to her by Master Hilarion, containing directions, from those who had already trodden the path, to those who desire to tread it. It is in two parts and each part has a set of 21 golden rules, containing deep insights for the guidance of the disciple/seeker. Let me quote the following thought-provoking rules which are considered to be the essence in relation to the topic of our discourse.

1. Kill out ambition. . . . [But] work as those work who are ambitious.

2. Kill out desire of life. . . . [But] respect life as those do who desire it.

3. Kill out desire of comfort. . . . [But] be happy as those are who live for happiness.

The seemingly contradictory statements could be somewhat intriguing to a mundane seeker. Many seem to have had difficulty in understanding the import of the statement. Often the question comes up — what is wrong in having good desires? Desires of wisdom, liberation, or others with sublime ends? If all desires come to an end, then what is the purpose of life? Let us be clear that ambition is not very different from personal desire, and more than one ancient text offers similar advice to end all desires, and work for the welfare of humanity selflessly, without expecting anything in return. The *Bhagavadgītā* (3.25) explains: “As the ignorant act from attachment to action, so should the wise act without attachment, desiring nothing except the welfare of the world.” Those working with such a consciousness, attain the state beyond all sufferings.

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So, considering various aspects, it would appear, the solution lies in living and acting with a pure heart, requiring great vigilance over the quality of one's emotions, thoughts, and motives that lie in the subconscious. Theosophists need to be extra vigilant, because the vices of the average person pass through a subtle transformation and reappear with changed aspects in the heart of the disciple.

After all, the unconscious mind is said to be at least two million times as powerful as the conscious mind. In other words, the vices are as much powerful and as difficult to be effectively killed out. Remember, a pure and compassionate heart is the hallmark of a matured disciple. Theosophical study, when it is of any value, finds its fulfilment in cleansing the heart of the student for elevating him into an unselfish personality.

The mind wanders externally for pleasure, happiness, and so on, and to fulfill it, one needs to be wealthy, one needs to acquire name and fame, recognition, and so forth. Humanity is in a mad race for these things. Even after one achieves all these, will he be truly happy? No, he now starts worrying about others who happen to be a little ahead of him, and will be constantly undergoing mental stress.

This is a problem arising out of comparison with others in whatever field one is associated with. While a healthy, positive competition is welcome for one's all-round development, comparison with others for every little thing leads to restlessness and frustration. The language of competition is "Who is better, who is

number one?" Wanting to be better than others is a never-ending race. It blocks our energies of love, care, and cooperation. Most of us grew up conditioned to believe that life is a competition. Let us bring about a change in this attitude and make cooperation our purpose of life. We are not against each other; we are with each other. Let us share what we have, be it material wealth or divine wisdom, and take others along as we move forward.

Now, let us examine it spiritually. In the *Rigveda*, it is stated: *ekam sat, viprā bahudhā vadanti*, meaning that "the truth is one, the wise reveal it in many ways". This idea helps the seeker to continue his quest with a kind of freshness, a kind of renewal. It is, therefore, nice to listen to the men of wisdom, wherein each approaches truth in a unique way. Like the story of the blind men and the elephant, each trying to experience and figure out how the elephant is like, and trying to explain what each one has perceived, even if we combine all the perceptions, we do not get to materialize an elephant in the true sense. In the same way, comparison takes us nowhere, as each one is unique and special in his own traits.

Therefore, when truth is presented in different words by different people, the comparative interpretation so emerges as if they are opposed to each other leading to undesirable arguments. Even the religious or scriptural statements, when comparatively interpreted from different angles, can at times develop into sectarian one-upmanship. Contrary to these, when a person is awakened to the ultimate truth,

he or she has nothing to describe, except experiencing every moment as it is, blissfully, without any analysis. Notwithstanding all these, the different perceptions help us to deepen our enquiry, as a *jijñāsu* (seeker), till we realize the ultimate truth.

Happiness, a very natural state of being for any soul, has become very difficult to experience in today's world, because of its dependence on material accomplishments. So, we need to stop all comparisons, stop running the race, and simply, experience and enjoy the present moment. The following quote by the ancient Sufi mystic and poet, Master Rumi, has a beautiful correlation with desire, comparison, and so on:

When I run after what I think I want, my mind is a furnace of stress and anxiety. When I sit in my own place of patience, what I need flows to me, and without pain. From this I understand that what I want also wants me, is looking for me, and is attracted towards me. There is a great secret here for anyone who can grasp it.

The feelings of unproductive ambitions, comparisons, and so forth, are intrinsically products of the mind. I have used the word “unproductive” because, its accompaniments are greed, jealousy, and ego. As regards productive ambitions, these fall under compassion, love, and service. The moment our avowed objective, that is, the maturity of mind, is attained, all negative aspects automatically fade away.

Thoughts and emotions constantly

well up in the mind, many or most of them being disorderly reactions to people and circumstances. These reactions are symptoms of the subconscious conditionings. The insecurity of the self is displayed in numerous ways — easily inflamed emotions, sensitivity to others' opinions, vain-glorious thoughts, and so on. People who appear stable or inflexible may in fact be hardening themselves, because they are uncertain and feel the need to protect themselves.

Wanting to become hard, strong, or clever is a symptom of hidden weakness. Among the seven virtues described as the keys to the seven portals in *The Voice of The Silence* is *kshānti*, poetically described as “patience sweet, that nought can ruffle”. In the absence of egoism, there is nothing to be offended or disturbed. The matured mind is like a light which burns steadily, unaffected by outer turbulence.

One who grows in maturity is not quick to offer opinions and come to conclusions. His mind is perceptive and intelligent, but the intelligence itself makes him pause and wait. He does not take it for granted that his opinions are of value and therefore there is no obstinacy, assertiveness, or pride in him. The first sign of maturity is to recognize one's own limitations, and be humble and simple. Never compare your child to siblings or friends. Appreciate the qualities of each individual and help them to create their own value systems. The appreciation, motivation, and creation of a new culture have to be done in individual capacity without references to anyone else. These help in

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making the child emotionally strong and developing high self-esteem. Each person's past is different and so even if everything in the present seems identical, there is no comparison whatsoever.

In *At the Feet of the Master*, it is stated:

Never wish to shine, or to appear clever; have no desire to speak. It is well to speak little; better still to say nothing, unless you are quite sure that what you wish to say is true, kind, and helpful. Before speaking think carefully whether what you are going to say has those three qualities; if it has not, do not say it. . . .

Much common talk is unnecessary and foolish; when it is gossip, it is wicked. So be accustomed to listen rather than to talk; do not offer opinions unless directly asked for them. . . .

Another common desire which you must sternly repress is the wish to meddle in other men's business. What another man does or says or believes is no affair of yours, and you must learn to let him absolutely alone. He has full right to free thought and speech and action, so long as

he does not interfere with anyone else. You yourself claim the freedom to do what you think proper; you must allow the same freedom to him, and when he exercises it you have no right to talk about him.

If you think he is doing wrong, and you can contrive an opportunity of privately and very politely telling him why you think so, it is possible that you may convince him; but there are many cases in which even that would appear to be an improper interference. On no account must you go and gossip to some third person about the matter, for that is an extremely wicked action.

If you see a case of cruelty to a child or an animal, it is your duty to interfere. If you see anyone breaking the law of the country, you should inform the authorities. If you are placed in charge of another person in order to teach him, it may become your duty to gently tell him of his faults. Except in such cases, mind your own business, and learn the virtue of silence.

The above simple instructions, if one is able to practice them, will immensely lead to the maturity of the mind. ✧

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Our Conscience

S. RAMKUMAR

THERE are many differences between a human being and an animal. There are some commonalities also. The commonalities are that both have the following equipment: the eyes, ears, skin, nose, and tongue. It is through these that seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting are possible. The process of evolution took off from the mineral age and progressed to the plant, animal, and human ages.

Humans are different from animals in that they have the equipment called “intellect” to discriminate/discern. They know the difference between right and wrong, they are supposed to have morals, ethics, and values. Morals and values are generally personal and ethics is generally professional/social.

One of the morals/values a human being is presumed to have is a clear “conscience”. Conscience is that part of the mind that discerns between right and wrong. It is more than just “gut instinct”; our conscience is a moral muscle. A story to exemplify:

There lived a man who was a thief. That was his profession. He was good at it. He lived with his wife and son in a house. Just like many parents who want

their children to join the same profession as theirs when they grow up, this thief also wanted his son to follow this tradition, but not just as a thief: as a “master thief”. He wanted to leave a rich legacy behind!

The thief took his son as an apprentice and stole from many places and escaped without getting noticed. He was so good! The time came when he thought that his son had had enough exposure and experience, and wanted him to graduate and prove his worth — just like him.

The thief told his son: “You now have all the expertise to break open a house, steal, and get away with the booty without getting noticed and caught; I want you to prove yourself that you can handle the job independently. This is to prove your mettle. Tonight, you will go to this address, break open the lock silently, get inside, steal the valuables, and get back as silently as you had got in. Make no mistake, you can decamp with the valuables and return in about two hours. Leave by 11 pm. I will be expecting you by 1 am.”

As the son was going out to steal for the first time independently, he was anxious and worried. Taking a deep breath, he bid goodbye to his parents and walked

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towards the prescribed address. His father had taught him well and the son meticulously opened the lock, went to the right place where normally people keep their valuables, and embarked on his return journey with the booty.

It was 1 am and the father was waiting outside the house for his son to arrive. The time changed to 2 am, then 3, then 4, then 5. The father got very restless. He thought maybe his son had gotten caught and been handed over to the police or been thrashed by the owner. He was now sweating profusely and pacing up and down the road in front of his house. Around 6 am the son appeared and the father saw at once his son's hand was empty. He was aghast. He saw his son's face; it looked crestfallen.

The father was truly worried and walked towards his son and asked him, "What happened? Is everything alright?" The son's face looked forlorn and he cried: "Sorry dad, I failed you!"

"What happened? Were you caught or were you not able to break in?"

"No dad," replied his son. "I broke in easily, quickly located the valuables, put them in the bag, closed the door behind me and silently started walking back." Then he sobbed: "I failed you, dad, I failed you!"

"Tell me what happened," the adoring father told his son.

The son said, "Soon after I left the house with the booty, I had a strange feeling that someone was watching me."

"So, who was watching you?"

"Everyone was watching me, the moon, the trees, and beyond all this my conscience was watching me. Only the house

owner and his family did not see me. I have failed, dad; I have failed you."

The dad asked his son what he did with the valuables. The son said: "As easy as it was to break in and get the valuables, undoing it was not difficult; I replaced the valuables in the same place, closed the door behind, and on the way home sat under a tree and contemplated about my future."

"Sorry dad, I will not enter this profession. I am not comfortable with what I did. I would rather do some other work which is not against my morals and values. I request you to do the same."

We may think no one is watching our actions. In fact, everything is being watched by the "Silent Witness" which is our soul or consciousness and our soul is connected to everything in the universe. Whatever we do we are being watched. Let our actions be noble; existence will take care of the rest. You become what you think all day long.

This is how Karma works: the law of causation or cause and effect. As you sow, so shall you reap. *Conscience is the voice of God, in the soul.*

"Watch your thoughts; they become words.

Watch your words; they become actions.

Watch your actions; they become habits.

Watch your habits; they become your character.

Watch your character; it becomes your destiny."

— Lao Tzu

"Never do anything against conscience even if the state demands it."

— Albert Einstein



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SUBSCRIPTIONS: EURO (€) AND RUPEE (₹) RATES

(Effective from 1 October 2024)

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Some issues of *The Theosophist* are now available online and can be read and/or downloaded from:
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Edited by Mr Tim Boyd, 'Olcott Bungalow', The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai (TS),
 Published by Mr S. Harihara Raghavan, 'Arundale House', TS, and Printed by Mr V. Gopalan, 'Chit Sabha', TS, at the
 Vasanta Press, TS, Besant Garden, Besant Avenue, Adyar, Chennai (Madras) 600 020, India, on behalf of the President, The Theosophical Society.