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INSIDE Theosophy: A Spiritual Legacy for Humanity
New President's Inaugural Address
The Muffin Syndrome
Pathways of the Mind
Modern Western Science in *The Secret Doctrine*

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The Theosophical Society welcomes students or seekers from all walks of life, belonging to any religion or to none and who are in sympathy with its Objects. It was formed to assist in showing to people that Theosophy exists, and 'to ascend towards it by studying and assimilating its eternal verities'. Wisdom is known by a mind that is completely open. Therefore freedom of thought and open enquiry are given special emphasis in the Society. **Theosophy** essentially refers to 'Divine Wisdom', Sacred Knowledge, which is a transcendent state of consciousness. In a secondary sense, Theosophy is an ancient yet distinct stream of enquiry, exploring and interpreting the truths of existence in terms suited to particular ages, e.g. in the teachings of ancient India, ancient China, Platonism, Neoplatonism, and, since 1875, through the contribution of the TS. At the core of Theosophy is the principle of indivisible Unity underlying the diversity of forms.

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Mission Statement of the Theosophical Society

To serve humanity by cultivating an ever-deepening understanding and realisation of the Ageless Wisdom, spiritual self-transformation, and the Unity of all Life.

From the National President

Stephen McDonald



Welcome to this, the first edition of *Theosophy in Australia*, since I assumed office as National President on 25 January 2021. My transition to this position has been made much easier by the substantial effort of our former National President, Linda Oliveira, to prepare the numerous documents and materials necessary to carry out the many tasks of the job. Linda held this office for nine years and before that for a period of seven years. In between those periods, she was appointed as International Vice-President of the Theosophical Society. Her wealth of experience and generosity in sharing her knowledge and expert advice with me has been invaluable. My thanks also go to Pedro Oliveira who has retired as our long-serving Education Coordinator. His work for the Section has been of great benefit to all members.

Covid restrictions have had a great impact on the meetings and activities of the Australian Section during 2020. I am pleased to report that most of the Lodges/Branches and Groups have resumed the “new” normal range of

activities and services to members. In fact, many places have indicated that their attendances have been up on the numbers prior to the disruptions. It appears that many people are eager to go out and participate in shared activities and social interactions once again. This period may well be an opportunity to make an effort to organize outreach functions and to promote the Theosophical Society with a renewed enthusiasm.

Travel is still precarious in Australia. At the National Headquarters we are keen to arrange lecture tours and events at our properties in Springbrook and Canyonleigh. Although it is unlikely that we will be able to organize any international speakers this year, it may be possible to arrange for some national lecture tours later in the year. I also hope it will be possible to have some events at Springbrook and Canyonleigh (keep an eye out for publicity in the coming months). Our national convention is planned for Perth in January 2022. A decision about whether we can proceed with that will most likely be made mid-

year. For my part, I hope to be able to travel around the Section to visit as many of the Lodges/Branches and Groups as possible during this year.

In this edition of Theosophy in Australia

A few years ago, our International President, Tim Boyd wrote an article that was published in *The Theosophist*, June 2017, which is reprinted here. Tim uses the word “legacy” to describe a tradition or lineage that communicates “knowledge and a depth of experience to future generations”. My inaugural talk also discussed a legacy that we share, although not in such a profound way as Tim has done in his article. He points out that the “catalyst” is ultimately internal to us, not something that relies upon other people or books or any particular tradition. Tim brings light to our three objects with clarity and a depth of understanding. His article complements and provides a backdrop for the other contributions in this edition, including my inaugural talk.

In their articles, Brian Parry and Nila Chambers look at the mind in different ways. In *Pathways of the Mind: a roadmap for the seeker*, Nila Chambers considers the many ways of looking at the mind according to the path being followed. For her, the various interpretations don’t matter.

Whichever view of the mind and the path adopted, it must be practical and “bear fruit”.

In a commentary on *The Voice of the Silence*, Brian Parry describes a road home for all of us that is “steep, thorny and beset with perils”. This road he describes as the “very essence of Theosophy”. He discusses the mind “as the barrier across the road” – “... the great slayer of the Real”. The title of this article is mysterious. Only by reading it will you understand the analogy that is employed to realise the nature of our habits.

Finally, Dara Tatra’s article (which was recently published in the Australian Theosophy-Science Group Newsletter) skillfully argues that we should keep in perspective our appreciation of the science in *The Secret Doctrine*, and take care in drawing conclusions about the relevance or accuracy it has to modern scientific understandings.

Plans for Theosophy in Australia

In coming editions of *Theosophy in Australia* this year, I plan to have themes. Our next issue, coming out in June, will be the centenary edition of this magazine. Theosophy in Australia was first published in May 1921. June is our closest edition to this date and the theme will be the history of the Theosophical Society in Australia.

I would prefer original materials or photos to be included about the history of the Society and the theosophical movement in Australia. This could include biographies of notable theosophists, the influence it has had on art, science and politics in this country and photos you may wish to share with our readers. I am especially interested to hear from any of the Lodges/Branches and Groups that may wish to contribute items related to their centre to this special issue. If you have any materials or would like to write an historical article, please send

it to me to be considered for inclusion. The September edition will feature articles related to science and theosophy. Again, if you have written, or are prepared to write a short article on this topic, I would be glad to consider it. Please be aware that the usual maximum length for any submission is 2,300 words and all articles go to our editorial committee for approval prior to being included. In addition to articles, other items, such as book reviews, will also be included. Preference will be given to materials produced in Australia.

Biodiversity Conservation Trust – Canyonleigh

In November 2019 the National Society entered what would eventually be a successful bid in the Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT) Southern Highlands Koala Habitat Conservation Tender. In the following twelve-months, a great deal of time and thought went into making the bid, deciding whether or not it would be in the best interests of the Theosophical Society to do so, and finally, determining the bid amount, that is, the annual sum to be paid by the BCT to the TS in Australia: a significant new income stream. Credit must go to the then Directors of the Trust for taking the time to carefully consider the extensive material placed before them by the National Secretary.

On 17 December 2020 the National Secretary was interviewed on radio ABC Illawarra. During the interview the NS stated that she and her fellow Directors were delighted to have made a successful bid, especially considering that theirs was only one of five, out of a pool of over 42 expressions of interest. She also stated that in entering into the conservation agreement, the Theosophical Society will be making a substantial contribution to the long-term conservation of koalas, and biodiversity more broadly, by protecting the high conservation values of the property in perpetuity. We are soon to receive the first annual payment, the amount of which was indicated in the annual financial statements.

From the
International President
*Theosophy: A Spiritual Legacy
for Humanity*

Tim Boyd



The idea of Theosophy as a spiritual legacy for humanity implies a tradition that has been prepared for us by others who have come before. That is the nature of tradition; it involves some kind of lineage by which knowledge and also a depth of experience are communicated to future generations. Hopefully they are communicated in ways that can be replicated. This is the basis of *any* tradition. In the case of Theosophy, it is no different.

We are all aware that there have been, and there *are*, guides that can show us the way. This is the nature of any type of knowledge or wisdom tradition. We need to avail ourselves of those people, sources, and books. However, that is not enough, sometimes we need to be reminded that, as valuable as a guide or a tradition may be, in the absence of that longing that is within us, nothing ignites; it takes a spark to make a fire. Any wood will burn, but unless something sparks that fuel, we just have the potential for fire. Similarly, when we look to the past we can point to great people

in this movement and in the spiritual movements of the world. As important as external factors are, we must always be aware that the catalyst is internal to us.

Theosophy has certain broad tenets and ideas as its foundation. Probably the most important is the “unity of all life”. Unity, oneness, brotherhood, sisterhood, or any idea that expresses the interconnection of all things is the important principle expressed through the theosophical tradition. For about forty years I have been trying to explore more deeply what might be meant by Unity, Oneness. It is so broad that we will never encompass it. But it also seems to keep growing in terms of its meaning. It is the basic focus for this spiritual movement, and for any genuinely spiritual approach to life.

Theosophy speaks about three primary avenues to a deeper understanding of this “Unity”: Religion, Philosophy, and Science. We are going to be dealing with Religion in its pure sense, which unfortunately is mostly missing from what we see in the nightly news of any

country. “Religion” comes from the Latin and means to tie back or bind back. The idea that there is a connection that in some way has been loosened, that has severed a connection with the divine source, is religion. To create that tie or bond that reconnects us with spirit is the role of religion in any form. The religious approach is one of the ways that Theosophy focuses our capacity to comprehend this over-arching unity.

When we discuss spirituality, generally it is our normal habit to think in terms of religion. In an ideal sense, that is accurate. This is because true religion is about fostering the experience of the Divine. So spirituality is about that experience, and relates to those activities and states of consciousness that move us toward a deepening experience of Unity. In theory, religion has a similar aim. But as we all know, in practice, the human capacity to distort even the most sublime things is most prominent in the realm of religion.

Religion, as practised in the world today, is one of the most divisive forces, more so than nationalism or the various forms of economic arrangements. It is the nature of religions that they require believers. We cannot participate in a religion unless we believe. It does not require, and actually does not actively seek out, people who know, but who have accepted certain forms of belief. By virtue of the fact that there are different beliefs, it has

a divisive quality, not by intention, but just because of our limitations. We find a way to express our limitations through anything that we touch.

“Philosophy” comes from the Greek *philosophia*, or love of wisdom. In general, we are referring to an intellectual quality. The attempt to question and explore the nature of the many ways that this unity expresses through the mind and through the activities of the intellect have been the focus of philosophy. One of the founders of the Theosophical Society (TS) gave another twist to this meaning. H. P. Blavatsky said that in its purest expression, philosophy means the “wisdom of love”. It is not just a play on words, it is much more than that.

If we really have an understanding of what wisdom is, it is not even of the same nature as knowledge. Our general view of knowledge is that if we obtain enough of it, eventually we become wise, as if there was a certain number of stacks of books, and when we have read all of them, and if we are sufficiently old, we are wise. There is an expression: “With age, comes wisdom.” The great wit, Oscar Wilde, turned that expression around by saying: “With age comes wisdom, but sometimes age comes alone.”

The “wisdom of love” means that love, by its very nature, is unifying. If we think about it in terms of our relationships, our love for our children, or pet, or partner,

the effect of it is always that somehow the boundaries of an individual, separated self expand so that the unit that is “me” now includes another. So love has an expansive quality and, carried to its extremes, recognizes no separations. When we consider the great teachers who have appeared in the world, where all beings are encompassed by their love, then we verge into the area that could be called “wisdom”, a true comprehension or perception of reality. So the wisdom of love is generally an intellectual effort to understand the universe.

“Science” is, by its nature, the study of phenomena and the material world. In a sense it is trying to grasp the nature of what exists beneath the material cloak visible through the various means currently available to scientific research. We are able to describe something of the invisible worlds in terms of the laws of physics and the behaviors of the biological world. It is that kind of approach to Truth. So these are the three main avenues that Theosophy looks to as an approach to the understanding and experience of Truth.

The above are three avenues for a deeper understanding of Unity, along which we can pursue what we call “spirit”. But what I would like to discuss now is the process of spiritual unfoldment. Whether we are devotional or religious, or whether we tend to be more philosophical

or scientific, the way in which we come to understand Truth depends on temperament.

There are people who explore the nature of Reality from many different angles. No one of them is correct, and all of them can lead to the same truth. As Krishna said in the *Bhagavadgītā*: “By whatever way human beings approach me, in the same way do I meet them.” By *whatever* road we make a sincere approach to an understanding and experience of Truth, on that same road we will be met and that understanding will be magnified.

When we talk about spirituality and the unfoldment of our spiritual lives, more than mere information is required. Application is needed. The process of unfoldment of the deeper aspects of our spiritual nature seems to take place in three distinct stages. First there is an experience of *awakening*. Next is a process and period of *purification*. These two then lead to an event which can be described as *realization*.

We are familiar with the first one, awakening; we do it every morning. But what happens when we say that we have awakened? Our consciousness withdraws from the *unconscious* state of deep sleep, moves through and then withdraws from the dream state, and then we open our eyes and awaken to this world that surrounds us. This is what

we describe as awakening. Coming to consciousness in the world is something that we do repeatedly.

In terms of our spiritual life, the awakening process is the same, but it is a different kind of consciousness that we withdraw from. The name “Buddha” means “the awakened one”. When he had his experience of enlightenment, there were others with whom he had been doing religious practices in the forest. He had separated from them because he realized that their way of practising was not going to take him where he needed to go. When he had his experience, he came back to the same group of people, and when they saw him coming, they could not see who he was. Because there was a brilliant light around him that was blinding them, they could not recognize him. They then asked him whether he was a god. When the Buddha said he was not, they asked him if he was a man, and he answered: “No, I am awake, I am Buddha.”

So, awake from what? The way that our particular sleeping and dreaming would be described in Buddhist terminology would be that we are affected by the sleep of ignorance. The way we usually interpret ignorance is as a lack of knowledge. But from the spiritual perspective, it does not mean “not knowing”; it is “wrongly knowing”. The classic example that is normally

used in the Indian scriptures is that when one mistakes a rope for a snake, one’s adrenalin rises, becomes fearful, and either starts looking for a stick to fight with the snake, or a direction to run. But when one walks a bit closer one sees that, in fact, the snake is just a coiled rope. Then the fear subsides, the adrenalin drains, one drops the stick, and just walks on, seeing correctly.

This describes the state of being ignorant, when everything we look at is seen wrongly, just as if we were looking at a snake instead of a rope, and we behave accordingly. This is a bit difficult for us to accept, because we look around and see things, interpret them, and “know” we are seeing rightly, but are we? Each of us is a spiritual being. There is a soul that has associated itself with a material form. Just like sparks fly up from a flame, all of the sparks are common to the one flame. Like rays from the one sun, every one of the spiritual sparks is common to the one source we all share. Yet we are seated on our chairs, with our different backgrounds and experiences, feeling completely separate from one another. If I move my hand, you do not move yours; it is confirmed by everything that we do, that we are separate and apart, so we behave accordingly.

When we look at the condition of the world, we see large portions of it with people who barely have food to eat, and

very small groups within that world who have the possibility and wealth to do just about anything they wish to do. There are groups of souls in bodies going over to other countries, or just across the border, fighting and killing other groups of souls in other bodies. Seen from the perspective of our higher nature, we understand why it is said that we are fundamentally ignorant and asleep.



Awakening Photo by Mohamed Nohassi on Unsplash

The experience of awakening is really that of coming into a state when we become aware that there *is* a soul within us. This awakening is symbolized in the spiritual literature of the world. In the Bible there is a story where Jesus and his disciples get into a boat and Jesus falls asleep. As they are going across the water a huge storm comes up. The disciples are afraid that they are going to drown and die, so they wake up the Master. As a result of the crisis, the highest spirit, or Christ consciousness, asleep within the boat (the body), awakens and commands the wind and the waves (the thoughts and emotions) to be still. We remain unaware

of this highest presence that slumbers within us because we do not provide an opportunity for it to awaken. But there are memorable moments in our lives when the sleeping soul finds an avenue of expression. Those moments are unforgettable because it is when we feel most whole, complete, and connected.

The awakening experience happens in a variety of ways. For some it happens because they meet someone special. Each of us is like a bubble in the ocean. There is a very thin membrane that separates us from the greater body of water. We float around engrossed in our own individuality, feeling separate from one another. But from time to time the membrane, at least temporarily, dissolves and we experience something of our greater potential. Sometimes these awakening experiences are the result of something that we could describe as “enough is enough”. In the American Civil Rights Movement there was a very active woman named Fannie Lou Hamer. She had been suffering through all of the racial discrimination and prejudices that were typical in the south of the United States. But at a certain point, she became exceedingly active in the Civil Rights Movement. When somebody asked her why she had changed and become a firebrand for civil rights, she said: “You know, there just came a point where I got sick and tired of being sick and tired!”

That is the experience for us. Enough repetition of non-productive circumstances, and eventually that little bubble wears down and this moment occurs. Awakening is a moment, an event, but it leads to a process of purification. Once we are awake, we attempt to intelligently engage with the environment in which we find ourselves — something we could not do when we were sleeping. In that purification process we recognize that there are certain things that we need to let go.

But what is purity? Very often people think of purity in terms of behaviors. We tend to describe pure persons by their actions, the foods they eat, their dress, where they shop, and so on. We apply many categories to their behaviors in our judgement, but behaviors may or may not indicate purity. They are deceptive. It is worth noting that Adolph Hitler was a devout vegetarian, non-smoker, and did not drink alcohol. He had a reputation of dining with his generals and soldiers, and if they were eating meat, he would talk to them about the terrible nature of animal cruelty that brought this food to their plate. Perhaps behaviors do not necessarily indicate a deeper purity.

So what is purity? We are all aware of the qualities of gold. Pure gold is 24 karats. Other metals are mixed in with 14-karat gold to make it hard, less expensive, and still keep the golden glow. We find

that when it is *only* gold, it has certain potentials. The third Object of the Theosophical Society (TS) speaks of “the



White Flower Photo by Quino AI on Unsplash

powers latent” in humankind. Likewise, in its purity, certain latent powers in gold are capable of expression, or revealed, as the alloys and other additives are removed: it can be thinned by beating it from the size of a coin to that of a ten-by-ten-foot room, it conducts electricity marvelously, it can be stretched, it does not tarnish, and so on. All these qualities are possible only in gold’s purified state. As a result, it is spoken of as a “precious metal”. One could say this also represents a higher consciousness even in the mineral kingdom, in the sense that gold is more responsive to a wider range of activities. Purity is the state of being unalloyed — a singleness of nature.

For us as spiritual practitioners, then what we are looking at is an arrival at a stage that is unalloyed. This is a bit difficult for us to think about because of the fact that,

being human, we are multidimensional. Each of us functions on many different levels. The most obvious is the physical body and its sensations, but we also have emotional and mental natures, and all of these are different. So how do we purify them? The answer is: all of these activities are linked together.

There are people who have determined to change their diet to detoxify their physical bodies. So they go on diets that actually start to change the components of their physical body. Perhaps their health improves and they become more radiant, but there are also *other* things that happen. Very often people have changed their diets in appropriate ways and find that they become less fearful, less anxious; they are able to better focus their attention. So the mind and the emotions are affected by an intentional choice of what foods we eat. This is interrelationship. All things affect each other. It works from the bottom up, and also from the top down. “You are what you eat”, whether we are eating cornflakes, or thinking angry thoughts, all of them build into the nature that we create for ourselves. Purification does have consequences.

In one of the Buddha’s discourses he gave a profound, but simple advice. He said three things: (1) do no harm; (2) do good; and (3) purify your mind. Directly across the river from our Theosophical Society’s Adyar headquarters, along the

northern bank of the Adyar River, there is a fifty-seven-acre place called Adyar Eco Park. This area used to have a little creek that flowed into it from the Adyar River. As the city grew to its current seven million people, the creek became polluted with sewage and other human wastes. The land became a dumping ground for the local community and was completely devoid of vegetation. Some concerned people came up with the idea that “this has to change, we want some pure water in this area”.

These people began by stopping the inflow of sewage and the dumping of garbage (do no harm). Next they started to remove the trash (do good). The process took two full years of truckload after truckload to clean the fifty-seven acres. Then they planted native species of trees and flowers, and built earthen dams blocking the direct inflow of the polluted Adyar River water. The polluted water that was coming into the protected ecosystem had to soak through the dams and would come out clean on the other side (purify); all the impurities were captured in the soil and sand. They also built other systems of purification and catch tanks to collect the rain water.

From being a toxic dumping ground, today this place is thriving. The native species of vegetation have taken over, birds not seen for years are now nesting there, one can hardly hear oneself think

at night because of all the frogs that come out and have found a home there, and they are still surrounded by seven million people! From the simple activity focused on purification of a small patch of land in Chennai, the broader community has been affected. “Do no harm, do good, purify” — these steps have consequences. Purification leads to certain results.

In terms of our own inner life, what are those states of consciousness that lead toward purity? What are the activities we engage in to purify the mind? It does not take a PhD in Indology or some spiritual practice to know that when our mind is reflective of kindness toward others, there is a certain enlargement of spirit within. When it is expressive of gratitude and thankfulness for whatever it is we have found that sustains life, friendships, connections, we find that our mind has an influence.

In the field of neuroplasticity of the brain, a research study was done on the effect of metta meditation. It is a meditation focused on unconditional love for all beings: “May all beings be secure, happy, free from suffering.” It was observed that for people who engage in that practice with some regularity, measurable changes in the structure of their brain take place in a short time. Now this meditation practice is utilized in cancer therapy, because the

body tends to mobilize toward health out of this mental practice. These steps have consequences. Ultimately, all of this is pointed toward some form of realization, which is to say, we have awakened, we have done the work to purify; then what? From our own experience we have an intimation of what lies ahead a dim awareness of what realization might involve. If we think about those moments in our lives when we have felt happiness, peace, joy, there is a quality that they all seem to share. For whatever reason those were moments when we had lost our constant preoccupation with ourselves; when the membrane of our little isolated bubble of self had dissolved. The joy and freedom of experiencing some degree of expansion and freedom from the weight of our habitual, self-imposed limitations gives us a sense of what realization might mean. In the lovely words of *The Light of Asia*, Sir Edwin Arnold describes the Buddha’s experience of enlightenment as that moment when “the Dewdrop slips into the shining Sea”. It is a beautiful expression for the potential that awaits each of us as we make the commitment to reconnect and remember the purified state of our minds and hearts.

It is not by studying Occultism for selfish ends ... that one can ever reach the true goal of helping suffering mankind.

H. P. Blavatsky
The Key to Theosophy

New National President's Inaugural Address to Members 25 January 2021

Stephen McDonald



“Nurturing the Theosophical Society in Australia - our legacy to the future”

Last night I had a dream or possibly it was a real event. I woke in the still of the night and at the foot of my bed stood Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, the founders of the Theosophical Society (TS). She had an enigmatic look on her face and he (with his long, luxurious beard) had eyes of great compassion. HPB looked at me with intensity and said, “As you are assuming the National Presidency for Australia, do you have any questions for us?”.

I paused for a moment and tentatively asked, “What will be the future of the TS in Australia and the World in the coming years?”

Col. Olcott spoke to me through that commodious beard and said, “You are

coming up to the 150th anniversary of the TS. The future is here and now, not in years away. You are creating it every day. You have a legacy to work with, all you need is a vision to provide direction and the right actions to get you there.”

I pondered about what he meant by a “legacy”, and a “vision” to steer us in the right direction? I realise that the work of the Theosophical Society is serious, and it rests upon us all to take up the opportunity that is our legacy.

As a Section of the TS, Australia has been endowed with a structure and resources that provide us with immense potential — properties, such as Springbrook in Queensland, Canyonleigh in NSW, and Mt Helena in Western Australia. We have a modest, but useful income from investments and we have a strong tradition of service from our membership.

The ingredients are here and now. We just need to bring into manifestation our objectives. To do this we must be clear about our purpose and direction. We must care for our legacy — for the money and resources that are our responsibility, to use them to further those purposes because our resources are not for our personal benefit but are a benefit to the world.

But what are our purposes and direction, I thought? I put this question to Madame Blavatsky. Before she answered me, she lit up one of those Russian Sobranie cigarettes that she liked smoking. Olcott grimaced and admonished her for the unhealthy habit. “You know how bad that is for your health”, he said. She snapped back, “Well, it hasn’t killed me yet!”.

She looked again intently into my eyes and explained that “the purpose and directions you take now should depend upon your vision, which should be one that is derived from and shared by your fellows.”

I thought about her statement. What is my vision for the TS in 5 or 10 years? Any vision must first be founded upon our legacy. A clear purpose is stated in our First Object: To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour. Obviously,

it means being free from all prejudice, but its meaning is far greater than our mundane understanding.

At a deeper level, it involves freedom from the self, whereby our separation from the world (or universe) does not exist. That is one of the principles that Theosophy shows us — that duality is an illusion.

My personal vision includes a sense of nurturing, which means caring for and protecting our Society and supporting and encouraging our fellows and respecting their individual quests. To do these things, two elements must be nurtured: freedom of thought and a fostering of individual search.

HPB nodded in agreement then said, “Today you are part of a new Theosophical Movement, though it is not new at all. It is based upon the precepts of an ageless wisdom. What needs to be new is your presentation. As you offer this ageless wisdom to the world it must be done without any effort to impose or indoctrinate, to proselytise or direct. The door is open to enter but that must be done by each person — you cannot lead anyone through that portal.”

I realised that we have been entrusted with an onerous responsibility. Our inner founders provided a vehicle by which humanity can find its way back

to its source. As a principal objective, however, Brotherhood is not just about getting along together in some Utopian harmony. It is about working together with a shared purpose. Creating relationships which can nurture our Society. The other day I heard a commentator suggesting that Joe Biden's greatest strength is his ability to create relationships. Fostering relationships between our members and between our Lodges and Groups will be an important objective for my presidency. The question remains of how this vision is to be achieved?

Colonel Olcott looked over his small spectacles and opined, "Whatever you decide to do, don't agonise about it. A good place to start your work is with yourself." That made me recall an elderly friend who I first met at Adyar in 1985. She lived in Melbourne and whenever I went there for work, I usually called by to see her. She would sit me down and look pensively at me and ask, "What have you been doing to improve yourself since we last met"? It seemed a very theosophical question to ask and always made me search for the answer.

Action is the critical part of implementing a vision for the future. Acting now is up to each of us, independently and interdependently. If, however, we see a bright future as some distant point in the future we are

less likely to get there. Plans need to be made and implemented within a clear timeframe, to be practical. Don't think that Stephen has become President and will create a better Society for us to enjoy. We are all creators and if we think that someone else will do the work for us, we are doomed to failure.

Why did you join the Theosophical Society? Was it to read books, to attend study groups or workshops or conventions, or for the camaraderie of like-minded people? All of these things are worthy pursuits, but they tend to be focussed on self-centred activities. All of us need to explore and focus on the common purpose and goals that underpin the legacy that we share. Our future is not distant because we are creating it now.

From a certain perspective our thoughts create the world around us. If we focus on our Society's diminishing effect in the world, then so it will be. Instead, deciding on our actions depends upon fully understanding the problems that we face.

I glanced up to see HPB's eyes looking into mine again. She could read my mind about action and related a story from her past. When in New York she took up the cause of an unpopular spiritual paper in Boston called *The Spiritual Scientist*. The editor, a man called Gerry Brown, had fallen out

with his rich family because he wanted to edit a spiritualist journal. HPB said, “Of course, I felt fired up like a dry match immediately, got several subscribers for him the same day and sent him my article.”¹ Olcott nodded knowingly about that incident. The point is, we all need to be “fired up like a dry match” to revitalise the fortunes of our organisation.



We need to decide on our actions as best we can and implement them as well as possible. Sitting and talking about our declining membership or financial problems will not change anything unless we act with purpose. Our declining membership is worrying. Attached to that is the digital world we are living in, where young people are not joining (or effectively supporting) organisations as they did in the past. This is not new; it has been going on for decades. We may not be able to change this modern lifestyle, but we can adapt our approach to it. To implement radical changes, we need to “feel fired up like a dry match” and find out what needs to be done.

The answer, however, often lies in properly understanding the question.

Examining the problem, without prejudice, will reveal the correct answer. Action then arises in absolute awareness when the mind is crystal clear.

When I looked back at Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, they could see the perplexed look on my face. They knew that doubt had entered my psyche and HPB directed me to The Three Truths revealed in *Light on the Path*. So, I will conclude with these prosaic aphorisms:

The soul of man is immortal, and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendour has no limit.

The principle which gives life dwells in us, and without us, is undying and eternally beneficent, is not heard, or seen, or smelt, but is perceived by the man who desires perception.

Each man is his own absolute law-giver; the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself; the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment.²

Clearly, the fate of our Society is in our hands, whatever we make of it.

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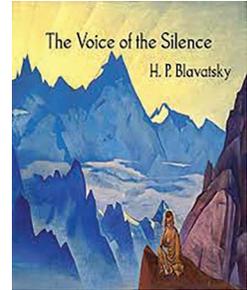
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This address can be watched on the TS website:

<https://theosophicalsociety.org.au/>

The Muffin Syndrome – from Ignorance to Learning... and Wisdom

Brian Parry



In September 1891 Annie Besant printed some words of Madame Blavatsky which appeared in *Lucifer*, the magazine of the Theosophical Society:

There is a road, steep and thorny, beset with perils of every kind, but yet a road, and it leads to the very heart of the Universe. I can tell you how to find those who will show you the secret gateway that opens inward only, and closes fast behind the neophyte for evermore. There is no danger that dauntless courage cannot conquer; there is no trial that spotless purity cannot pass through; there is no difficulty that strong intellect cannot surmount. For those who win onwards there is reward past all telling – the power to bless and save humanity; for those who fall, there are other lives in which success may come.¹

This is the very *essence* of Theosophy; not rounds and races, not reincarnation and karma, not even the Three Objects

of the Theosophical Society. The very heart of the universe – the very essence of the universe – is our true home, our true being. And there is a road home – a road of return, a road which is steep, thorny and beset with perils, but yet a road that leads to the very essence of Reality.

The Way to the Heart of the Universe

Blavatsky made good on her offer to show us the way. In addition to her vast volume of writings and lectures, in 1888 she founded the Esoteric Section of the T.S. (later renamed the Esoteric School), as an environment in which serious members could begin to walk the road; one that required a disciplined life involving regular meditation, study, a non-alcoholic life regimen, and so forth. Of course, the E.S. does not purport to take its members home. No-one can take one through the gate that opens inwardly only; however, it does provide an ethos that can aid the serious aspirant in the search for the gate.

Then, and arguably more importantly, she also published in 1889 that incredible little book *The Voice of The Silence*. In its first one hundred verses she provided an instruction manual, a step by step guide for the road to the secret gateway.

The book began with the identification of the mind as the barrier across the road: ‘The mind is the great slayer of the Real. Let the disciple slay the slayer.’² This is pretty daunting stuff, counter-intuitive, particularly in a society like Australia where the mind is regarded so highly. We should have a high regard for our mind. It is the medium for some of our greatest achievements. With the mind we have discovered so much that is not obvious about the world, concerning our bodies and indeed ourselves. Our mind-driven curiosity has shown us something of the birth, age, and composition of the universe. Our sciences have revealed amazing facts about our bodies.

The mind is potentially so wonderful. However, it is also the slayer of the Real. We could not live without the mind. We cannot even cross the road safely if the mind is dulled or distracted. The heart of the problem lies not in our perceptions of life’s events, but in the judgements, the valuations – the spin – we put upon them. If this is true, then how do we slay the slayer? *The*

Voice of the Silence outlines the steps that we all need to take for this journey using some wonderful imagery. Like all good instructional material, it is expressed in an easy to remember format labelled the Three Halls – the Hall of Ignorance, the Hall of Learning, the Hall of Wisdom; and then the Vale of Bliss.

The Hall of Ignorance deals with those roadblocks that apply to physical barriers, addictions and habits mainly focussing on the body such as drug, alcohol or sex addictions. Verse 24 labels this Hall *avidyā*, ignorance, and says that this is the phenomenal world of our senses. Ignorance does not mean lack of information in this context. Ignorance is darkness without illumination. It arises when we mistake illusory phenomena for Reality. It is the Hall in which we are born and die. Verse 28 advises that we should not let our mind mistake the fires of lust for the sunlight of life.

The Muffin Syndrome and the Hall of Ignorance

What has the above got to do with the Muffin Syndrome and, for that matter, what is this syndrome? A muffin certainly could not be an addiction, unless one craved it in huge quantities. After all, a muffin is only a muffin – or so I would have thought.

Let me detour into the personal experience that revealed the Syndrome. Last year I was walking from our home to the local village, about twenty minutes away. The walk was for exercise and because in the village I would have my regular daily coffee and a muffin. While walking, I was mentally planning my next visit to Sydney in detail. Then, as I walked and planned, it suddenly became clear that I had not allowed any time on the day of travel for the daily muffin and coffee – at least another half an hour would be required! After beginning to plan around that addition in turn, it suddenly hit me. The muffin coffee thing was being treated as though it was an unquestionable necessity, with as much importance as the travel time. In that moment, I realised that muffins and coffee had become an integral part of my life routine; in other words, a habit. And another less happy word for a habit is an addiction.

At that moment, I could also see immediately that I was stuck in the Hall of Ignorance with all the other addicts, and that I should not tarry in it. In that rare moment of sudden clarity, I could see how it had begun some thirty years ago and then progressed gradually over the next thirty-one years up until now. But this habit, this addiction, had to stop. Therefore while walking I resolved that from tomorrow there

would be no more daily coffee and muffin. You see how cunning the mind is: ‘from tomorrow’ – just one last indulgence. This is pure Hall of Ignorance, the ‘Muffin Syndrome’. The temptation takes many forms and arises in the most unlikely places. And the personal battle still goes on.

Many Applications

It hardly needs to be said that this Syndrome is not confined to muffins, or even to any type of food. Temptation takes many forms and arises in the most unlikely places. It could apply to a must watch TV programme, or to furniture location or a daily walk route.

It should be noted that the Muffin Syndrome does not necessarily apply to all patterns of behaviour. We have to get up each day. We have to bathe, eat, meditate, go to work and so on ... This is routine. However, we still have to be on the lookout for some routine that we may have elevated into a Muffin Syndrome.

Once recognised, it is possible to see the Syndrome clearly exhibited in others. For example, there is the ‘I am a special person’ type who must have recognition; this person’s muffin is political status and power. Then again, there is the person whose habit is always to want more. More generically, we might simply call it ‘The I-Want

Hall'. Another Hall of Ignorance trap can be my religion or my political bias. There is nothing necessarily wrong in either a particular religion or political ideology. The problem only emerges when I lose the self-insight that my understanding – my attachment – may be biased. This is the Hall in which are manifest all my overt habits. But as *The Voice of the Silence* says: 'The mind is the great slayer of the Real. Let the disciple slay the slayer.'³

The Hall of Learning

Let us move on to the Second Hall: the Hall of Learning. This sounds more like us! After all, the second Object encourages us to study comparative religion, philosophy and science. Verse 26 says that in this Hall we find the blossoms of life – but, it goes on to say, 'under every flower a serpent coiled'.⁴ In a note at the end of the book, HPB adds that this Hall is the 'astral region, the psychic world of supersensuous perceptions and of deceptive sights – the world of mediums'.

There is more. We are considering the Hall of Learning, the world of the great illusion that we should not heed. *The Voice of the Silence* says that if you want to be free from karmic chains, do not seek your guru in these mayavic regions, that is, in the region of illusion. The history of 20th century

gurus shows the wisdom of this pre-20th century manual. This is the hall of the not-Self. Any guru we meet here will be just another object in this hall of beguiling objects that constitutes maya or illusion.

Why is the Hall of Learning 'needed for our probation' if it is so dangerous? It is needed, so that we might become aware of the 'other' as separate from me. It is dangerous because the 'me' that feels separate from 'you', the personal 'I', is not the true Self, the Monadic Self. The text goes on to make this clear when it says that if the disciple wants to reach the Vale of Bliss through the Hall of Wisdom, then it is necessary to close fast the senses against 'the great dire heresy of separateness' that weans the disciple from the rest.

In later theosophical terminology this is the world of *kāma-manas*, the desire mind; the serpent that is coiled under every blossom of life. This is our mind as we know it all too well, the desire-mind that judges every new thing. When in this mode, the mind never sees a thing as it is in itself. Rather, it only judges in terms of its own perception of the new object. It is as though *kāma-manas* throws a veil over each new thing so that we never actually see that thing truly.

Remember, ‘The mind is the great slayer of the Real.’

The flowers of life are all around us but we never see them because under each one is coiled the serpent of our fear or desire. The event in consciousness,



Photo by Isabela Kronemberger on Unsplash

which is the flower, is hidden by the desire mind which switches between ‘I want’ or ‘I don’t want’. This is the mind ‘slaying the real’. We can now see why in an earlier verse of *The Voice of the Silence* we were advised that we should – indeed, must – become indifferent to objects of perception; indifferent, not disinterested. We are advised by the text to ‘flee this Hall’. Remember we were told not to *tarry* in the Hall of Ignorance. However, it is from this Hall we are actually to *flee*.

You remember that this hall is full of fragrant blossoms, but that under each there is a coiled serpent – and a very venomous one too. We observe some

flowers; what a fragrance, what a lovely shape, what a delicate texture. A bee comes by and takes some honey, what a joy this is. How could I get a flower for myself? Could I breed them? Would people buy them? Are they worth enough to justify the effort? Could I just quietly steal one from this garden and not tell anyone how I got it? It is not hard to see what is happening here. Our old friend, *kama-manas*, is up to his old tricks. An object of perception has been transformed into a thing of desire. The Muffin Syndrome is alive and well in this Hall also. All the answers are wrong because all my questions were wrong – all ‘me’ centred. It is this ‘me-ness’, this desire, that takes my mind away from the flower and back to myself. The Hall of Learning is a very lonely place, so full of me that there is no space for anyone else.

Indifference to Objects of Perception

At the very beginning, *The Voice of the Silence* demands that the disciple becomes indifferent to objects of perception. That wonderful classic text of Chinese Buddhism written around 600CE, the *Hsin-Hsin Ming*, gives the same advice when it says in the first sentence, ‘The Great Way is not difficult for those not attached to preferences.’⁵

We can be as interested, searching and compassionate as the person or object demands, but we can only ever perceive the object as it really is, in itself, if we do not project our background conditioning upon it. A classic example of indifferent action is where a paramedic is confronted by serious suffering and injury when first arriving at an accident. There is no time to engage in anything other than impersonal remedial action; the paramedic must be indifferent to the suffering and get on with the job. So it is in the Hall of Learning. Here are many objects that we might desire, but we must be indifferent to them and have no preferences if we are to truly appreciate them. The flowers of life are real. The projections we put upon them are not. When these are removed, we can see them as they truly are. Free of habits, preferences and projections, we can begin to explore the third Hall of *The Voice of the Silence*: the Hall of Wisdom.

But that is a story for another day.

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Biography

Brian Parry has been an active and enthusiastic member of The Theosophical Society for over 50 years. He is a past Supporting Lecturer for The Theosophical Society in Australia. Brian retired in June 2005 after 18 years as the Executive Chairman of the Melbourne Fire Brigades Board. Prior to this he held a number of Chief Executive positions in major organisations. He is a lay member of the Clinical Research Ethics committees of the Royal Melbourne and Monash Hospitals and a lecturer on Great Religions of the World for the University of the Third Age. In 2004 he was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia as a result of his services to the Fire Brigade and to the community.

Particular interest areas of Brian's include Advaita Vedanta, Kashmir Shaivism and the theosophical classic, *The Voice of the Silence*.



Pathways of the Mind: a roadmap for the seeker

Nila Chambers



It is curious that all humans possess a mind and yet our understanding of the mind, its characteristics and significance varies greatly. In the pursuit of truth, this article will consider various perspectives on the nature of the mind and its relationship with reality.

For Mme Blavatsky, the mind — called *Manas*, is the sole link between the physical human and the Higher Self. It is the bridge to the higher states but can also be directed downwards towards the animal nature. Blavatsky sees the mind as that which takes up body after body, storing up impressions and adding experiences to a vast memory bank and in the process developing the spiritual Self. From this perspective the human is a thinker made of thought and the physical mind merely serves to provide material to develop the mental-spiritual being. Blavatsky equates the mind with the soul, a permanent individuality that exists throughout a long cycle of creation.¹ From this point of view, it is very valuable to ponder deeply into esoteric concepts and

ideas that will develop and refine the spiritual Ego or Self.

From the traditional scientific perspective, the mind is the faculty of the brain and it ceases when the body dies. Some modern scientists are beginning to question whether consciousness does exist within or beyond the brain and the scientific community is starting to broaden its understanding. However the consensus view is that the mind is essential for humans to make progress on earth and its creativity and problem solving capacity must be given free rein. From this perspective, intellectual ability and vast book knowledge are seen as capacities to aspire to.

For others thinking is the root of the problem and thought must be transcended to apprehend true reality. Shankara (686-718 A.D.), the practitioner of Advaita Vedanta, argued that the problem lies with *tamas* and *rajas* that disturb the tranquility of the mind and lead to the false sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. *Tamas* creates illusions,

which cause the mind to believe it is the impermanent illusory body. *Rajas* creates incessant activity, resulting in endless thoughts. Sankara states that the mind creates its own bondage and its own liberation. The mind must overcome the power of *tamas* and *rajas*, become tranquil and realise that it is not separate from Brahman or God.² The enlightened mind then becomes indifferent to all concepts, creeds and ideologies that arise within it. From this angle, taming the mind is a critical pursuit.

The non-dualist Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950 A.D.) taught his students that whenever a thought arose, they should overlay it with the thought 'Who am I?' thus driving the mind back to its Source and reaching the state of liberation beyond the mind. He stated in conversations with Paul Brunton:

'The mind is composed of thoughts. Stop thinking and then show me: where is the mind?... The mind creates its own problems and then tries to solve them, but it will never find the final solution, as this does not exist in its limited sphere of activity.'³

From both of these perspectives the mind must be controlled rather than given free rein to explore.

In Dzogchen, the Tibetan teachings that predated Buddhism, the mind is not considered an impediment to be controlled or an asset to be exploited. Thought is a natural aspect of consciousness. It is like effervescence encountered on the surface of the ocean. Dudjom Rinpoche (1835-1904 A.D.) stated that in the gap between the cessation of one thought and the inception of the next, there is a moment of clear naked awareness or pure consciousness. Since we cannot remain in that state, a thought inevitably arises and that thought is the creative expression of pure awareness. If we fail to recognise the thought immediately, it proliferates into a wandering chain of creative delusion, but if we recognise it upon its inception and just let it go without running after it, whatever thought arises is spontaneously liberated into the space of pure awareness.⁴ Thoughts are therefore not the problem; they are part of the natural state of being but catching them is the task.

In Sufism, Christianity, and Bhakti forms of Hinduism, the mind is regarded as a secondary focus for human concern. It is the heart and its intuitive knowing that guides the human to the One and it is through self-surrender to the Beloved that one achieves the goal of liberation.

Iraqi (1213-1289 A.D.) said:

'So vast is this heart that earth cannot contain it and the worlds might vanish in its' embrace'.⁵

By focusing the heart on the Divine, thoughts subside and the heart begins to reveal itself leading one ultimately to 'fana' or annihilation of the separate self. Hafiz (1315-1390 A.D.) said:

'Let us be like two falling stars in the sky. Let no one know our sublime beauty as we hold hands with God and burn into that one sacred existence that surpasses every description of ecstasy and love.'⁶

Rumi (1207-1273 A.D.) continues the analogy of burning:

I was raw
I cooked
I burnt to a cinder
And all that was left was You.⁷

The Christian mystics often described a similar pathway rooted in the heart. Br. John Ruusbroec (1293-1381A.D.) stated:

'The interior spiritual heat in the heart gives rise to unity with God in our heart, for we can attain true unity only if the spirit of God enkindles His fire in our heart.'⁸

In this rendering it is light, heat and vibration caused by the power of love that burns away the illusions of the

mind and the false self and leads to oneness. The mind is swept clean by the power of the heart.

Advaita Vedanta is often presented as a purely mental path based on the pursuit of non-duality through insight, inquiry and discrimination. Yet Shankara also said in the *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*:

'Be devoted to Brahman and you will be able to control your senses. Control your senses and you gain mastery over the mind... In this manner the yogi achieves an unbroken realization of the joy of Brahman. Therefore let the seeker strive to give his heart to Brahman.'⁹

So where does the truth lie? There are a range of perspectives on the nature and importance of the mind. Should we cultivate it? Should we merely watch it? Should we struggle to overcome it? Or should we focus on the riches of the heart and let the mind follow? Ananda Mayi Ma (1896-1982 A.D.) said when once we state something as truth, its opposite will also be true because consciousness cannot be limited by one particular conceptual point of view.¹⁰ The truth of the mind is in all paths equally. None is better or worse. None more esoteric than the others. None merely a stepping stone to a superior, clearer understanding.

Our past life tendencies will draw us naturally in one direction or another and Theosophy encourages us to explore freely according to those tendencies while respecting and affirming all paths. Meanwhile consciousness is so vast, it can accommodate all perspectives despite apparent contradictions.

After more than forty-five years of Sufi meditation practise, I would posit that the important thing is, no matter which path we tread, it must bear fruit. We must see results and experience positive changes within. It is not enough to play with ideas or feelings. We need to have direct spiritual experiences that affirm the value of any path. Theory must translate into practice and practice into personal experience. The seeker can take any pathway that he or she chooses but of most importance is clear progress towards the destination.

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Biography

Nila Chambers is the Co-ordinator of the Northern Beaches T.S. group in Sydney and has been a T.S. member for about 8 years. Nila has an M.A. (Religion Studies) and various teaching qualifications. She founded the Rudolf Steiner school in Cairns and taught Steiner education in Melbourne. She also taught at James Cook University and Cairns TAFE. She is the author of 'The Gift of Intuition: guidance on a healing journey'. Nila is a lifelong meditator whose first and most influential teacher was a Javanese Sufi master.

Modern Western Science in The Secret Doctrine: A Cautionary Tale

Dara Tatray



Our approach to modern western science in *The Secret Doctrine* (SD) and *Isis Unveiled* might perhaps be tempered by an appreciation of the reasons the author gave for their publication; along with the fact that Madame Blavatsky was not a scientist, not even an occult scientist. Despite frequent references to the occult sciences, Madame Blavatsky's treatment of occultism was essentially spiritual, moral, and metaphysical, rather than practical, magical or scientific.

I can well understand the inclination that a scientist might have in reading the SD to remark on where it may or may not tally with modern western science (MWS), and for all I know, the SD may be replete with out of date or "incorrect" MWS. What I can confidently say however is that throughout her work, Mme Blavatsky displays an uncanny and sometimes breathtaking grasp of the Vedānta, just as she displayed an uncanny understanding of Mahāyāna Buddhism

in *The Voice of the Silence*. She would no doubt get an A-plus in metaphysics, even if a Fail or Absent Fail in science.

The author's intention in *Isis Unveiled* (and augmented in the SD) was to demonstrate:

- (a) the reality of the Occult in nature;
- (b) the thorough knowledge of, and familiarity with, all such occult domains amongst "certain men," and their mastery therein;
- (c) hardly an art or science known in our age, that the *Vedas* have not mentioned; and
- (d) that hundreds of things, especially, mysteries of nature—in *abscondito* as the alchemists called it—were known to the Aryas of the pre-*Mahabharata* period, which are unknown to us, the modern sages of the XIXth century (Occult or Exact Science? *Collected Writings* VII p.62).

Judging from a number of questions posed to her by scientists or those interested in science it would appear that some felt as though Mme Blavatsky thought of *herself* as having

a thorough knowledge or mastery of the occult domains in nature. This she did not.

In Transaction 22 June 20, 1889 Bertram Keightley asks a question about chemical affinity, and Mr Kingsland seeks to clarify the question (which had exasperated HPB), by asking, ‘How are we to connect that [chemical affinity between hydrogen and oxygen] with an intelligent entity on a higher plane?’ In response, all that HPB was prepared to say was:

... there is not the smallest thing in the universe—there is not the contact of two atoms, take any two things in nature—there is certainly an intelligence in them, behind them, and they act through intelligence, in intelligence ... we are all immersed in intelligence.

I am not a scientific person at all. I am simply a metaphysician ... if you do as the men of science do, and begin by the tail, and by that which appears here on this plane of illusion, you will never arrive at anything ...

Shall I tell you a mistake, gentleman, that you fall into? ... you take independently all these causes that you want to call intelligent, that you take them one by one, instead of taking the whole ... science is perfectly right from its physical

standpoint to say that they are blind forces of nature, because science does not see farther than its nose ... but if we go from the beginning, and if we imagine to ourselves this one life, this eternal, omnipresent homogeneity, that which underlies every phenomenon in nature—which underlies nature itself—which I won’t call spirit, because it is far more than spirit ... you have to take the whole thing and then proceed from universals to particulars. Otherwise you cannot grasp the thing ... (p.629)

Had the SD been written in 1910 or 1930, the questions Madame Blavatsky’s students posed to her might have been rather more to the point (metaphysics-wise). In 1900, Max Planck discovered the quantum field, eventually leading to David Bohm’s *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* first published in 1980. [Let us pause here a moment for that fantasy dinner at which both HPB and David Bohm are principal guests.] The year 1900 also saw the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Sigmund Freud; and in 1903, the classicist and poet F.W.H. Myers published *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*. In 1922, Freud published papers on dreams and telepathy. Sigmund Freud’s paper on Psychoanalysis and Telepathy, completed in 1921, was

only published posthumously in 1941. Its second paragraph begins:

It is no longer possible to keep away from the study of what are known as 'occult' phenomena—of facts, that is, that profess to speak in favour of the real existence of psychical forces other than the human and animal minds with which we are familiar... (Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Great Britain:Vintage, 2001: p.177).

Given his reluctance to continue in the line of inquiry he commenced in the early 1920s, Freud, if dining with HPB at our fantasy dinner, might have to watch out for flying cutlery. Then, in the 1930s the "coming of age" of psychical research as a reputable branch of science seemed set to arrive with the establishment of the Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke University in North Carolina, under the leadership of Dr Joseph Banks Rhine, who published the international bestseller *Extra-Sensory Perception* in 1934. Blavatsky Lodge in London would no doubt have been able to pose more interesting questions to Mme Blavatsky in light of any of the aforementioned publications, which would almost certainly have been referred to in the SD.

In *An Account of Sir Isaac Newton's*

Philosophical Discoveries in Four Books, Scottish mathematician Colin Maclaurin shows the lines along which Newton reasoned, in a manner not unlike that of Madame Blavatsky:

After having established the principle of universal Gravitation of Matter in the first treatise, when he is not able to demonstrate the causes of the phaenomena described in the second more evidently, he endeavours to judge of them, by *analogy*, ... a way of reasoning that is agreeable to the harmony of things, and to the old maxim ascribed to *Hermes*, and approved by the observation and judgement of the best philosophers, "That what passes in the heavens above is similar and analogous to what passes on the earth below" ... It was a great matter in philosophy to be secure of one general principle; and one was sufficient for carrying on the regular motions of the heavenly bodies. A greater variety was necessary for conducting the different operations of nature in particular parts; and these being involved in some obscurity, till better light should appear, he could find no surer ground on which to found a judgment of them, than that principle he had already shown to take place in nature. But because we often find that phaenomena, which at first sight, appear of a very different sort,

flow nevertheless from the same cause, and several such causes are often resolved, on farther enquiry, into one more general principle; the whole constitution of nature (notwithstanding the variety of appearances) manifestly leading to one supreme cause; this great philosopher was hence induced, as well as from several observations he had made, to think that all these powers might proceed from one general instrument or agent, as various branches from one great stem, whose efficacy might be resolved more immediately into the direction of influences of the sovereign cause that rules the universe ... (C. Maclaurin *An Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophical Discoveries in Four Books*, London, Patrick Murdoch, 1748 p.20).

Here we have it, almost directly from Sir Isaac Newton — Maclaurin was a very close associate/disciple — that until better light can be thrown on the different operations of nature in particular parts, and where there is doubt, we would do well to hold firm to fundamental principles, foremost among them being that what passes above is similar and analogous to what passes below. Reading the SD and other of Madame Blavatsky's works, we should always return to the fundamental propositions, and other

first principles of Theosophy. They are the tail end of the knowledge that leads all the way to omniscience. Letting go of that can result in getting lost in peripheral details, which occasionally seemed to happen in the Transactions of Blavatsky Lodge London in 1889. This is not to say that there isn't anything of interest to MWS in *The Secret Doctrine*, only that the science in the SD might best be taken in the spirit in which it was given, as an attempt to provide examples of the underlying principles as they may apply to "the different operations of nature in particular parts," and as a corrective to scientific materialism.



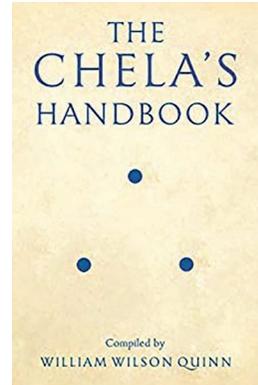
Biography

A former President of the Australian Section, and presently serving as the National Secretary, Dara Tatrav joined Blavatsky Lodge in 1979 having discovered Theosophy and the Theosophical Society through a chance encounter with a pamphlet, an exposure to some of the teachings through a broadcast on Radio 2GB, and soon thereafter arriving at Mecca, the Adyar Bookshop in Culwulla Chambers, Sydney. There she discovered Ramana Maharshi, H.P. Blavatsky, and J. Krishnamurti, the three treasures of her interior landscape.

Review ...

The Chela's Handbook

**Compiled by:
William Wilson Quinn
Turning Stone Press
United States, 2020**



This book contains a compilation of quotes from The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett, Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom (First & Second Series) and Mrs. Holloway and the Mahatmas, which succinctly delineate the spiritual teachings given by the Masters or Adepts of occultism to various early members of the Theosophical Society. This is not a book for the faint-hearted as the selection of quotes have been carefully selected to give instructions to chelas or disciples who are aspiring or dedicated students of occultism or the *philosophia perennis*.

A warning given by H.P. Blavatsky to the would-be chela states: “One who undertakes to try for Chelaship by that very act rouses and lashes to desperation every sleeping passion of his animal nature...”. However as Quinn, in his introduction points out,

all spiritual paths eventually lead to one single path, that of the perennial philosophy also known as *theosophia* or *ātma-vidya*. It is only when students have developed a deeper understanding of their psychology, and gained better control of their thoughts and emotions, are leading a moral life and offering altruistic service to humanity that the teacher will appear. I found this pithy quote from the Adept Serapis Bey to Henry S. Olcott is very apt for aspiring disciples: “One who prepares for solving the Infinite must solve the finite first” (p.43). Until that time when a student is accepted as a chela, there exists for those interested students, the theosophical teachings to help prepare the would-be chela for the many challenges on the spiritual path.

All the quotes have brief annotations to inform the reader about the recipient,

author, date of the letter and its source. The quotes are grouped into subject matter according to the chapter heading:

- 1) Sacrifice, Suffering and the Risks of the First Steps;
- 2) Probation Before Chelaship and Its Test and Trials;
- 3) Qualities and Behaviours Necessary for Advancement;
- 4) The Adepts and Their Practices and Rules; and
- 5) Relationships Between Adepts and Chelas.

The final page gives some excellent suggested further reading for interested students such as *Light on the Path* and *The Voice of Silence*.

This book packs a punch in that, within its brevity, are contained essential, no-nonsense spiritual guidelines. It is an inspirational book to encourage students to read the original source books and the selected quotes are useful as a reflective meditation aid.

Available online at websites such as Fishpond or Amazon, with the latter offering a Kindle version.

About the Author

Dr Quinn gained a B.A. in Literature and Writing in 1970, continuing his

studies to gain an M.A. in Religious Studies, a PhD in *philosophia perennis* and a Doctor of Jurisprudence (J.D.) – whereby he worked as a solicitor in private practice for many years specializing in American Indian affairs. He has been a member of the T.S. in America since 1969 working as Editor of *The American Theosophist* and *Quest*, and Associate Editor of the Theosophical Publishing House at the H.Q. in Wheaton, Illinois. He is a T.S. and university lecturer and author of his doctoral dissertation – *The Only Tradition* (1981) and the subject of this review – *The Chela's Handbook* (2020). He has written numerous articles on comparative religion, spirituality and metaphysics, as well as articles on American Indian history, culture, and law in national academic journals and law reviews.

Review by Rosanna Sheridan President, Blavatsky Lodge



A Eulogy to Geoffrey Harrod



The Theosophical Society has lost a valued member in the passing of Geoffrey Harrod. Geoff first joined the Theosophical Society in 1961 in Sydney before transferring to Brisbane Lodge in 1964 remaining a member there until 1977. He re-joined Brisbane Lodge in 1996 and remained a member until his death. Geoff served on the Brisbane Theosophical Society (BTS) committee in various capacities including that of President. He also served as the Queensland representative on the National Council, and for a time was National Vice-President. His innate sense of dignity and his quiet common sense made him a valuable asset in these roles.

Geoff's working life was in IT. The TS in Australia benefitted greatly from his expertise in this area, as did the BTS. He was very generous with his knowledge, ever ready to provide assistance.

It would be hard to overstress the contribution that Geoff Harrod made to the Theosophical Order of Service

(TOS) throughout the many years of his very active and efficient membership. He was Webmaster for the International TOS as well as developing their communication strategy and, with his wife, Carolyn, a quarterly e-newsletter "In-touch-Online" to link the TOS groups all over the world. He put together the Australian TOS website and, again with Carolyn, produced the Australian "TOS Links" online newsletter three times a year. At the time of his death, he was Secretary of the Australian TOS.

Geoff's gentle presence and eager intellect will be missed. May he go forward to the next stage of his journey in great peace.

This eulogy was adapted from information provided from Janet Harding (TOS information) and Phillipa Rooke.

Photographs of four of Geoff's beautiful paintings are being used as cover images in *Theosophy in Australia* this year.

News and Notes

Introduction to Theosophy - Online and Printed Sources

A wonderful resource referencing theosophical literature, including books, articles, study courses and DVDs, most available online and some for purchase in hard copy from the national headquarters. This compilation by former Education Coordinator Pedro Oliveira is available on our website at <https://theosophicalsociety.org.au/resources>. A new course by Pedro, The Science of Yoga: An Introduction to the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali is due for release this year and will be available for sale through our online bookstore.

Voting International President

A reminder that the voting papers have been posted for the election of the International President of the Theosophical Society. Tim Boyd is the only candidate, however, casting your vote will give confidence in the support of his next term of office. Once you receive your ballot papers, please ensure you return them to reach the headquarters by no later than Tuesday 23 March 2021.

National Calendar of Events

The Covid restrictions have curtailed advance planning for many national

events this year. The National Office is considering the possibility of an event at Springbrook and Canyonleigh later in the year. There will be no events by international lecturers this year, however plans are being made for a limited tour by our national lecturers. Please keep an eye on future editions of Theosophy in Australia for details.

The Freedom and Responsibility of Lodges and Branches

The freedom of Lodges and Branches is defined by the scope of the Society's Objects as well as its essential mandate to make Theosophy known as a practical living Wisdom, which can uplift human consciousness to a realisation of the Oneness of life. Therefore, although the Society has no official creed of its own and upholds freedom of thought, and while it is acceptable to invite some outside speakers who can contribute to the exploration of the Ageless Wisdom, it is not appropriate for our platform to be used by such speakers to actively promote other organisations or belief systems. Each Lodge and Branch was chartered by the International President to be a representative of the Society in its area. Its work and programme should reflect the character, altruistic ethos and spirit of the Theosophical Society.

Resolution passed by the General Council of the Theosophical Society (2019)

Section Directory

It is advisable to check in advance to confirm resumption of meetings.

Australian Section National Headquarters

Level 2, 162 Goulburn Street,
Surry Hills NSW 2010
Ph: 02 9264 7056 / 9264 6404
Fax: 02 9264 5857
Email: tshq@theosophicalociety.org.au
Web: theosophicalociety.org.au
Campbell Theosophical Research Library:
Email: catalogue@theosophicalociety.org.au
www.facebook.com/Austheos/

Australian Capital Territory

Canberra Group, Certified 16/11/2019
Meet: Friends Meeting House, Crn. Bent and
Condamine Streets, Turner
2- 4 pm, 3rd Saturday each month
Coordinator: Gordon Herbert
Tel: 0466 464 064
Email: canberratheosophicalociety@gmail.com
Secretary: Barbara Harrod
Tel: 02 6254 1415

New South Wales

Blavatsky Lodge, Chartered 22/5/1922:
Postal Address: PO Box 319, St Leonards NSW 1590
Meet: Suite 8, 599 Pacific Highway, St. Leonards
NSW 2065 (entrance in Albany Street)
1.00pm Wednesdays + many others activities (see
website for full program)
Telephone: Reception: 02 9267 6955
Email: contact@tssydney.org.au
Web: sydney.theosophicalociety.org.au/
President: Rosanna Sheridan
Secretary: Pamela Peterson

Newcastle Lodge, Chartered 3/12/1941:
Meet: Star Hall, 23 Valencia Street,
Mayfield NSW 2304
7.30pm 2nd Friday each month (except
3rd Friday when 5 Saturday in month)
Please call before attending:
President: Howard Gregg
Secretary: Tony Buzek/Tel: 0452 633 132
Email: anthonybuzek61@bigpond.com
Web: newcastle.theosophicalociety.org.au/

Blue Mountains Group, Certified 13/5/1997:
Meet: Members' Lounge, Blue Mountains
Cultural Centre, 30 Parke Street (above Coles),
Katoomba NSW 2780
2.00 - 4.00 pm every Monday
Acting Coordinator: Jessica Gemmill
Email: tsbluemountainains@gmail.com
Jasmine de Vimes
Tel: 0415 535 525

Gosford Group, Certified 11/11/1997
Meet: The Narara Community Centre,
Pandala Road, Narara NSW 2250
8.00pm 2nd Tuesday each month
Coordinator: Vivien Wareing
Tel: 0487 196 654
Email: vivienwareing@hotmail.com
Secretary: Roni Ostergaard
Telephone: 02 4358 1413

Northern Beaches Group, Certified 2/4/1996:
Postal address and meeting address:
c/- 31 Riviera Street, Avalon NSW 2107
1.30 pm 1st Saturday of the month
Please email to confirm meetings
Coordinator: Nila Chambers
Email: nilachambers@bigpond.com

Queensland

Brisbane Lodge, Chartered 21/1/1895:
355 Wickham Terrace, Brisbane QLD 4000
Tel: 07 3839 1453
Email: brisbanelodge@theosophyqld.org.au
brisbane.theosophicalociety.org.au
Meet: 7.30 pm Wednesdays, bookshop
and library open Monday and Friday 10.30 am - 2.30
pm and Wednesdays 6 - 7.15 pm (see website for other
events)
President: Michael Morton
Secretary: Dianne Manning

Logan Group, Certified 9/4/2019:
Meet: Please contact Coordinator for venue
Monthly 1st Friday 9.30-12 md + 1st Thursday
5.30-7.30 pm
Tel: 0418 755 496
Coordinator: Christine Gwin
Email: logantheosophy@gmail.com

Sunshine Coast Lodge, Chartered 1/4/2004:

Meet: Buderim Croquet Club,
 Syd Lingard Drive, Buderim QLD 4556
 Note: Venue will change in April
 (Contact before attending meetings to confirm venue)
 Meetings: 7.00 pm Thursdays except last Sunday each
 month at 2 pm there is a guest speaker (various venue)
 Email: theosophy.sunshinecoast@gmail.com
 President Joyce Thompson/0417 873 481
 Secretary: Jean Carroll/0402 805 127

Toowoomba Group, Certified 10/7/2007:

Meet: East Creek Community Centre, 43 Kitchener
 Street, Toowoomba QLD 4350
 Thursday 6.30 pm once a fortnight.
 Annual Springbrook retreat each Spring
 Coordinator: Barry Bowden
 Tel: 0438 331 885

South Australia*Adelaide Lodge, Chartered 26/5/1891:*

310 South Terrace, Adelaide SA 5000
 Tel: 08 8223 1129
 Email: president@tsadelaide.org.au
 Web: adelaide.theosophicalsociety.org.au/
 Meet: 10.30am 4th every Saturday. Science Group
 7-9 pm every 2nd Thursday. (Please contact Lodge for
 additional meeting dates.)
 President: Gaynor Fraser
 Acting Secretary: Valrae Jays

Tasmania*Hobart Branch, Chartered 7/6/1889:*

13 Goulburn Street, Hobart TAS 7000
 Tel. 03 6294 6195 (please leave message)
 Email: helen_steven@live.com
 Web: hobart.theosophicalsociety.org.au/
 Meet: 7.30pm Mondays
 President: Helen Steven
 Secretary: Berry Dunston

Launceston Lodge, Chartered 12/1/1901:

Meet: Salvation Army, 111 Elizabeth Street,
 Launceston
 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month at 1.00pm
 Postal address: 28 Teggs Road, Gravelly Beach,
 TAS 7276
 Email: launcestontheosophicalsociety@gmail.com
 Web: launceston.theosophicalsociety.org.au/
 President/Secretary: Ruth Holt
 Tel: 0418 346 526

Victoria*Melbourne Lodge, Chartered 9/12/1890:*

From 1st April (call before attending)
 Meet: 1st Flr., 234 Flinders' Lane,
 Melbourne VIC 3000
 Tel: 03 9650 2315 Fax: 03 9650 7624
 Email: info@melbournetheosophy.org
 Web: melbourne.theosophicalsociety.org.au/
 Meetings: usually 4th Saturday each month
 Acting President: Edward Sinclair
 Acting Secretary: Robert Mullaney

Mornington Peninsula Group, Certified 8/2/2000:

Meet: Mount Eliza Neighbourhood House,
 Canadian Bay Road, 1st Sunday
 of the month, (12.00pm meditation + library - 1.30pm
 presenter + questions and comments)
 Coordinator: Georgina Fode
 Tel: 0476 516 778
 Secretary: Elizabeth Ramirez

Wodonga-Albury Group, Certified 9/7/1996:

Meet: Shop 6, Tower Place, High Street,
 Wodonga VIC 3690
 For talks & library, please contact: Coordinator/
 Secretary: Denis Kovacs
 Tel: 02 6024 2905

Western Australia*Perth Branch, Chartered 10/6/1897:*

21 Glendower Street, Perth WA 6000
 Tel/Fax: 08 9328 8104
 Email: tsp Perth@iinet.net.au
 Web: tsp Perth.com.au
 Meet: 7.30pm Tuesdays
 Due to Covid please check before attending.
 President: Franco Guazzelli
 Acting Secretary: Hana O'Rourke

Mount Helena Retreat Centre:

1540 Bunning Road, Mt Helena WA 6082
 All enquiries to Perth Branch
 Tel: 08 9328 8104

**Theosophical Education and
 Retreat Centre, Springbrook, QLD**

2184 Springbrook Road,
 Springbrook QLD 4213
 Tel: Office/Hall 07 5533 5211
 Email: info@tsretreat.com.au
 Caretaker: Kay Schiefelbein

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 emphasise 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 of 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.

*Resolution passed by the General Council
of the Theosophical Society (1924)*



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 organisation 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 organisation.

*Resolution passed by the General Council
of the Theosophical Society (1949)*



The Three Objects of the Theosophical Society

I. To form a nucleus of the **Universal Brotherhood of Humanity** without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.

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II. To encourage the study of **Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science.**

~

III. To investigate unexplained laws of **Nature** and the powers latent in the human being.