

Theosophy for a New Generation of Enquirers

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THE theme chosen for this issue of *The Theosophist* is very relevant for our times. I wish to begin by mentioning here that what is presented in this article is based not only on my personal views but also the views and suggestions given by some of our children, grandchildren, and their spouses, who are members of The Theosophical Society. I felt it was very desirable to consult them also.

Theosophy seeks to provide a framework of knowledge and insight which meets the criteria of wisdom and integrity. Today, access to teachings of all ilk and variety are available instantaneously, and although many are attracted by what is different or exotic, the truth is much simpler — oneness of all life and the divine essence embedded in each and every expression thereof.

Today, in the field of our daily lives, advances in technology and often lopsided economic growth have given rise to ugly 'consumerism' worldwide. It leads to growth of selfish acquisitiveness, glaring social disparities and crime. We do not need to quote scriptures to understand a commonsense truth that physical and psychological cravings

cannot ever be satisfied. Robert Frost, in one of his poems, beautifully puts it thus:

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold,
Her early leaf is a flower,
But only so an hour,
Then, leaf subsides to leaf,
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day,
Nothing gold can stay.

The vision of wholeness or oneness of all life and the natural flow from it of love, compassion, kindness and consideration for others have been stressed by the great teachers of all religions, but that vision seems to have become hazy. It is, therefore, heartening to note that some respected teachers of our times have begun to revivify that vision of wholeness or oneness of life. One feels further encouraged and happy to notice that modern science is also gradually veering towards a perception of wholeness or oneness of all life. Albert Einstein wrote: 'A human being is part of the whole . . . He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest — a kind of optical

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delusion of his consciousness.'

Proper and carefully selected study and pondering over what one studies, help to acquire knowledge and provide inspiration for moving towards a perception of oneness of life and living a life of goodness. However, warnings also find place in the teachings of sages against allowing study to lead to mere 'learnedness'.

People today everywhere are searching for guidance in everyday life, searching for core truths to embrace at a time when everything around them is changing. Fortunately, we have in the Theosophical Society a large number of very beautiful, helpful and inspiring books. However, one often notices that our books and journals do not attract much attention among the new generation of enquirers. Dara Tatray, in her talk at the last international Convention at Adyar, referred to the need to 'clothe the original teachings in a form appropriate to the times, which need not entail any sacrifice of depth'.

The demography of the world has changed. The percentage of youth has gone up considerably. Apart from the demographic appeal, youth is the time for idealism, the time for questioning parental and social values and desire for a better world. There is, therefore, urgent need to provide help to younger people, as also to an extent to others, in their exploration, for example, of the following questions:

1. What does living a theosophical life mean in relationships, marriage and family life?

2. What does Theosophy mean in starting, running and managing one's own business or profession?

3. What does Theosophy mean in how one lives and the choices one makes?

4. What is the role of competition, of ethical and moral values in our lives in the world?

5. What is religion? Should religion be allowed to play a role in our lives?

This can be done partly by bringing out attractive small booklets in simple language, including life stories of some of the great men and women of the present and past, the dilemmas they faced and the decisions they made.

One, however, considers it necessary to mention that there is still a large number of existing books published by the Theosophical Society in the past, which do make very good reading and are useful, informative and provide good guidance both to the old and the new generation of enquirers. Taking a simple example, in the book *Man Visible and Invisible* by C. W. Leadbeater, looking at the plate of the astral body of a person in intense anger makes one instantly feel how despicable it is to lose one's temper.

Interested inquirers outside the Theosophical Society, however, often complain about non-availability of books published by the Theosophical Society at prominent bookshops in the cities, while many books of a similar nature brought out by other publishers are readily available. Concerted efforts need to be made at all levels to resolve this problem.

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To ensure a wider reach, publication rights for some of the selected books/booklets may, subject to minimum conditions, be given to one of the reputed publishers like Shambhala and Penguin. Also, more and more of our books which attract younger minds need to be put on the Internet websites and blogs. Another way to involve our younger brethren is to host online discussions and chats on topics relevant to daily living, where senior members of the Society can interact and answer questions. Apart from the Internet, the old radio still continues to be useful. One noticed some years back that a Section of the Theosophical Society had arranged with a radio station to allow one hour to the Society every weekend. That time was utilized for one member reading a few sentences from a booklet like *At the Feet of the Master* and making short comments thereon and the second member adding his comments also and asking questions. Appreciation started coming on the phone from many listeners and some began attending the weekly meetings/lectures at the headquarters of that Section.

One important point may be mentioned here. The theme for this special issue of *The Theosophist* is 'Theosophy for a New Generation of Enquirers'. This new generation of enquirers, which includes some new members of the Theosophical Society, relates largely to the new generation of non-members growing outside the precincts of the Theosophical Society. Are some of our programmes in the Lodges, National Societies or Section headquarters open to

them and is adequate information made available to them through newspapers or other means of communication? Are the programmes in our Lodges attractive and inspiring to those present or do they consist mainly of dull, drab unprepared talks given every week by one or two old members in a routine manner? Are study camps/retreats held, covering particular books or topics? Are younger members encouraged and asked to contribute to the programmes, even to lead studies and discussions, realizing that the future is with them? The way we conduct the programmes of our Sections and Lodges determine the interest in Theosophy of non-member enquirers, even of new members of the Society.

An aspect of theosophical life is meditation. During the last two decades, meditation has attracted a lot of attention, particularly among the younger generation. Many books have appeared and some individual teachers of meditation are also going round lecturing or taking classes/courses on meditation. It is, however, not always pure meditation but often linked with 'yoga' — a physical culture. Some books and booklets on meditation have been published by the Theosophical Society. One single type of meditation cannot be prescribed for everybody, but the basics of pure or deep meditation are more or less the same. Seeing such an awakened interest in meditation, it seems very desirable that the Theosophical Society publishes a short book or booklet on meditation for the guidance of serious-minded aspirants/

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enquirers. Lectures on meditation at the annual conferences/conventions of the Theosophical Society at the international and national levels and at meetings of Lodges would also be very desirable.

Another relevant aspect needs mention here. That relates to the ceremonial sphere and includes Co-Masonry, the Ritual of the Mystic Star and Order of the Round Table. These convey in beautiful forms dedication to selfless and efficient service in various spheres of life. The Ritual of the Mystic Star and Order of the Round Table are especially attractive to the younger generation of members. One notices that the ceremonies of both these at the annual international Convention are extremely popular. Encouraging the expansion of these Ceremonials will, one believes, be widely welcomed by the new generation of enquirers, for these try to represent Theosophy in an attractive form.

There is also a palpable thrust, especially among the young adults in many parts of the world, towards volunteering to help others in various ways in times of need — in sickness, in facing calamities like floods and cyclones, etc. Many like to help, but do not know where to begin. The Theosophical Order of Service, which is open to both members and non-members of the Theosophical Society, can play a bigger and useful role in a wider sphere of relief work. It is desirable that its objects, the work it is doing and the opportunities for welfare work it provides should be made known widely through various means of communication and contacts.

Study, meditation, attending lectures

and courses, participating in ceremonies like the Ritual of the Mystic Star or serving under the Theosophical Order of Service do certainly provide encouragement, support and inspiration for moving towards goodness in the larger sphere of responsible life in the world. But what ultimately matters is the way we *actually live, think and work*. An oft-repeated anecdote in the life of the Buddha needs to be mentioned here. A very rich businessman, supported in his work by a large number of employees, once approached the Buddha and requested his advice on how he should live. And the Buddha replied thus: It is not life and wealth and power that enslave men, but the clinging to life and wealth and power. And whatever men do, whether they remain in the world as artisans, merchants and officers of the king, let them put their whole heart into their work, let them be diligent and energetic; and if they are like the lotus, which, although it grows in water, yet remains untouched by it; if they struggle in life without cherishing envy or hatred, if they live in the world not a life of self, but a life of truth, then surely, joy, peace and bliss will dwell in their minds.

If we think of it carefully, the responsibility for forming a noble society, which is free, responsible, peaceful and happy, lies with thoughtful individual members who are earnestly trying to understand one's deep relationship with all that exists in Nature. Sometimes one tends to lose heart, seeing the condition of the world as it is today, and begins to ask what can a lone individual, or a small

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group of individuals, do to change the wide world. When once questioned, J. Krishnamurti simply answered — change yourself and then see what happens. He would often repeat: ‘Sir, you are the world. The world is you.’

One is tempted to quote here a piece from Walt Whitman, who, in one of his poems refers to good men and women in different lands who consider themselves as equal, above narrow beliefs, who are compassionate, with a sense of deep understanding and who, therefore, cooperate with others in promoting the larger good:

We walk silent among disputes and assertions
we walk upheld, free, the whole earth over,
journeying up and down,
till we saturate time and eras,
that men and women of races,
of ages to come, may prove brothers and lovers, as we are!

Perhaps, some of what has been mentioned above may, in some measure, help to present Theosophy to a new generation of enquirers in a manner which arouses keener interest therein and thus promote growth of goodness in the larger life. ✧

Spiritual life and love are not exhausted by being spent. Expenditure only adds to the store and makes it richer and intenser. Try and be as happy and contented as you can, because in joy is the real spiritual life, and sorrow is but the result of our ignorance and absence of clear vision. So you should resist, as much as you can, the feeling of sadness: it clouds the spiritual atmosphere. And though you cannot entirely stop its coming, yet you should not altogether yield to it. For remember that at the very heart of the universe is Beatitude.

Annie Besant
The Doctrine of the Heart