

BLAVATSKY LECTURE

H. P. BLAVATSKY'S
TEACHINGS ON
THEOSOPHICAL
PRACTICE

BY PABLO SENDER

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Helena P. Blavatsky

INTRODUCTION

H. P. Blavatsky (HPB) described the organization she co-founded as “a Society for searching into *divine wisdom*, occult, or spiritual wisdom.”¹ The pursuit of wisdom stands as a fundamental pillar within the Theosophical Society (TS). However, the qualifiers “divine,” “occult,” and “spiritual,” indicate that the mission of this organization extends beyond the realm of *human wisdom*, that is, one that comes from experience gathered on the mental, emotional, and physical planes. The wisdom sought by the TS has its source in the higher or spiritual aspect of human beings. Thus, since the founding of this organization, a number of Theosophical leaders have produced a sizable body of literature containing teachings that they claimed were acquired through spiritual or occult means.

At this moment in our evolution, however, only a few remarkable individuals possess the ability to consciously access highly spiritual planes of consciousness. Therefore, one may ask what it means for the TS as an

organization to “search for spiritual wisdom”? Is the aim just to study the spiritual teachings produced by these exceptional individuals? Or does it entail more than that? When talking about the mission of the TS, HPB wrote that it “was formed to assist in showing to men [people] that such a thing as Theosophy exists, and to help them to ascend towards it by studying and assimilating its eternal verities.”² This definition seems to indicate that promoting the study of Theosophical teachings is not the ultimate goal of the TS, but merely the initial step. The dissemination, study, and assimilation of the “eternal verities” expressed in the teachings are meant to be the *means* to the ultimate aim, which is an “ascent” towards *theosophia* or *divine wisdom*.

This interpretation is based on a fact mentioned by several Theosophists: there are two categories of Theosophy. The first refers to Theosophy as a body of teachings, while the second and higher category indicates a spiritual state of consciousness in which the aspirant gets in touch with divine wisdom. This distinction is made by HPB in various writings, such as the article “The Beacon of the Unknown.” In this piece, she uses terms like “true Theosophy,” “transcendental Theosophy,” and “inner Theosophy, that of the soul” to describe the experienced divine wisdom that is beyond the level of concepts.

The real aim of earnest seekers, therefore, is to get in touch with this *transcendental Theosophy*. How can one proceed to attain this lofty goal? According to HPB, this cannot be achieved through our reason (*manas*) alone, but requires the higher faculty of spiritual intuition (*buddhi*):

The infinite cannot be known to our reason, which can only distinguish and define; but we can always conceive the abstract idea thereof, thanks to that faculty higher than our reason—*intuition*, or the spiritual instinct of which I have spoken.³

The challenge for modern aspirants lies in the fact that this spiritual intuition is not readily available at our current stage of evolution, but can only be accessed in deep meditative states. As HPB further elucidated:

The great initiates, who have the rare power of throwing themselves into the state of *samādhi* . . . a state in which one ceases to

be the conditioned and personal ‘I’, and becomes one with the ALL—are the only ones who can boast of having been in contact with the *infinite*. These few characteristics of *true* Theosophy and its practice have been sketched for the small number of our readers who are gifted with the desired intuition.⁴

By earnest and dedicated study alone one may become a scholar but not a true Theosophist, that is, one who has access to divine wisdom. To achieve this, one must undergo an inner transformation that makes it possible to reach “a state in which one ceases to be the conditioned and personal ‘I’, and becomes one with the ALL.” Because the mission of the TS is to help people ascend to this state of spiritual consciousness, HPB and her Adept teachers have emphasized the necessity of making Theosophical teachings practical. As Mahatma K.H. wrote:

The truths and mysteries of occultism constitute, indeed, a body of the highest spiritual importance, at once profound and practical for the world at large. Yet, it is not as a mere addition to the tangled mass of theory or speculation . . . that they are being given to you, but for their practical bearing on the interests of mankind.⁵

I suggest that within the writings of HPB one can find an outline of a Theosophical system of yoga designed to provide the earnest aspirant with a path to move from the study of teachings towards a direct perception of spiritual truths. This yoga comprises various practices, but before reviewing them it is necessary to examine the context in which such practices stand.



THEOSOPHICAL GOAL

Throughout human history, the religious life has often been depicted as a pathway to personal salvation, bliss, enlightenment, or liberation. Given the prevailing individualism of our time, it comes as no surprise that this self-centered mindset continues to hold sway. It is therefore important to emphasize from the outset that individual gain is not the ultimate goal of the Theosophical yoga advocated by HPB and her Adept teachers. As she wrote:

True occultism is the destruction of the false idea of Self, and therefore true spiritual perfection and knowledge are nothing else but the complete identification of our finite “selves” with the great all. It follows, therefore, that no spiritual progress at all is possible except by and through the bulk of humanity. It is only when the whole of humanity has attained happiness that the individual can hope to become permanently happy—for the individual is an inseparable part of the whole.⁶

According to Theosophical teachings, we cannot isolate ourselves from others, for each of us is intimately connected to the entirety of existence. Just as our physical bodies are affected by global conditions such as climate, pollution, and so on, our emotional and mental natures are also influenced by the collective emotional and mental “atmospheres” that we

share with the rest of humanity. Spiritual seekers might be tempted to isolate themselves in an attempt to create an individual bubble shielded from the general physical, emotional, and mental conditions. And even though this may be feasible to some extent on these planes, true seclusion is simply not possible at the fundamental levels of our beings. Thus, an attitude of self-isolation will only bar the possibility of growth on the higher spiritual planes, where no separation can abide. For this reason, HPB criticized individuals who forsake the world in their pursuit of personal realization:

Followed with a selfish aim, Theosophy changes its nature and becomes demonosophy. That is why oriental wisdom teaches us that the Hindu yogi who isolates himself in an impenetrable forest, like the Christian hermit who, as was common in former times, retires to the desert, are both of them but accomplished egoists. . . . Their motive is altogether personal. . . . In isolating themselves as they do, neither the yogi nor the “saint” helps anyone but himself; on the contrary, both show themselves profoundly indifferent to the fate of mankind whom they fly from and desert.⁷

The aim of a true Theosophist is to contribute to the cessation of sorrow for all of humanity. How do Theosophical teachings propose to achieve this? While any endeavor that alleviates suffering falls within the scope of earnest aspirants, HPB stressed that the most important field of Theosophical service lies in the transformation of human nature:

To seek to achieve political reforms before we have effected a reform in *human nature*, is like putting new wine into old bottles. Make men feel and recognize in their innermost hearts what is their real, true duty to all men, and every old abuse of power, every iniquitous law in the national policy, based on human, social or political selfishness, will disappear of itself. . . . No lasting political reform can be ever achieved with the same selfish men at the head of affairs as of old.⁸

Social action to address inequalities is an important area of service, and individual Theosophists are encouraged to participate in this as far as their abilities permit. However, since the root cause of all problems lies in humanity's selfishness and ignorance, addressing this cause is the primary goal of Theosophical action. Now, it should be obvious that our capacity to help improve the human condition will remain severely impaired as long as we ourselves are part of the problem. To avoid being "the blind leading the blind," we must work to grow spiritually. Speaking about this, HPB said:

It is not the spirit of self-sacrifice, or of devotion, or of desire to help that is lacking, but the strength to acquire knowledge and power and intuition, so that the deeds done shall really be worthy of the "Buddha-Christ" spirit.⁹

Here is where service to others and fostering our own spiritual development converge, for in our endeavor to help we become aware of our limitations and the necessity for self-development. Thus, the yoga system promoted by HPB encourages the attainment of enlightenment and liberation, but solely as a means of effectively aiding humanity. This ideal is embodied by the Masters of Wisdom, who represent the culmination of this yoga. They have achieved all that can be achieved, only to put it at the service of the world.

It is important to note that the ideals of unity and service play a role that goes beyond serving as the motivation for Theosophical practice. As HPB said, the aspirant—

. . . has to devote himself with all the fervor of unselfish philanthropy and love for his brother men, to studying and knowing collective life, or Mankind. . . . He has to decipher, understand and *remember* the deep and innermost feelings and the aspirations of the poor people's great and suffering heart. To do this he has first "to attune his soul with that of humanity," as the old philosophy teaches . . . and to be thoroughly saturated with the truism that the latter is a whole inseparable from his own SELF.¹⁰

A practice focused on the individual can only take us so far, since no true spiritual achievement is possible except through the realization of oneness with humanity and all life. Thus, unity and service not only constitute the true motivation, but also encompass the means and ultimate goal of the Theosophical path.



Helena P. Blavatsky
PENCIL PORTRAIT BY CARINA POVARCHIK (CATRU), 2019

STUDY AND TRANSFORMATION

What, then, are the key components of this yoga? As we have seen, the study and assimilation of the eternal verities presented in Theosophical literature play an important role. HPB expressed:

[Theosophical] doctrines, if seriously studied, call forth—by stimulating one's reasoning powers and awakening the inner in the animal man—every hitherto dormant power for good in us, and also the perception of the true and the real, as opposed to the false and the unreal.¹¹

The consciousness of most people today is mainly engaged with the realities brought to them by the senses, and therefore, their spiritual nature remains passive. To change this condition, aspirants must start directing their mind and consciousness towards higher realities, aided by the study of Theosophical literature. Naturally, a mere intellectual study cannot lead them too far for, otherwise, all scholars of religious philosophies would be spiritually enlightened. Studying Theosophy solely from the standpoint of

the lower mind may foster intellectual grow but not necessarily spiritual development. As HPB explained:

A high development of the intellectual faculties does not imply spiritual and true life. The presence of a highly developed intellectual soul (the fifth principle, or *manas*), is quite compatible with the absence of *buddhi*, or the spiritual soul. Unless the former [*manas*] evolves from and develops under the beneficent and vivifying rays of the latter, it will remain forever but a direct progeny of the terrestrial, lower principles, sterile in spiritual perceptions.¹²

Since the primary functions of the lower mind are analytical dissection, labelling, and drawing of distinctions, intellectual growth alone tends to foster an overly critical, intolerant, and dogmatic attitude. But the “eternal verities” conveyed through Theosophical writings are not realities that the separative mind can perceive and grasp. For this reason, HPB warned a student as follows:

Your axioms of logic can be applied to the lower *manas* only and it is from the perceptions of *kāma-manas* alone that you argue. But occultism teaches only that which it derives from the cognition of the higher ego or the *buddhi-manas*.¹³

As pointed out earlier, true Theosophical or occult teachings have their origin in the higher nature. Thus, to really grasp them we must not be content with staying at the conceptual level of the teachings. Instead, we must use them as an aid in our effort to elevate our consciousness to the higher mind. HPB advised the following:

Once define an idea in words, and it loses its reality; once figure a metaphysical idea, and you materialize its spirit. Figures must be used only as ladders to scale the battlements, ladders to be disregarded once the foot is set upon the rampart. Let the esotericists, therefore, be very careful to spiritualize the *Instructions* and avoid materializing them; let them always try to find the highest meaning possible.¹⁴

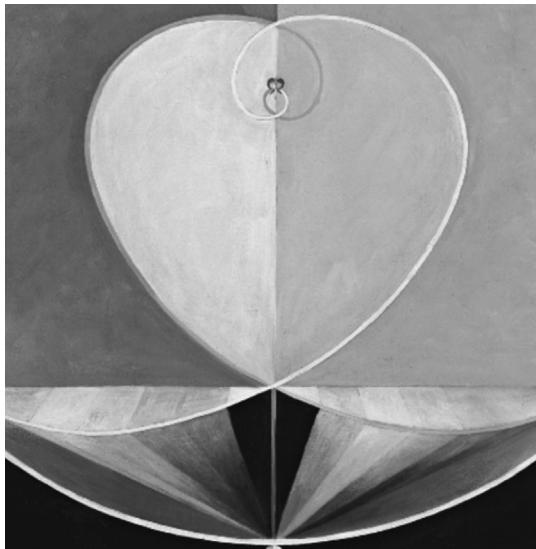
When our study involves a sincere effort not only to grasp concepts but also to perceive the higher realities to which these concepts point, then the study becomes a form of *jñāna-yoga*. A common obstacle encountered in this pursuit, is adopting a submissive attitude towards the teachings. Trusting the wisdom of a particular Theosophist is important as it encourages us to invest time and effort into studying these teachings. However, if we merely take the information we read and unquestionably consider it as true, the development of our higher nature will not be stimulated. We must possess the freedom—and the courage—to engage in critical inquiry and question the teachings with genuine sincerity. Here, we are not questioning them because we presume to know better, but rather we refrain from accepting them until we can truly understand their intended meaning. This does not imply an outright rejection of those teachings that we cannot grasp after due effort. If we trust that the teacher has wisdom, the best approach is to temporarily suspend judgement and continue diligently our study until the time comes when we can comprehend the teaching. This requires intellectual honesty to not dismiss apparent contradictions. If the teacher truly knows what he or she is talking about, and if the student understands the teachings correctly, there can be no contradiction. Therefore, as long as contradictions seem to persist, we should keep our minds open, recognizing that our current understanding is somehow incorrect or incomplete. A superficial intellectual acceptance of a particular teaching is too fragile a foundation for the student to be able to move beyond the lower mind. This is precisely why freedom of thought held such importance to HPB:

Freedom of thought above all things, is the only way of reaching at some future time that wisdom, of which every Theosophist ought to be enamored.¹⁵

Because the study of Theosophical teachings is important, some students tend to place excessive emphasis on amassing Theosophical information and the ability to articulate concepts. They may think that the primary objective of a Theosophist is to know Theosophy. But a theoretical understanding of the teachings, even if profound, is not enough to bring us closer to a perception of the occult aspect of life and ourselves. As HPB wrote:

Book learning—and here I refer only to the subject of occultism—vast as it may be, will always prove insufficient even to the analytical mind . . . unless supported by personal experience and practice.¹⁶

A personal experience of ever deeper aspects of the teachings and their application in our daily lives are indispensable in the yoga of Theosophy. This is why HPB stated “Theosophist is, who Theosophy does.”¹⁷



Group IX-UW, No. 2, The Dove

HILMA AF KLINT, 1915

PURIFICATION

From what has been discussed so far it is clear that one may become a proficient scholar of Theosophical teachings without having to practice its principles, but for the attainment of “transcendental Theosophy” the seeker must strive to lead a Theosophical life. Why is this so? HPB explained:

The power to know does not come from book-study nor from mere philosophy, but mostly from the actual practice of altruism in deed, word, and thought; for that practice purifies the covers of the soul and permits that light to shine down into the brain-mind. As the brain-mind is the receiver in the waking state, it has to be purified from sense-perception, and the truest way to do this is by combining philosophy with the highest outward and inward virtue.¹⁸

HPB states here that, along with the study of Theosophy, the aspirant must work on the purification of his nature by leading a virtuous life. This is why she said that “Theosophy has to inculcate ethics; it has to purify the soul.”¹⁹ Now, “the power to know” mentioned in this quote evidently does not refer to the ability to grasp concepts, which can be developed irrespective of moral qualifications. This power is the capacity to access direct spiritual knowledge of *theosophia*. Only through such purification can we remove the barriers between our waking consciousness and the higher nature.

Consequently, a foundational element in the yoga system that emerges from HPB’s writings is that of “purification.” It is not a mere coincidence that the statement known as “The Golden Stairs” identifies purification as the first step leading to the attainment of divine wisdom. HPB quoted her Adept teacher’s commentary on this as follows:

“Observe,” writes the Master, “that the first of the steps of gold which mount towards the Temple of Truth is—A CLEAN LIFE. This means a purity of body, and a still greater purity of mind, heart, and spirit.”*²⁰

The purification required to access divine wisdom must encompass all aspects of our fourfold personality—body, vital principle, emotions, and mind—so that they can be attuned to the higher nature. In HPB’s words:

Remember that you have, so to speak, to enclose the square within the triangle; in other words, you must so purify the lower quaternary that it shall vibrate in unison with the upper triad.²¹

Serious spiritual traditions recognize that inner purity is more important than the physical one. Famously, Jesus remarked: “What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile him, but what comes out of his mouth, that is what defiles him.” However, the need for physical purity cannot be

* Since the Theosophical definition of “spirit” refers the always-pure atmic principle, I take that the Master is using the word “spirit” in a non-technical way, more aligned with the Judeo-Christian meaning of *breath of life* (nephesh), that is, the vital principle.

disregarded. Since during our waking hours we must operate through the physical body, this vehicle of consciousness must be sufficiently pure to receive and retain the influence of the higher nature:

To render active the inner vision the student must purify his whole nature, moral, mental, and physical. Purity of mind is of greater importance than purity of Body. [However] if the *upādhi* [vehicle] be not perfectly pure, it cannot preserve recollections coming from a higher state. . . . The *sthūla-śarīra* [physical body] is the *upādhi* for all the principles acting on the physical plane.²²

Dealing with the limitations and material instincts imposed by the physical body is by no means an easy task. Even “the highest Adept,” said HPB, “put into a new body, has to struggle against and subdue it, and finds its subjugation difficult.”²³ Therefore, this endeavor should not be taken lightly. Diet clearly plays a significant role in physical purity since our bodies are built from the substances we consume. While in this, as in all other aspects, Theosophists are left free to choose their lifestyle, HPB has offered suggestions regarding the type of diet most beneficial for spiritual purposes. In *The Key to Theosophy*, she wrote:

When the flesh of animals is assimilated by Man as food, it imparts to him, physiologically, some of the characteristics of the animal it came from. Moreover, occult science teaches . . . that this “coarsening” or “animalizing” effect on Man is greatest from the flesh of the larger animals, less for birds, still less for fish and other cold-blooded animals, and least of all when he eats only vegetables.²⁴

One of the reasons for this difference lies in the varying degree of development of *kāma*, or “animal soul,” which becomes more pronounced as one ascends the scale of animal evolution. The kāmic principle predominantly resides in the blood of the organism and is partially absorbed when consuming its flesh. Nevertheless, there are other dietary aspects that have a more adverse impact on inner development:

Enquirer: With regard to the use of wine and spirits, I suppose you do not advise people to drink them?

Theosophist: They are worse for his moral and spiritual growth than meat, for alcohol in all its forms has a direct, marked, and very deleterious influence on man's psychic condition. Wine and spirit drinking is only less destructive to the development of the inner powers, than the habitual use of hashish, opium, and similar drugs.²⁵

It is important to keep in mind that an enforced abstinence from any of these items will not be effective in attaining the desired purity. As explained in the informative article "The Elixir of Life," merely adhering to external austerity without simultaneously striving to eradicate desire is of little help on the occult path. After all, as HPB wrote, although unhealthy physical habits stem "from the automatism of the body; the original impulses have come from thought." So let us briefly consider the purification of thoughts and desires:

An act may be performed to which little or no attention is paid, and it is of comparatively small importance. But if thought of, dwelt on in the mind, the effect is a thousand times greater. Therefore, it is above all things of importance that the thoughts should be kept pure.²⁶

Although purifying the body can be difficult, mastering our thoughts is even more challenging. One of the main obstacles is that we are more identified with our thoughts than with our bodies. When a thought arises in our minds, we often believe that it is us who produced it. However, this is not always true, otherwise we would never think of something that we know is unhealthy or objectionable. *The Voice of the Silence* portrays this struggle in dramatic language, as a battle between the disciple and negative thought patterns:

Strive with thy thoughts unclean before they overpower thee. Use them as they will thee, for if thou sparest them and they take root and grow, know well, these thoughts will overpower

and kill thee. Beware, disciple, suffer not, e'en though it be their shadow, to approach. For it will grow, increase in size and power, and then this thing of darkness will absorb thy being before thou hast well realized the black foul monster's presence.²⁷

When *The Voice of the Silence* advises not to allow even the shadow of unclean thoughts to approach, it is giving us the key to gain control over our psychological activity. If we allow a negative thought pattern to take root and grow, we become identified with it, our sense of self becomes absorbed by the mood, and we become enslaved by it. The key to mastering negative thoughts is to become aware of them as soon as they start to form. The problem is that in the early stages of the practice, aspirants are not conscious of these thoughts until they become strong enough to capture their attention. Unfortunately, by that point, it is often too late—the thought has already awakened the emotion, and the resulting mood has grown beyond the seeker's ability to control it. However, with repeated attempts, the seeker starts to perceive thoughts early in the process of formation, when their power is weaker than the aspirant's will.

As this skill is developed, it can be applied to practices such as the following, which is prescribed as one of the rules of discipleship:

His thoughts must be predominantly fixed upon his heart, chasing therefrom every hostile thought to any living being.²⁸

The disciple is required to be keenly aware of his psychological activity so that no unkind thought can unwittingly take hold of his psyche. While it is important to use this skill to avoid falling into negative thinking patterns, this is only part of the process. The seeker is also encouraged to actively direct his mind toward spiritual matters as much as possible:

The student must make all his desires lean to, and center upon, the acquirement of spiritual knowledge, so that the natural tendency of his thought may be in that direction. He must, therefore, in every moment of leisure revert to these subjects, as well as have a special time set apart for their consideration.²⁹

This twofold approach of avoiding negative thought patterns and fostering spiritual ones is highly effective in gradually purifying the lower mind and harmonizing it with the higher. Such attunement gradually brings higher *manas* into action, even in everyday life:

There are persons who never think with the higher faculties of their mind at all; those who do so are the minority and are thus, in a way, beyond, if not above, the average of human kind. These will think even upon ordinary matters on that higher plane.³⁰

At the present stage of evolution, the principle of desire (*kāma*) is a powerful motivator of our mental activity. Consequently, the purification of thoughts cannot be achieved without a simultaneous effort to purify desire. Let us now explore HPB's writings on this subject:

The first step towards this purity is to kill out the desire for the things of matter, since these can only be enjoyed by the separated personality.

The second is to cease from desiring for oneself even such abstractions as power, knowledge, love, happiness, or fame; for they are but selfishness after all. . . .

When desire is for the purely abstract—when it has lost all trace or tinge of “self”—then it has become pure.³¹

HPB proposed a progressive purification of our desire-nature by gradually shifting the object of desire from material possessions to psychological gains, and eventually to purely abstract realities that lie beyond the reach of the personal self. In the first step, the seeker must divert his or her attention and interest away from the material and cultivate instead an appreciation for intangible goals such as knowledge, virtue, harmonious relationships, power to master one's personality, and so on. This shift is facilitated by the study of Theosophical literature, which places before us ideals higher than those of the world, as well as by our own inquiry into what is truly desirable in life. As the desire-nature becomes predominantly attracted to healthy psychological objects, the aspirant must transcend

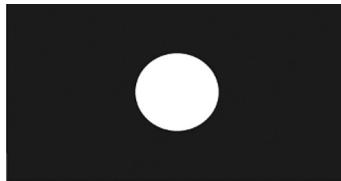
even that stage, for the pursuit of these achievements is still centered on the personal self. Here, the desire is directed towards more impersonal objects, such as fulfilling one's duty well, acting rightly, helping humanity, surrendering the separated self to the higher nature, and so forth. When these goals are “desired” not for the satisfaction of personal accomplishment but simply because they are principles by which it is good to live, the desire loses all traces of “self” and becomes pure.



We have thus examined the general principles underlying the purification of thoughts and desires. However, in order to implement them, two skills must be cultivated:

- 1) *Self-observation*, to become aware of the activities of thought and emotion taking place in one's consciousness.
- 2) *Self-mastery*, to be able to redirect one's attention from lower psychological activity to a higher one.

Let us now explore some practices that aid the seeker in developing these skills.



SILENT AWARENESS

Becoming aware of our thoughts, emotions, motivations, and other psychological activity is no easy task. These subtle inner processes are quick and elusive, making it challenging for us to perceive them clearly. That's why it is recommended that aspirants begin working on the development of self-awareness by focusing on the more objective physical realm. In an article attributed to HPB we read:

The student finds that . . . all his attention and watchfulness are required on the outer plane; he must never forget himself, never lose hold over his body, his mind, his brain. He must even learn to control the expression of every feature, to check the action of each muscle, to be master of every slightest involuntary movement. The daily life around and within him is pointed out as the object of his study and observation. Instead of forgetting what are usually called the petty trifles, the little forgetfulness, the accidental slips of tongue or memory, he is forced to become each day more conscious of these lapses.³²

In order to cultivate this attitude of self-observation, it is important to first direct our attention towards the more concrete aspects of our existence, such as the external environment, our bodies, and our actions. This effort to be aware involves a struggle against the restless tendency of our minds, to develop instead the ability to concentrate our attention on the present moment.[†] As HPB wrote:

It is absolutely essential that the superficial and inattentive hab-

[†] This concentration, as we will see, is the necessary foundation for a successful practice of meditation.

its of thought, engendered by Western civilization, shall be given up. . . . To this end students are required to practice the habit of careful and constant concentration of mind upon every duty and act in life they may have to do.³³

Rather than mindlessly going about our daily activities, seekers are asked to make an effort to be fully engaged with the task at hand.

Now, to take full advantage of the possibilities for spiritual growth afforded by daily life, this careful and constant concentration must be accompanied by a learning attitude. As *Light on the Path* advises:

Regard earnestly all the life that surrounds you.

Learn to look intelligently into the hearts of men.

Study the hearts of men, that you may know what is that world in which you live and of which you will to be a part. Regard the constantly changing and moving life which surrounds you, for it is formed by the hearts of men; and as you learn to understand their constitution and meaning, you will by degrees be able to read the larger word of life.³⁴

The valuable lessons that life has to offer can only be acquired if we are consciously aware of what is happening and have the courage and willingness to learn from it. Now, to be able to learn from a spiritual perspective, our awareness must possess a special quality—it must be free of personal biases and conditioning. Elaborating on the injunction to look intelligently into people's hearts, *Light on the Path* states that this must be done—

From an absolutely impersonal point of view, otherwise your sight is colored. Therefore, impersonality must first be understood.

Intelligence is impartial: no man is your enemy: no man is your friend. All alike are your teachers.³⁵

Most individuals are aware of the external world and other people's actions to some extent. However, if this awareness is accompanied by a

judgmental attitude, it becomes tainted by the personal self. An awareness bound by judgement cannot move beyond the level of the lower *manas*. For spiritual purposes one needs to cultivate a “silent awareness” that quietly observes without engaging in commentaries, labelling, judgement, or emotional reactions to what is witnessed. Unless there is an effort in this direction, a heightened awareness of the physical realm may result in a curse rather than a blessing, because seekers may find themselves overwhelmed by reactions to many things that were not noticed in the past.

During the early stages of developing this disengaged awareness, the main objective is to be mindful of the body and the external environment, even at the expense of other areas of activity. However, this concentration on the physical is not the ultimate goal. Once this awareness is developed, if immediate attention is not required in the physical realm, there is no fault in directing our attention elsewhere, but always as a fully conscious choice. Thus, for example, during a walk, rather than allowing our thoughts to wander aimlessly, we focus our awareness on the body and environment. But if there are some important matters to think about, it is permissible to direct our attention in that direction.

As the aspirant becomes skillful in this practice, his awareness must extend to his psychological nature, that is, to the activity of his desires, fears, motivations, responses, thoughts, and so on. And as we enter this realm of self-observation, it is perhaps even more crucial that the awareness remains impersonal, free from judgement, condemnation, or justification. There must only be a disengaged perception of what is taking place in our consciousness without reacting to what is perceived. This silent observation itself produces a clarity that will naturally lead to the right action.

Initially, the seeker may find it difficult to observe the psychological movement without getting entangled and carried away by it. However, the ability to silently observe the physical realm previously developed will enable him to gradually apply the same kind of awareness to his inner world. He will now have the opportunity to become aware of any unhealthy thoughts or emotions as they arise, allowing him to avoid being ensnared by them, as suggested in the quote from *The Voice of the Silence* previously examined.



The Path
REGINALD MACHELL, CIRCA 1895

SPIRITUAL WILL

Through self-observation, the aspirant discovers that what he calls “himself” is actually an amalgamation of various forces striving to control the personality at any given time. Some of these forces stem from the body’s automatism while others arise from the elemental energies that fuel thoughts and emotions. There are also karmic, astrological, and other types of influences affecting him. Amidst this complex interplay is the manasic ray emanating from his higher nature, which often finds itself overwhelmed by these forces. To gain mastery of his personality, the seeker must awaken the spiritual Will within and assimilate it to his manasic consciousness. HPB stated:

Will is the offspring of the divine, the God in Man; desire the motive power of the animal life.

Most of men live in and by desire, mistaking it for will. But he who would achieve must separate will from desire, and make his will the ruler; for desire is unstable and ever changing, while will is steady and constant. . . . His task is twofold: to awaken the will, to strengthen it by use and conquest, to make it absolute ruler within his body; and, parallel with this, to purify desire.³⁶

We have already dealt with the topic of purification of desire, so let us now concentrate on the question of Will. According to HPB, most people mistake desire for Will. A person may feel drawn to (or repelled by) something external, and then he decides to act based on those feelings. This person may believe that he is exercising his will, thinking, “I like something, and then I use my will to acquire it.” However, the driving force behind this action is desire, not will. Will, in the spiritual sense used here, is a steady and self-determined power that incessantly propels the personality in the direction of evolution. In contrast, desire is ever-changing—its direction depending on the object that happens to awaken it.

True will lies dormant in most individuals and will remain so as long as they are compelled to act by the attractive or repulsive nature of external objects. To awaken it, we must first learn to discern whether our actions are driven by Will or desire. It is helpful, when feeling the urge to act in a certain way, to question whether it is really we, the manasic Ray, who want to act in such a way, or if the impulse arises from the lower quaternary. This discernment can be challenging when we are under the sway of desire. In that case, it is more helpful to evaluate the action in question when we are in a different mood, such as after a session of study or meditation. Do we still believe that pursuing this course of action is in alignment with our higher nature?

The early stages in the development of Will do not involve coercing one’s personality to behave in a particular manner. Instead, the aspirant should concentrate his efforts on *refraining* from acting under the compulsion of the lower nature. Even if he fails repeatedly, the very attempt to prevent the kāmic elements from seizing control begins to awaken the Will. As the seeker becomes proficient in this pursuit, the next stage entails striving to behave in alignment with what he perceives is right. With continued practice, the Will is gradually strengthened until it becomes “absolute ruler within his body.”

At first, this task may require making difficult decisions or sacrifices in order to remain true to our higher nature, which can be quite demanding when desires are strong. But as desires become subtler and the Will grows more active, the balance of power shifts until the Will operates with such an authority that no sense of internal struggle remains. The mere recognition of the right course of action galvanizes the Will, which spontaneously acts in accordance with that perception.



MEDITATION

So far, we have seen that HPB's yoga system encompasses several elements, including unselfish motivation and action, spiritual understanding, personal purification, self-awareness, and spiritual will. All of these components form the essential foundation for success in the next practice of this yoga—meditation.

As we previously explored, to perceive the transcendental aspect of Theosophy one must enter higher states of consciousness through the practice of meditation. In the early days of the Theosophical movement, when meditation was unfamiliar to most in Western audiences, HPB limited its instruction to a select few members who were committed to a Theosophical life. They congregated in her Esoteric Section and Inner Group, where they learned how to prepare for what she referred to as “practical occultism”:

For instruction in practical occultism it is necessary to have acquired . . . the power of concentrating his mind and will . . . and it is to this end that the Rule ordering daily meditation was laid down. There is no other way of attaining the power of concentration, and without this power, largely developed, no progress can be made in practical occultism, no beginning even of it being possible.³⁷

Anyone who attempts to concentrate his mind and will on a specific object of meditation quickly discovers that it is no easy task. While prior

efforts to cultivate mindfulness are of great help, the practice of meditation introduces an additional layer of complexity as it involves a deliberate attempt to elevate one's consciousness to a higher level. The first challenge is found at the outset of this practice, as we must confront and overcome the elemental forces that drive the mechanical activities of our minds and emotions:

Whenever we calmly sit for any sort of meditation, one of the first things to happen is that the elementals begin to present to our inner eyes pictures of all sorts, and the kind of picture presented will be the result of the prior thoughts and also of the state we are in both mentally and physically. For if we are disturbed or harassed in any way in thought, the pictures will be more and more confused in fact, though sometimes having no appearance on the surface of being in confusion.³⁸

Today, meditation is often advertised as a standalone practice that can be quite disconnected from one's general lifestyle. However, it is evident that for meditation to have a profound effect, it must be firmly grounded in the broader discipline outlined in this presentation.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that not all meditation techniques fashionable nowadays are conducive to the higher goals of the yoga of Theosophy. For instance, HPB spoke against “the tedious and useless practice of the counting of inhalations and exhalations as a means to produce absolute tranquility of mind or meditation.”³⁹ While focusing attention on the breath can serve as a preliminary exercise to enhance concentration, it is not sufficient on its own. The techniques of meditation advocated by HPB entail a deliberate effort to elevate one's consciousness from the lower to the higher nature, using various techniques to this end.[‡]

Let us begin our overview of some of HPB's teachings on this topic by noting the emphasis that she attributed to the heart in meditation. According to her, “the heart is the organ of the spiritual consciousness,” rep-

[‡] Exceptions to this feature are certain methods of meditation related to the awakening of kundalini that she taught to a handful of students under her direct supervision in her Inner Group. These techniques were considered supplementary and not intended to replace the primary focus of realizing one's true nature.

resenting the principle of *buddhi*—the spiritual wisdom. She explained that in most people the spiritual consciousness of the heart is passive, but that aspirants can activate it by directing their consciousness to this area, particularly during meditation:

The effort however should be continually made to center the consciousness in the heart, and to listen for the promptings of the spiritual consciousness.⁴⁰

The student will now begin to understand why so much stress is laid on the Heart in connection with meditation, and why so many allusions are made in old Hindu literature to the *puruṣa* in the Heart.⁴¹

It is important to note that in the context of meditation, the term “heart” does not refer to the physical organ, but rather to its spiritual counterpart known as the “space within the heart” in Hindu yoga.

As to the general method of meditation, the overall goal is to elevate one’s consciousness from the lower to the higher nature by means of various methods. For example, she recommended as an “excellent” exercise the “genuine concentration and meditation, conscious and cautious, upon one’s lower self in the light of the inner divine Man and the *pāramitā*-s.”⁴²

Exploring these techniques in detail is beyond the scope of this presentation. Nonetheless, we can briefly mention that in this approach, the seeker is asked to enquire about the nature of the personal ego from the perspective of the spiritual individuality. To ensure that this self-examination does not take place in the realm of the lower mind and its ever-changing cultural values, HPB recommended the use of the virtues known as *pāramitā*-s in Buddhism. By using these virtues as a spiritual compass, the aspirant is aided to elevate his consciousness and gain insights into the true nature of the lower self.[§]

A different approach proposed by HPB involves an effort to realize the higher triad in meditation, as follows:

§ I have explored this technique of self-examination at length in my book *Evolution of the Higher Consciousness*, pp. 120-125.

Try to have a clear representation of the geometrical triangle on every plane, the conception gradually growing more metaphysical and ending with the subjective triangle *ātma-buddhi-manas*.⁴³

It is not a mere geometrical triangle, but the Triad imaged, to make thought possible. . . . We must try to represent the triangle to ourselves on higher and higher planes.⁴⁴

This technique begins with a meditation focused on the geometric triangle, trying to grasp the abstract archetype that underlies the diverse manifestation of triangles. However, as the practice unfolds, attention is directed towards the threefold principle as it manifests on the emotional, mental, and spiritual planes. Throughout this process, meditation gradually deepens until a state is reached where one merges with the higher triad.

An additional element that HPB suggested is the use of the sacred word “Om” in a serious and reverent manner:

The word Aum or Om, which corresponds to the upper triangle, if pronounced . . . by an averagely good man, in the correct way, it will strengthen him morally, especially if between two “Aums” he meditates intently on the Aum within him, concentrating all his attention upon the ineffable glory.⁴⁵

This practice should not be confused with the constant repetition of a mantra known as *japa*. In this approach, the act of chanting the sacred word is intended to help the aspirant concentrate “all his attention upon the ineffable glory” of the higher nature, where he should strive to establish himself for as long as possible. HPB explained this effort as follows:

Fix the fourfold consciousness [physical, vital, emotional, and mental] on a higher plane and nail it there. Let him make a bundle of the four lower, and pin them to a higher state. He should center on this higher, trying not to permit the body and intellect to draw him down and carry him away.⁴⁶

This quote highlights a key aspect of Theosophical meditation. Although various techniques are recommended to concentrate our thought and Will on the Real in us, the use of the mental faculties is only a means for a greater purpose. Once we have become proficient in concentration and meditation, we must learn to move beyond all mental activities and rest in a state of silent contemplation. For instance, HPB recommended:

Try to imagine something which transcends your power of thought; say, the nature of the *dhyāni-chohan-s*. Then make the brain passive and pass beyond.⁴⁷

In this practice, we use the mental abilities to the fullest extent, but ultimately aim to transcend the activity of the thinking mind and rest in a state of darkness and silence.

One may question the value of this exercise, which seems to be devoid of any cognitive gain. However, dwelling in this “cloud of unknowing” is a vital goal of all mystical and yogic pursuits. It not only enables the seeker to transcend the mental realm but also empties the brain of its automatic activities, making it a fit vessel for the higher consciousness:

When the brain is thus rendered a blank, an impression from the heart may reach it and be retained.⁴⁸

It is important to note that the process discussed here should not be mistaken for merely sitting and leaving the mind a blank. HPB explicitly warned against this practice:

To “sit for yoga,” with only a superficial and often distorted knowledge of the real practice, is almost invariably fatal; for ten to one the student will either develop mediumistic powers in himself or lose time and get disgusted both with practice and theory.⁴⁹

The state that HPB recommended is one of full spiritual presence rather than mere emptiness. Thus, the attempt to leave behind the brain and mental processes should only come after making a decided effort towards the higher consciousness. If aspirants simply empty their minds without

undertaking the preliminary meditative work, they will end up developing a mediumistic condition.

Eventually, as we become proficient in this practice—

There comes a moment, in the highest meditation, when the lower *manas* is withdrawn into the Triad. . . . The *psychē*, thus separated from *kāma*, unites itself with the higher triad and becomes spiritual.⁵⁰

It is in this state of consciousness that we can tap into the *theosophia* or divine wisdom. The higher mind is illuminated by the radiance of *buddhi* and attains direct perception of spiritual realities:

Spiritual knowledge or esoteric wisdom [is] not attainable by ordinary intellectual processes, and only to be gained by mystical enlightenment or the awakening of the buddhic elements in Man.⁵¹

This is the real source of any teaching that can be referred to as “theosophical,” as opposed to philosophical and scientific knowledge that is based on empirical observation and rational speculation. In fact, HPB asserted that her own knowledge was acquired in higher states of consciousness:

Knowledge comes in visions, first in dreams and then in pictures presented to the inner eye during meditation. Thus have I been taught the whole system of evolution, the laws of being and all else that I know—the mysteries of life and death, the workings of karma. Not a word was spoken to me of all this in the ordinary way, except, perhaps, by way of confirmation of what was thus given me—nothing taught me in writing. And knowledge so obtained is so clear, so convincing, so indelible in the impression it makes upon the mind, that all other sources of information, all other methods of teaching with which we are familiar dwindle into insignificance in comparison with this.⁵²

In conclusion, in order to help humanity, we have to undergo a spiritual transformation. For this, it is not sufficient to simply gain knowledge of spiritual teachings; one must strive to realize the transcendental aspect of Theosophy. Admittedly, this accomplishment is difficult for most earnest seekers, but as HPB once stated, “though success be far off, a beginning must be made, and the path opened up.”⁵³ In this presentation, we have outlined some of the practices found in HPB’s writings to help us tread this path.

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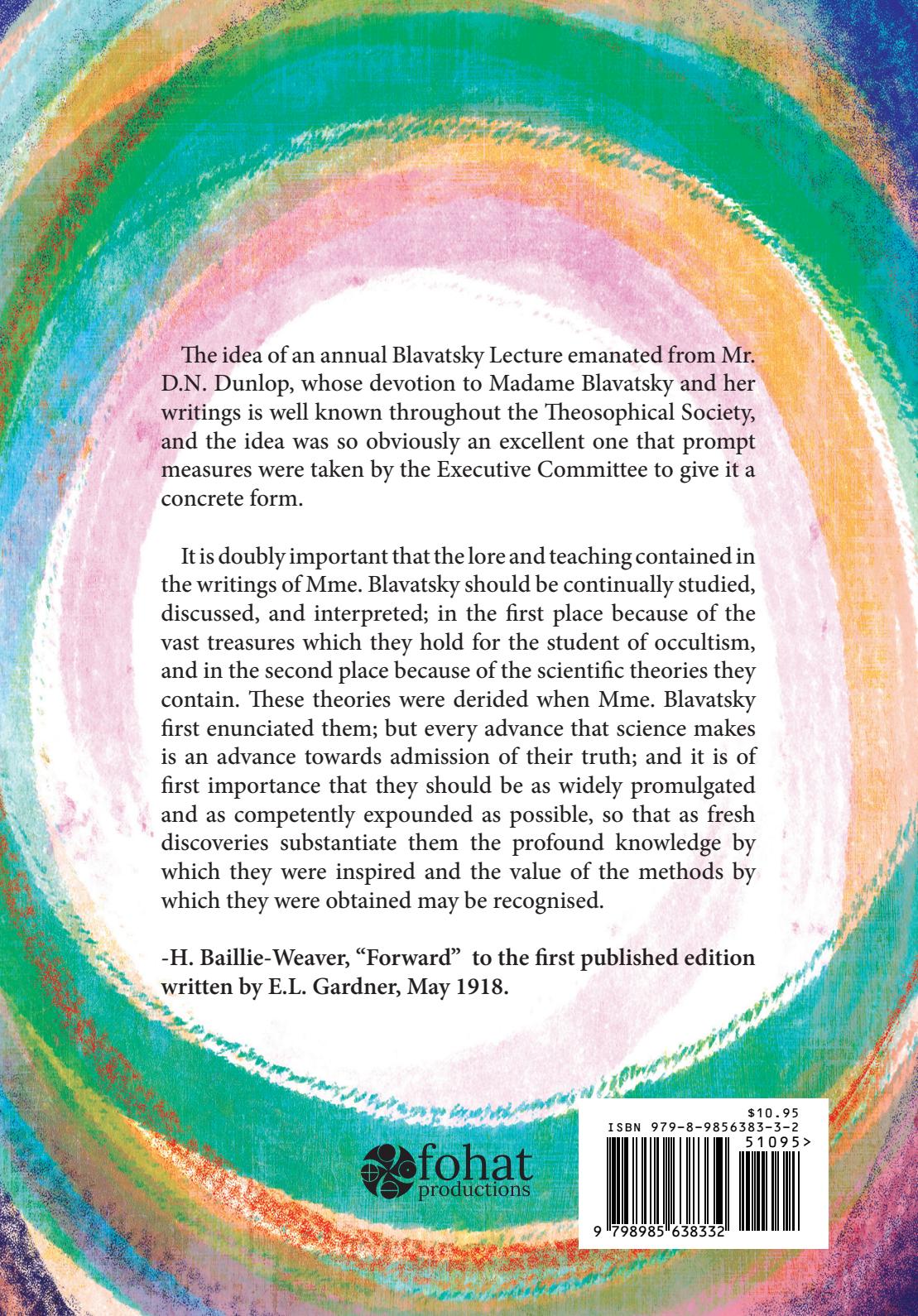
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Pablo Sender, PhD, joined the Theosophical Society (TS) in his native Argentina in 1996 where he received his doctorate in Biological Sciences. He has been a student of the teachings of H. P. Blavatsky for over twenty-five years, and is an international speaker and author. Pablo has lived and worked at the international headquarters of the TS in Adyar, India and the national center of the TS in America. He is currently at the Krotona Institute of Theosophy in Ojai, California.

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The idea of an annual Blavatsky Lecture emanated from Mr. D.N. Dunlop, whose devotion to Madame Blavatsky and her writings is well known throughout the Theosophical Society, and the idea was so obviously an excellent one that prompt measures were taken by the Executive Committee to give it a concrete form.

It is doubly important that the lore and teaching contained in the writings of Mme. Blavatsky should be continually studied, discussed, and interpreted; in the first place because of the vast treasures which they hold for the student of occultism, and in the second place because of the scientific theories they contain. These theories were derided when Mme. Blavatsky first enunciated them; but every advance that science makes is an advance towards admission of their truth; and it is of first importance that they should be as widely promulgated and as competently expounded as possible, so that as fresh discoveries substantiate them the profound knowledge by which they were inspired and the value of the methods by which they were obtained may be recognised.

-H. Baillie-Weaver, "Forward" to the first published edition written by E.L. Gardner, May 1918.

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