

*No. 149*

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# Theosophical & Digest

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VOLUME 38 NO. 1

The Hidden Wisdom Within  
the Human Being

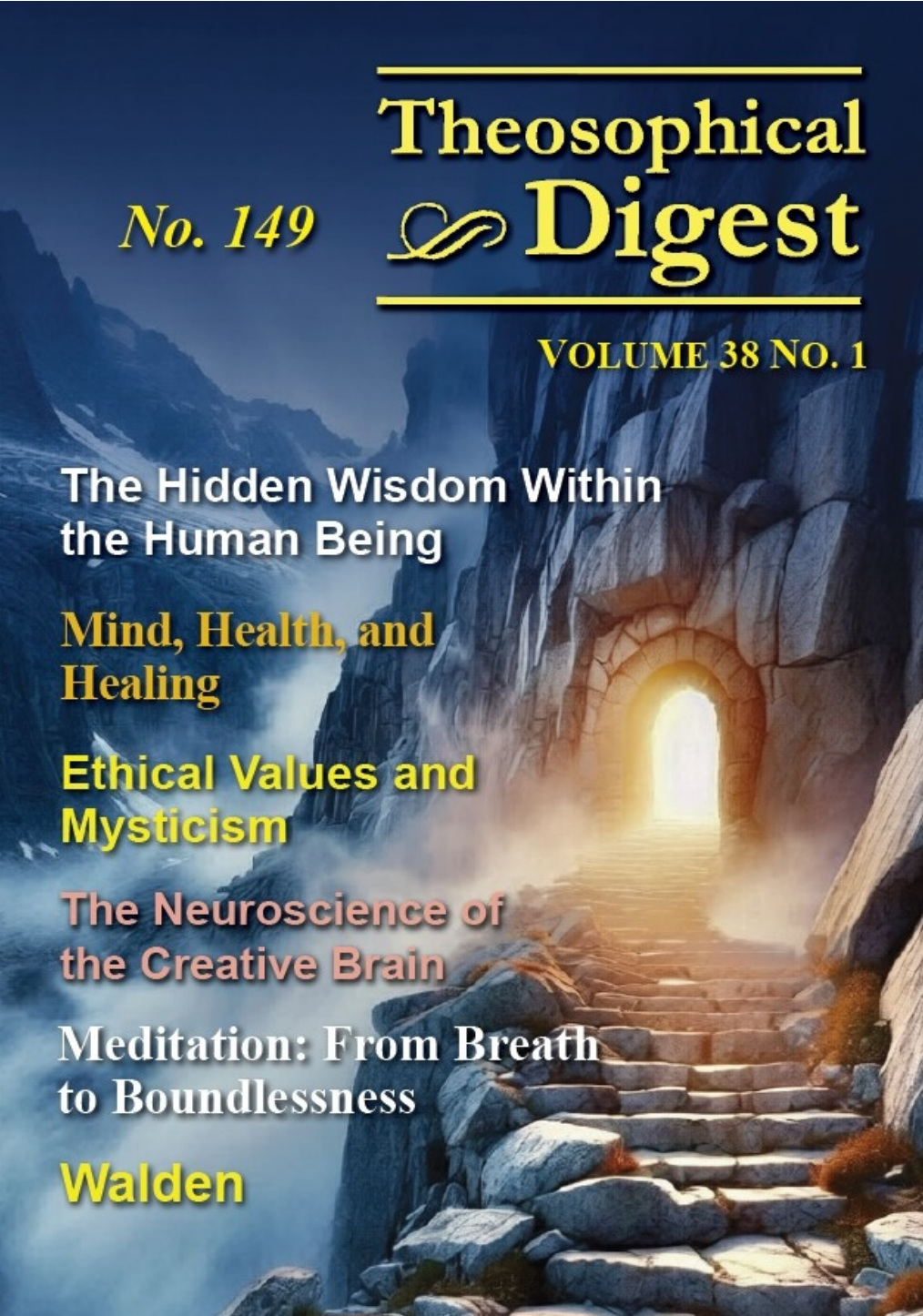
Mind, Health, and  
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Ethical Values and  
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The Neuroscience of  
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Meditation: From Breath  
to Boundlessness

Walden





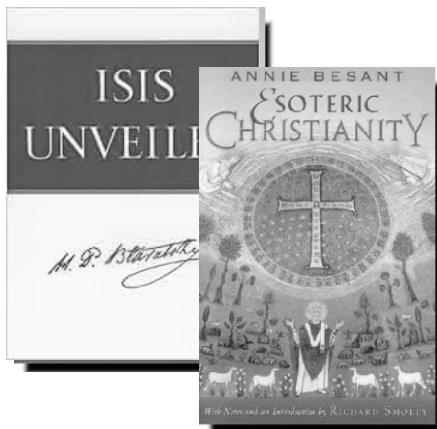
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Surrender and awareness as gateways to inner wisdom



## The Hidden Wisdom Within the Human Being

*Condensed from* THEOSOPHIA

BARRY BOWDEN

**W**HE human beings carry within us the wisdom of the universe, yet it lies out of reach of most of us today. We live in a world dominated by self-centered consciousness and a me-first attitude.

To make the necessary changes in ourselves so that we can access the wisdom, we need to develop a very honest attitude towards our own faults and shortcomings. The thought of this is generally enough to stop many from progressing. The reason for self-honesty is that we, as people, have blind spots that we don't see in our nature.

The questions of why and how are equally interesting. Where does our blindness come from? Our consciousness is one with

the higher, even though we are blind to it. Our emotional reactions are not us. They are reactions in the emotional body formed through many lives driven by the recent development of the lower mind.

When we react strongly, the mind is not there to witness it because it is swamped by the emotions we identify with causing us to go with the reaction, thereby losing consciousness of what really happened. The experience of negative emotions belongs to the personality, not the Self — it strengthens the personality and is only a growth tool. A very effective tool it is too, if we identify with it. In other words, we take it personally and get involved in

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***“Witnessing” . . . involves the two almost seemingly opposite actions to the lower mind: surrender and concentration.***

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the party that is happening at the time.

Awareness of this process has given rise to a personal tool I use today — which is not to take things personally. It doesn't stop you from feeling what is happening, however there is no need to join in with the reaction. Rather, to be aware of it and let it run its natural course and let it go. This is entering into “witnessing.”

The term “witnessing” cannot be fully understood until you are actively practicing it most of the time. It involves the two almost seemingly opposite actions to the lower mind: *surrender* and *concentration*. To practice witnessing, one cannot be the participant in what is happening. This technique is not taken from book-reading, but from daily experience of surrendering to the reaction that is happening. This is necessary.

In other words, one stops all resistance to the reaction. One surrenders and gives up all fight to the reaction.

Some words that fell into my hands recently from the book

*The Land of the Gods* (p. 21) by H.P. Blavatsky are where she quotes her adept teacher: “Your will is strongest if you have no will of your own, but remain in all things obedient to the Law.”

Surrender allows the universal to operate through us in this act and everything is then in perfect harmony with the universe; it is the universe. This technique is learned through years of practice rather than by just studying.

Where, then, does concentration come in? One must keep awareness of the reaction at the time, either emotional or mental. To carry this on when doing something else or having a simple conversation takes concentration to stay with it. This sounds complex and to the worldly mind, it is. However, the higher mind can do this without any problem after years of practice. It can even become almost effortless. The higher mind is the “witness” that is, in its natural state; it is not bound by the rules of the lower and finite world.

With this practice, many of the ordinary problems of life become a learning ground. For example, when impatience appears, instead of going with the feelings, one sees the commotion in action as a witness. The practice shows the impatience to our inner senses and preserves it as emotional disharmony. However, the mind is the instigator. When one is in surrender, it allows the uni-

versal to operate and restore harmony to the lower world.

Many of life's problems reveal themselves to us in this way. This state is also devoid of analysis and comparison. There is no movement of the mind at all in this process. It is always still. There are questions that arise with this practice, this notion of developing our inner senses as opposed to the outer senses which we take for granted and take us towards ignorance, not wisdom. It would seem obvious that if there is an inner life, then there must be inner senses that are impersonal and not the servants of the personal.

Personal life is often made up of disharmony and disputes with ourselves, even though we will see them as disputes with others. Such is the nature of the dream-world of the mind. When one begins to wake, we are waking from the dream of the mind and its identity problems of the personality. The lower mind creates a false "I" and the higher dissolves it. The whole notion of the lower mind is strengthened by pain. It is the pain that makes it seem real. Pain produces suffering and this is generated by resistance to feeling pain. As the renowned psychiatrist Carl Jung said, "What you resist persists."

Resistance is generated by the mind, which is the seat of the personality. This, in turn, allows pain to stay and become suffer-

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*Personal life is often made up of disharmony and disputes with ourselves, even though we will see them as disputes with others.*

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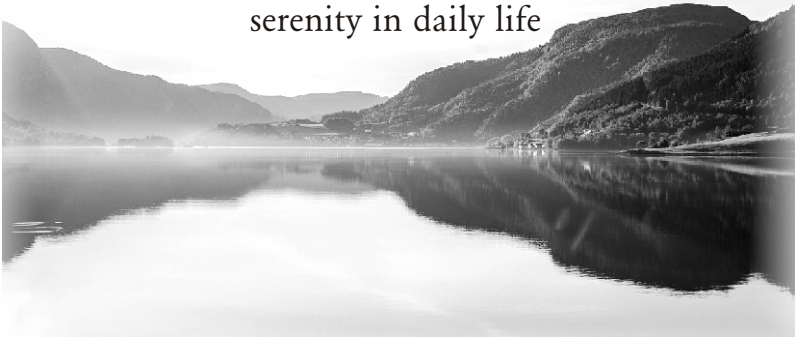
ing. Surrender, being opposite to resistance, painlessly allows pain to dissolve. This can bring us to a problem in terms of not applying effort. This is both true and false. True in the higher mind and false in the lower. It takes effort and discipline to practice surrender during daily life. I urge you to try this during the night when some problem keeps you awake!

The problems of understanding disappear with discipline and effort. They begin to reveal their actions through observations. It takes effort to develop concentration, to bring the lower mind to rest on one thing and not struggle. When surrender is practiced with discipline, it begins to awaken the inner senses.

With stability of practice, the effort needed slowly lessens and the higher mind can gradually take over this action. It can, at times, be almost effortless.

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Ancient wisdom for cultivating  
serenity in daily life



## Plutarch on Serenity of Mind

*Condensed from* QUEST  
ERICA GEORGIADES

PLUTARCH (AD c.45-c.120) was a distinguished priest of Apollo at the oracle of Delphi. He was also a historian and Middle Platonist philosopher whose legacy has profoundly influenced the world. Among his extensive writings, his treatise *On Contentment* (*Peri euthumias*, often translated as *On Serenity of Mind*) is especially noteworthy for those aspiring to lead a genuinely philosophical and theosophical life.

In this work, Plutarch meticulously curates a diverse range of philosophical insights on contentment, drawing not only from his own wisdom but also from the teachings of philosophers and

poets such as Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, Euripides, Hesiod, Homer, Epicurus, and Cratus of Thebes.

By incorporating the ideas of numerous thinkers, including himself, Plutarch showcased the richness and depth of classical Hellenic philosophy as a practical guide to living a life of contentment and achieving serenity of mind. This work also shows that classical philosophy, rather than being a merely dialectical, metaphysical, and analytical discipline, was a way of life that emphasized self-knowledge, contemplation, reverence for the Divine, and, one could argue, achieving enlightenment. The result is a wonderful and time-

less source of living wisdom for everyday life, from which every person thirsting for a truly theosophical life can draw guidance and inspiration.

The word philosophy comes from the ancient Greek *philein*, meaning to love, and *sophia*, meaning wisdom, so it literally translates as love of wisdom. The term was coined by the great pre-Socratic philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras.

The word theosophy is derived from the Greek *theos*, god, and *sophia*. Hence, it is often translated as divine wisdom or wisdom of God. It presupposes the existence of the divine, the sacred, and a transcendent source of wisdom that can only be drawn from the waters of *Mnemosyne*, or remembrance. This is the sacred spring flowing from our soul or higher self, which Plato associates with remembering one's divine nature.

In the Platonic tradition, in order to remember one's divine nature, it is necessary to live a noble and virtuous life, full of love for wisdom and compassion for all beings. But this is not enough. It is also necessary to thirst for union with the Divine or, as H. P. Blavatsky says in *The Voice of the Silence*, to "thirst for Wisdom."

Plutarch's insights on living a life that leads to serenity of mind and contentment provide work for those thirsty for wisdom.

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***Classical philosophy, rather than being a merely dialectical, metaphysical, and analytical discipline, was a way of life that emphasized self-knowledge, contemplation, reverence for the Divine, and, one could argue, achieving enlightenment.***

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Some of the main topics addressed in the treatise can be broadly classified as follows:

1. Praise the divine.
2. Apathy and seclusion are not remedies for the soul.
3. Do not seek *eudaimonia* (happiness) in material goods; instead, practice simplicity and moderation.
4. Develop balance and self-control by cultivating a positive state of mind.
5. Live in the present.
6. Exercise prudence and learn from nature.

In exploring each of these, it is important to bear in mind that classical philosophers generally held that the art of living should be practiced daily and repeatedly, much like athletes who need daily training to prepare for the Olympic games. By con-

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*In the Platonic tradition, in order to remember one's divine nature, it is necessary to live a noble and virtuous life, full of love for wisdom and compassion for all beings.*

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trast, Plutarch writes, “those who are without skill and sense as to how they should live, like sick people whose bodies can endure neither heat nor cold, are elated by good fortune and depressed by adversity” (467b).

Plutarch refers to the need to reach a state of mind indifferent to pleasure and pain, happiness and sorrow, good fortune and misfortune. In order to achieve such a state, it is necessary to practice art of living. The importance of achieving a similar state of mind is also emphasized in *The Voice of the Silence*, where Blavatsky likens it to *titiksha*, which she defines as a state “of supreme indifference; submission, if necessary, to what is called ‘pleasures and pains for all,’ but deriving neither pleasure nor pain from such submission — in short, the becoming physically, mentally, and morally indifferent and insensible to either pleasure or pain” (Blavatsky, 93). Such indifference does

not mean apathy but achieving an inner state in which one will not be carried away by pleasure or pain.

**To Praise the Divine.** Plutarch highlights Xenophon’s idea that it is important to remember and praise the divine on a daily basis, in every moment of your life, not only in difficult times, but also in times of happiness. He proposed that if we want to live a life full of eudaimonia, serenity, peace, and contentment, we should praise the divine amidst joy or sorrow, peace or adversity.

He further hinted that such a practice will lead us closer to our soul or higher self: “For as savage dogs become excited at every strange cry and are soothed by the familiar voice only, so also the passions of the soul, when they are raging wild, are not easily allayed, unless customary and familiar arguments are at hand to curb the excited passions” (465b).

Praising the Divine, then, is related to connecting our life with a consciousness of our divine nature.

**Apathy and Seclusion Are Not Remedies for the Soul.** Plutarch emphasizes that it is wrong to think that in order to achieve serenity of mind, we should avoid politics or worldly affairs, retreating into nature and practice quietness “on a mattress” (465d). It is wrong to

think that seclusion is a remedy for the soul, because an ill person needs exercise and be active to heal. Similarly, in order to live a philosophical life, we should be active in the world. He also cites Plato's view that in facing adversities, we should remain as calm as possible, reflect on the circumstances, and try to make the best of it as it were with the fall of the dice, to determine the movements of our affairs with reference to the numbers that turn up, in the way that reason indicates would be best, and instead of stumbling like children, clapping one's hands to the stricken spot and wasting the time in wailing, ever to accustom the soul to devote itself at once to the curing of the hurt and the raising up of what has fallen. (Plato, *Republic* 604c-d)

To reinforce this idea, Plutarch gives us a wonderful example of how we should face challenges and adversities in life: "Sensible persons, like bees, extract honey from thyme, the hardest and driest plant." (467c).

In other words, instead of seeking isolation or whining about hardships and adversities, we should — like the bees, who can make honey from thyme—make the best of the adversities and challenges we may face in life. Contentment, serenity of mind, and eudaimonia are not achieved by inaction but by righteous deeds. Therefore, do not

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*Classical philosophers generally held that the art of living should be practiced daily and repeatedly, much like athletes who need daily training to prepare for the Olympic games.*

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seek seclusion from the world, but learn to resolve the most difficult situations with a serene state of mind.

**Practice Simplicity and Moderation.** We should not seek eudaimonia in material possessions such as money and fame, for contentment, serenity, and simplicity need to be practiced constantly. Part of this daily practice is to focus on the good we have. For example, if we lose a friend, a family member, we may feel sad and suffer. Yet in the face of adversity, the mind should not be allowed to be immersed in pain and suffering. It is important to focus constantly on the good we have instead of allowing the mind to be violently dragged toward adversities.

**Cultivate a Positive State of Mind.** The evil that we may encounter in life, such as anger, jealousy, and gossip, should not preoccupy our mind and heart, negatively affecting our mental

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***We should face  
adversities with inner  
harmony and self-control.  
To achieve such serenity,  
it is important first to  
accept the fact that there  
are both good and evil,  
positive and negative  
circumstances in life.***

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state or cause us sadness and grief (468d). Instead, we should face adversities with inner harmony and self-control. To achieve such serenity, it is important first to accept the fact that there are both good and evil, positive and negative circumstances in life. “Every man has within himself the store-rooms of tranquillity and discontent, and that the jars containing blessings and evils are not stored ‘on the threshold of Zeus,’ but are in the soul” (473c; the “threshold of Zeus” is an allusion to the *Iliad*, 24:527).

The goal, then, is to achieve balance and harmony between these two different poles. This requires constant practice, training our minds to see and focus on the good instead of being carried away by things that cause us anxiety, anger, and sadness.

Plutarch gave two examples to highlight this principle: the patient and the musician. A patient who finds it difficult to eat does not blame or grieve because others can eat, but tries to heal so that he too can enjoy his meal. In the same way, when the mind is drawn violently into negative thoughts, we become ill. In such a case, it is necessary to heal our soul instead of blaming the circumstances. To achieve this, we need to constantly turn the mind away from anything that causes pain and distress, focusing attention on the good we have and making the best of it: “Why do you scrutinize too keenly your own trouble, my good sir, and continue to make it ever vivid and fresh in your mind, but do not direct your thoughts to those good things which you have?” (469b).

To use another analogy: before mastering a musical instrument, a musician will play unpleasant sounds, because the instrument can inherently produce both harmonic and disharmonic sounds. It depends on the skill of the musician to play harmonic melodies, which is achieved by constant practice.

We are the musicians, and life is our musical instrument. We must learn to play it properly to produce harmonic melodies. This can only be achieved through extensive training and practice. “For the harmony of the

universe, like that of a lyre or a bow, is by alternatives, and in mortal affairs there is nothing pure and unmixed” (473f?474a).

Similarly, in life there is not only the positive or negative, but a mixture of the two. The right combination leads us to the beautiful, to the good. The musician achieves harmony by avoiding disharmonious sounds, eventually mastering the instrument and producing beautiful tunes.

We must do the same in our lives. Plutarch cites Socrates as an example:

When Socrates heard one of his friends remark how expensive the city [Athens] was, saying, “Chian wine costs a mina, a purple robe three minae, a half-pint of honey five drachmas,” he took him by the hand and led him to the meal-market, “Half a peck for an obol! the city is cheap”; then to the olive-market, “A quart for two coppers!,” then to the clothes-market, “A sleeveless vest for ten drachmas! the city is cheap.” We also, therefore, whenever we hear another say that our affairs are insignificant and in a woeful plight because we are not consuls or governors, may reply, “Our affairs are splendid and our life is enviable: we do not beg, or carry burdens, or live by flattery.”

In showing the positive side of things, Plutarch suggests that as a philosopher, he was constantly focusing on the good he had instead of allowing the mind to be carried away by any evil that may affect his life.

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*Plutarch advises us to live in the present instead of allowing ourselves to be carried away by thoughts of the past or expectations of the future.*

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**Live in the Present.** Plutarch advises us to live in the present instead of allowing ourselves to be carried away by thoughts of the past or expectations of the future. Nor should we allow our minds to be lost in pain and suffering resulting from adversities.

Many people are insensitive because their minds are not focused on the present. Both future expectations and the recollection of past events carry the mind away from the present, which may result in a state of sadness, intense desire, or fear.

To achieve serenity of mind, it is important to comprehend the immense value of everything experienced in the present moment. To realize this, Plutarch suggests that we imagine how life would be without what we have right now.

**Learn from Nature.** The wise one hopes for the best but prepares for the worst. Happiness brings more joy to those who are not afraid of the future. We need

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*Plutarch . . . emphasizes that nature is not only sacred but divine and is full of contentment and serenity. We just need to observe it with the light of our soul.*

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to reflect on the transience of life and the fact that we will all leave our physical bodies one day. Today, you know that you are healthy, but you also know that tomorrow you may become ill. Today, you know that you have all your family members close to you, but you also know that tomorrow they may be gone. The awareness of the possibility of losing what we have and the acceptance of this fact without fear is an exercise in prudence.

To learn from nature, to appreciate the beauty and light that exist in all beings, and to respect all forms of life are other ideas that we can draw from Plutarch. He emphasizes that nature is not only sacred but divine and is full of contentment and serenity. We just need to observe it with the light of our soul:

For the universe is a most holy temple; into it man is introduced through birth as a spectator, not of hand-made or immovable images, but of those sensible representations of knowable things that the divine mind, says Plato, has revealed, representations which have innate within themselves the beginnings of life and motion, sun and moon and stars, rivers which ever discharge fresh water, and earth which sends forth nourishment for plants and animals. Since life is a most perfect initiation into these things and a ritual celebration of them, it should be full of tranquillity and joy. (477d)

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In the silence of your soul, you will found the blossoms of peace.

KHALIL GIBRAN

There is nothing so much like God in all the universe as silence.

MEISTER ECKHART

When the mind is quiet, all is Self.

SRI NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ

All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.

BLAISE PASCAL

Vegetarianism as essential truth-force  
in Gandhi's ethics



## Truth Force and Vegetarianism

*Condensed from* COMPASSIONATE SPIRIT  
KEITH AKERS

Spiritual progress does demand at some stage that we should cease to kill our fellow creatures for the satisfaction of our bodily wants.

MAHATMA GANDHI

**T**HIS month marks the 77th anniversary of the violent death of the apostle of non-violence: on January 30, 1948, Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated in India. Many throughout the world admire Gandhi and want to work for peace. Few of these admirers, however, really understand Gandhi's own words about what peace requires: a commitment to nonviolence which includes both animals and humans.

Gandhi's vegetarianism is usually ignored. The motion picture epic *Gandhi* (which appeared in the early 1980's) popularized the life and ideas of the Mahatma, yet during the length of this otherwise excellent motion picture, there was never a single reference to Gandhi's vegetarianism.

Part of the reason for the "invisibility" of Gandhi's vegetarianism is that so many in India are vegetarian anyway. However, Gandhi was vegetarian as part of a conscious ethical choice, not just adherence to Indian culture, as he makes clear in his *An Autobiography*. Gandhi actually experimented with meat-eating in his youth, then gave up meat consumption just to please his

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***Gandhi had a straightforward concern for animals. Nonviolence includes nonviolence towards animals.***

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mother. Later, in England as a young student, he read a pamphlet by Henry Salt entitled "A Plea for Vegetarianism" which completely convinced him. "From that day forward," Gandhi says in his *Autobiography*, "I may claim to have become a vegetarian by choice" — and the spread of vegetarianism "henceforward became my mission."

Gandhi had a straightforward concern for animals. Nonviolence includes nonviolence towards animals — the devotee of *ahimsa* (or nonviolence) "shuns to the best of his ability the destruction of the tiniest creature." He was a lacto-vegetarian, consuming goat's milk, but resolutely avoided meat. When Gandhi spoke to the Vegetarian Society in England in 1931, he said that he would never eat meat even in the face of death: "If anybody said that I should die if I did not take beef-tea or mutton, even under medical advice, I would prefer death." Gandhi viewed moral commitment as essential to the vegetarian cause. He ob-

served that those who became vegetarian solely for health reasons often had great difficulty in remaining vegetarians, while those who were vegetarian for ethical reasons were much more consistent in their practice.

There is a second aspect to Gandhi's vegetarianism, and that is Gandhi's radical economic views. For Gandhi, violence is inherent in any form of exploitation or inequality. "If we are to be nonviolent," he said, "we must then not wish for anything on this earth which even the meanest or the lowest of human beings cannot have." Gandhi lived a very simple lifestyle, insisting on sharing in manual labor and at his death had only a very few possessions.

This has obvious implications for anyone eating a typical American-style diet. There is no way that all humans could ever be "raised" to such a destructive standard of living. The earth's resources cannot sustain even the meat-eating of a small, privileged minority; it certainly cannot sustain such a massive waste of resources by all humans, were everyone to eat even half the meat of the average American.

It has been said that vegetarianism alone cannot solve the world's problems; even if the world were to become entirely vegetarian tomorrow, other problems remain (overpopulation, overconsumption, etc.)

which might even worsen the problem of world hunger. There is some truth in this. For everyone to become vegetarian overnight, would be the ecological equivalent of winning the lottery; it would release vast resources of land, water and energy. But just as real-life lottery winners sometimes actually wind up in debt due to mismanagement of their resources, so the human race, if it fails to act in accordance with Gandhi's universalism, might still wind up with more environmental problems than before. We need to focus on regulating all of our actions on the principle of global equality, as well as our actions with regard to food.

Gandhi's most famous idea was that of "truth-force" (or *satyagraha*) as a means of resisting the British rule of India. But the essence of truth-force is the repudiation of violence and the use of *ahimsa* (or nonviolence): "ahimsa and truth are so intertwined that it is almost impossible to separate them." And how can one be nonviolent without being vegetarian? If we still eat meat, are we not part of the world of violence toward animals and the earth? If we still eat meat, are we not part of a system of global indifference to those who are starving? Does not

truth-force require vegetarianism?

Gandhi warned against abrasive relationships with meat-eaters. Vegetarians need to be tolerant of others if they want to convert them to vegetarianism. However, we should certainly not remain silent about vegetarianism. "Truth hates secrecy . . . there must be no watering down of the ideal. . . . A *satyagrahi* [practitioner of truth-force] has no secrets to keep from his opponent or so-called enemy."

Many are reluctant to invoke vegetarianism in their work for peace. Some do not even see any connection between vegetarianism and peace at all — they think that violence towards people is wrong, but that this can be neatly separated from violence towards billions of innocent animals each year.

None of this has support in Gandhi's thought. Quite the contrary: for Gandhi both vegetarianism — and speaking out about vegetarianism — is a moral necessity. While we should adopt humility and tolerance in our relations with meat-eaters, we as vegetarians are not just allowed, but required, to voice our ideals. Truth-force requires nothing less.

[HTTPS://COMPASSIONATESPIRIT.COM/WPBL0G/1998/01/01/TRUTH-FORCE-AND-VEGETARIANISM/#MORE-2616](https://compassionatespirit.com/wpblog/1998/01/01/truth-force-and-vegetarianism/#more-2616)





# Life Review at the Gate of Death

*Condensed from QUEST*  
ANNTI SAVINAINEN

**A**FTER five decades of research, the science of the near-death experience (NDE) has provided independent data on the life review. People who have survived heart attacks or other life threatening situations sometimes talk about how some or all instances of their lives were available to them in a very brief time. Expressions like “I saw my life flash before my eyes” have become part of Western culture.

I will discuss and compare life reviews from the perspectives of both NDE research and Theosophy. These perspectives have intriguing commonalities as well as some differences. First, however, I will present the first pub-

lished account of the life review, which contains many features that also appear in the NDE research and Theosophical descriptions.

**The First Published Account of a Life Review.** British naval officer Francis Beaufort (1774-1857) provided the first published account of life review. The experience, which was induced when he nearly drowned in 1791, was written down in a letter circa 1825 and published in the autobiography of the English naval officer Sir John Barrow in 1847. Following is an excerpt:

Though the senses were thus deadened, not so the mind; its activity seemed to be invigorated, in a ratio

which defies all description — for thought rose after thought with a rapidity of succession that is not only indescribable, but probably inconceivable, by any one who has not himself been in a similar situation . . . Thus travelling backwards, every past incident of my life seemed to glance across my recollection in retrograde succession; not, however, in mere outline, as here stated, but the picture filled up with every minute and collateral feature; in short, the whole period of my existence seemed to be placed before me in a kind of panoramic review, and each act of it seemed to be accompanied by a consciousness of right or wrong, or by some reflection on its cause or its consequences; indeed, many trifling events which had been long forgotten then crowded into my imagination, and with the character of recent familiarity . . .

The length of time that was occupied by this deluge of ideas, or rather the shortness of time into which they were condensed, I cannot now state with precision, yet certainly not two minutes could not have elapsed from the moment of suffocation to that of my being hauled up (in Barrow, 399-401).

Beaufort's account recapitulates the essential features of the life review:

1. The operation of the mind is highly enlightened.
2. The memories are detailed, and long-forgotten memories are available.
3. The memories are described as being panoramic, although

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*Beaufort's account recapitulates the essential features of the life review: . . . The operation of the mind is highly enlightened. . . .*

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they are viewed in retrograde order.

4. There is a moral evaluation of the actions and awareness of their causes and consequences.

5. The time during which the life review takes place is at most two minutes.

**Scientific Research on the Life Review.** Many near-death experiencers (NDErs) describe their life reviews in terms of watching a movie of their own life. Some NDErs see their whole life with detailed memories, whereas some glimpse only fragments. At any rate, they view themselves from a third-person perspective. Moreover, some people can feel how their actions and words made other people — and animals — feel. Here is an excerpt from such a life review:

It was the proverbial “life flashing before my eyes” or life review, as I have since heard it called. I would describe this as a long series of feelings based on numerous actions in my life. The difference was that not only did I experience the feelings again, but I had some sort

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of empathetic sense of the feeling of those around me who were affected by my actions. In other words, I also felt what others felt about my life. (Long and Perry, 108-09)

The life review often reveals that little acts of kindness are important and that our everyday judgment of our actions or inactions may not be correct:

I saw how acting, or not acting, rippled in effect towards other people and their lives. It wasn't until then that I understood how each little decision or choice affects the world. I learned that many of the things I thought were "wrong" were not necessarily wrong. I also learned of opportunities to love others that I passed up. (Long and Perry, 114)

In addition to actions and words, thoughts have an impact on the world: "I found out that not even your thoughts are lost . . . every thought was there" (Lorimer, 13).

Thoughts have their effect on other sentient beings as well as on nature:

For me, it was a total reliving of every thought I had ever thought,

every word I had ever spoken, and every deed I had ever done; plus the effect of every each thought, word, and deed on everyone and anyone who had ever come within my environment or sphere of influence whether I knew them or not (including unknown passers-by on the street); plus the effect of each thought, word and deed on weather, plants, animals, soil, trees, water, and air. (Lorimer, 14)

About half of the informants in a 1995 study by researchers Ian Stevenson and Emily Williams Cook reported that they remembered their "whole life" or "everything." The same study reported that 23% of informants had a simultaneous sequence, a panoramic memory, whereas 50% reported that their life review took place from birth or childhood to the present. Only 13% reported having a sequence of memories going from the present back to childhood.

Although the timing of the life review is difficult, Stevenson and Cook could place outer limits of duration in drowning cases to a few minutes and, in the case of falls, only a few seconds. In some reported cases, the duration of the life review was much longer (and occurred more slowly).

The judgment of past life actions is typically carried out by the NDErs themselves. However, the NDER is sometimes accompanied by a spiritual being who acts as a loving guide and helper and whose comments help put

their life in a higher perspective. There is rarely negative judgment by the spiritual being, although the NDERs can see the effects of their hurtful actions on other living beings. One crucial lesson conveyed by many NDERs is that there are only two things one takes to the other side: knowledge and love.

The life review and the NDE in general have a life-changing effect on the experiencers. Dr. Raymond Moody, who published *Life after Life*, the first book on the NDE, in 1975, has called it “one-minute psychotherapy.” Here is an excerpt on the aftereffects:

Over the years, I've undergone a number of changes. I feel a strong connection with nature . . . I've acquired a great sense of justice. I've become more patient and peaceful. I can see things in perspective now. My aggression is a thing of the past. I feel a strong inner urge to never lie again. I'd rather keep silent than tell a little white lie. I do struggle with deadlines: things must get done within a certain time . . . I enjoy life immensely . . . I believe that people have stopped living from the heart. (van Lommel, 47-48)

**Theosophical Descriptions of the Life Review.** The earliest Theosophical account of the life review is provided in a Mahatma letter from 1882:

At the last moment, the whole life is reflected in our memory and emerges from all the forgotten nooks and corners picture after

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*Thoughts have their effect on other sentient beings as well as on nature.*

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picture, one event after the other. The dying brain dislodges memory with a strong supreme impulse, and memory restores faithfully every impression entrusted to it during the period of the brain's activity . . . Yet from the last pulsation, from and between the last throbbing of his heart and the moment when the last spark of animal heat leaves the body — the brain thinks and the Ego lives over in those few brief seconds his whole life over. (Letter 93b, in Chin, 326)

This passage states that all memories are faithfully restored and lived by the Ego. This is an important distinction: the Ego, in Theosophy, does not refer to the personality or empirical ego, but to the higher self behind the personality. The higher self is the true essence of a human being, responsible for each incarnation and enriched by the spiritual efforts of the personality on earth. Notably, the judgment in the life review is not conducted by the mere personality but by a much wiser higher self.

Another interesting point is the duration of the life review: within a few seconds, all memories of the whole life are reviewed. This is consistent with

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some reported life reviews, for instance in the context of falling from heights.

The second Theosophical account of the life review is provided by HPB:

At the solemn moment of death every man, even when death is sudden, sees the whole of his past life marshalled before him, in its minutest details. For one short instant, the personal becomes one with the individual and all-knowing Ego. But this instant is enough to show him the whole chain of causes which have been at work during his life. He sees and now understands himself as he is, unadorned by flattery or self-deception. He reads his life, remaining as a spectator looking down into the arena he is quitting; he feels and knows the justice of all the suffering that has overtaken him. (Blavatsky, 162)

Blavatsky adds that the dying person understands their life in a much deeper way and “feels and knows” why they have suffered. This is possible because the personality becomes “one

with . . . the all-knowing Ego.” There seems to be an implicit element of evaluating the past life, since the dying person objectively understands themselves. All this takes place “for one short instant,” which is consistent with the passage in the Mahatma letter (“those few brief seconds”). Moreover, the dying individual is just a spectator of the unfolding memories.

**Pekka Ervast’s Account of the Life Review.** Pekka Ervast was the pioneer of the Finnish Theosophical movement. His most detailed account of the life review was provided in lectures from 1928-29. Here is an example:

When consciousness moves to the etheric brain during death, all memories are alive in front of us. Therefore, a person reviews the past life in all its details, although this happens very fast. What has happened in life through the decades is seen within half an hour as films in memory, yet everything happens in detail, while the person is outside the whole play . . . He does not live in his reminiscences as he did while being physically alive. He just watches the great play and judges it objectively, calling each thing — depending on its own quality — as good or bad, crime or merit, and so on. He remains in a great light, so to speak . . . In fact, the viewer is the personalized higher self. In death the solemn experience of memories is not due to the ordinary physical personality; instead, it is due to the higher self, the “I,” which is behind

the physical personality. (Marjannen et al., 37-38)

Ervast's account is in many respects consistent with the Theosophical descriptions above: he too talks about reviewing all details of a past life. This review takes place objectively, without an emotional component, and it is permeated with an ethical evaluation of all deeds. This is possible because the viewer is not the personality, but rather "the personalized higher self," which aligns with what the cited Theosophical authors have stated. But there is one difference from the other descriptions presented above: Ervast states that while the life review happens fast, it takes place "within half an hour," not seconds or days.

**Discussion.** Theosophical sources maintain that there is an objective evaluation of all deeds in the life review. The judgment aspect is consistent with the NDE descriptions, although Theosophical accounts differ from many (but not all) NDE accounts at in one respect: according to Theosophy, the emotional component is absent. Interestingly, the first written account of the NDE by Francis Beaufort is in line with the Theosophical view.

According to Theosophy, the second phase of the unfolding death process is entering *kamaloka* or the astral world. The soul will live through all the deeds,

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*Blavatsky adds that the dying person understands their life in a much deeper way and "feels and knows" why they have suffered.*

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words, and thoughts in kamaloka and intensely feel how their actions affected other sentient beings.

Incidentally, the perspective of later Theosophy differs from that of the Mahatma Letters. According to the latter, the deceased individual is unconscious in kamaloka rather than experiencing their actions. (Deaths resulting from accidents and suicides are exceptions to this rule.)

This life review in kamaloka can be very painful, but its purpose is to become free from earthly life and its digressions; some religions call this state purgatory. The purgatory state resembles the NDE descriptions of the life review, since in both cases the effect of past actions is felt the same way as other people felt them. The emotional aspect of the life review can cause remorse and a strong will within NDErs to make amends. Still, it does not appear to be painful in the same sense that Theosophical descriptions of kamaloka im-

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*The life review can have life-changing effects on NDErs. It can also be a life-changing experience for those who delve into these accounts.*

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ply. Rather, it seems that the emotional component of the NDE life review acts as a way of knowing how the world was affected by their actions.

To sum up, the many accounts of the NDE life review have interesting similarities and differences. On the one hand, they involve reviewing at least parts of past life deeds in order to understand how they affected others.

NDErs also recall long-forgotten memories. On the other hand, the details vary: some see all the memories at once in a panoramic style, some relive their life from childhood to present, and some relive from present to childhood. Moreover, some life reviews take place within a few seconds, whereas some last a few minutes (and others can take a considerably longer time).

The life review can have life-changing effects on NDErs. It can also be a life-changing experience for those who delve into these accounts. The life review reveals the ethical core of life shared by all great religions and true philosophies: compassion and love toward all sentient beings.

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When you leave this world, what you call death is but the closing of your eyes to open the to a wider vision. RUMI

Find out who it is that dies. Then you will know there is no death. SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

When I die, I will become what I truly am. MEISTER ECKHART

Life and death are one thread, the same line viewed from different sides. LAOTZU

Death is a stripping away of all that is not you. The secret of life is to die before you die, and find that there is no death.

ECKHART TOLLE

Seeing the world anew through  
openness and compassion



## Beginning Again With the Beginner's Mind and the Compassionate Heart

*Condensed from PAHINGALAY  
CHIRANJIVI*

**I**N his seminal book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Shunryu Suzuki — a Japanese Zen monk and teacher who helped popularize Zen Buddhism in the West — wrote the now-famous words, “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, in the expert’s there are few.” At first blush, this may seem like nothing more than a simple encouragement toward intellectual humility or openness to new ideas. But beneath this surface lies a deeper spiritual truth: that renewal, growth, and even awakening arise not from loading up on more knowledge or spiritual experience, but from

emptying ourselves — becoming, as it were, like children again — and seeing the world as if for the first time.

Beginner’s mind (*shoshin* in Japanese) is not naivety, but a cultivated openness — a radical receptivity that stands before the mystery of existence without grasping or judging. It is the mind that does not know and is therefore free to truly see. In this posture of wonder and humility, the spiritual path becomes alive again. When seen through the lens of the beginner’s mind, the sacred is no longer an abstract concept or distant goal, but something shimmering right

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***Beginner's mind . . . is the mind that does not know and is therefore free to truly see.***

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here in this very moment — in the breath, the sky, the eyes of another.

Yet, beginner's mind alone is not enough. To fully embody its spirit, we must root it in the compassionate heart — the heart that has been broken open by joy and sorrow alike. If the beginner's mind clears the space, the compassionate heart fills it with warmth. Without love, openness can become cold detachment; without wonder, even love can become routine. But together — mind and heart, seeing and loving — they become the wings of awakening. One!

Across spiritual traditions, this marriage of clarity and compassion is honored. In Christian mysticism, we are invited to become like little children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, not merely for innocence, but for that wide-eyed trust that sees God in all things. In the Sufi path, the *fana* or annihilation of the self prepares the heart to be fully present with the Beloved. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna calls for action free from attachment — a clarity of mind guided

by a heart attuned to dharma, or sacred duty. In Indigenous traditions, such as those of many Native American peoples, wisdom is inseparable from kinship with the land and all its creatures, requiring both reverent attention and loving stewardship. All of these point to the same invitation: to meet the world freshly, and to meet it with love.

In the course of our spiritual journey, we accumulate experiences, practices, and insights. These are valuable, but they can subtly turn into baggage — lenses through which we filter new teachings or life events. The very wisdom we gain can calcify into identity. “I know this already,” we might think. “I’ve been through this before.” But the moment we believe we have arrived, we cease to see what is still unfolding.

This is why beginning again is so crucial. To live with beginner's mind is not to regress, but to return — again and again — to the present moment, to let go of the script and rediscover the sacred in what is right before us. It is to bow to the mystery, not from ignorance but from reverence. And to do so with a heart awakened by compassion and true love — a heart that does not separate the seeker from the suffering, or the sacred from the ordinary. In this way, every pause becomes an opening, every silence a renewal — a quiet re-

minder that life itself is the continual grace of beginning again. What once seemed ordinary reveals hidden radiance, and what once felt heavy is lightened by the grace of awareness. Beginning again means trusting that the well of life never runs dry, that each moment offers water fresh and clear.

In truth, beginner's mind and compassionate heart are not separate. One opens the door; the other invites the world in. Together, they lead us not forward on the path, but deeper into it — to a placeless place where Love is not something we strive for but who we really are.

So we begin again. Not because we failed before, but because beginning is itself the practice. In each breath, each meeting, each sunrise, the invitation is always the same: to see with new eyes and to love with an open heart — again and again, until we fully awaken. And if awakening seems far away, still we trust the rhythm of returning. Each small act of beginning is like a seed planted in the soil of eternity,

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***In truth, beginner's mind  
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certain to bloom in its own time. In this way, the path is never lost, for it is renewed in every step we take with sincerity and wonder.

In the end, every step, every breath, and every act of love in the lived awareness of our essential Oneness is a turning toward the Divine — the boundless Presence that is both our sourceless Source and glorious Destiny; the same Light that shone in Christ, the Buddha, and all the Holy Ones who walked this earth, and that forever whispers in the stillness of our own hearts, ever inviting us Home.

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CITY, PHILIPPINES



If you cannot find truth right where you are, where else do you expect to find it?

DOGEN ZENJI

To understand that you do not understand is the beginning of wisdom.

LAO TZU

To come to know everything, desire to know nothing.

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS



# Quotes and Thoughts

The aim of education is not only to inform but to transform.

SRIAUROBINDO

The light of the soul shines when the clouds of desire and fear are cleared away.

ANNIE BESANT

The soul always knows what to do to heal itself. The challenge is to silence the mind.

CAROLINE MYSS

In the practice of tolerance, one's enemy is the best teacher.

DALAILAMA

Parents are not only the custodians of the child's body, but the gardeners of the soul.

MARIA MONTESSORI

The more light you allow within you, the brighter the world you live in will be.

SHAKTI GAWAIN

To be humble is to be teachable at every stage of life.

MAHATMA GANDHI

The greatest discovery of any generation is that human beings

can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.

WILLIAM JAMES

The purpose of human life is to serve and to show compassion and the will to help others.

ALBERT SCHWEITZER

Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.

C. S. LEWIS

Patience is the companion of wisdom.

ST. AUGUSTINE

Courage is grace under pressure.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.

MOTHER TERESA

The quieter you become, the more you can hear.

RAM DASS

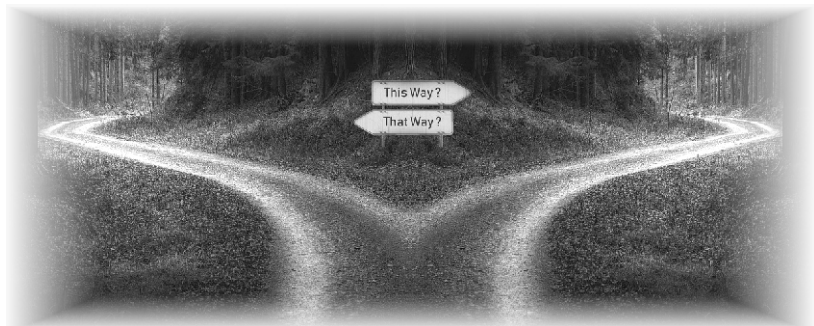
Where love and wisdom meet, there lies true understanding.

HELENA P. BLAVATSKY

The heart that gives, gathers.

TAO TE CHING

## Embracing the mystery at the heart of our search for truth



# The Value of Uncertainty

*Condensed from* THE AMERICAN THEOSOPHIST  
SRI MADHAVA ASHISH

THE journey into the unknown through a trackless jungle: If we are truthful to ourselves, we must admit that we do not know what it is that we seek; we do not even know that there is anything to be found. If we already knew it, there would be no search; we would have only to recall it to mind.

All that we have heard about God, the Spirit, Atman, the Void, derives at its best from other people's experience; and we have not yet shared that experience. It may be their knowledge, but it is not ours; and that is why we are still seekers and not finders. The experience they claim is so foreign to what we call "normal"

waking experience that we cannot share it, even by comparison with familiar events. We cannot even be sure that we understand their words in the senses that they use them. We hear of a path, even of many paths that lead to the same goal. Yet no one who has blazed a trail through the jungle of his mind has thereby left a trail in ours.

We cannot follow in his footsteps. No one but ourselves has ever trodden or can ever tread our private jungles. Beyond the jungle, they say, there lies a mystery. But the mists that shroud it are not dispersed for us when they melt before another seeker's gaze. The mystery comes to

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*There is something in us that responds to the answers given by those who have found, and responds to their affirmation of an ultimate reality which can be experienced.*

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the very edge of the jungle and entices us with promises of joy, knowledge, power, and fulfillment. We see its reflections in the mysteries of birth and death, the joys of love, temporal power, the satisfactions of appetites, and the mysteries of the material universe. Yet the very solidity of the mirrors makes us doubt our perception of the reflected mystery.

In the face of these inherent uncertainties, what is it that drives us to seek? It is not just the voices of those who affirm the reality of the goal, for there are as many, perhaps more, voices that deny it. Nor is it just the tendency of the human mind to evade the immediacy of real life by pursuing abstractions: religion may sometimes be an opiate, but no real search for the ground of being can be construed as an escape from reality. There is something in us that drives us

to question and to seek the answers to our questions.

There is something in us that responds to the answers given by those who have found, and responds to their affirmation of an ultimate reality which can be experienced. It is as though that "something" does already know what we seek. It responds, as the string of a violin vibrates when the note to which it is tuned is sounded by another instrument.

This subtle resonance stirs us on a level as deep and as difficult to isolate as the homing instinct of our animal natures. Often, we seek to satisfy the longings it inspires with outer substitutes that seem to harmonize with its urgings. We may join a church or a religious society, take up the practice of yoga, communicate with the dead, become followers of the fashionable guru, or just remain content with reading books and trying to be good. And if, as so many people do, we become bigots in support of our chosen sect, it is because the inner resonance is so small in relation to the doubts that invade us that we dare not let go of the one bit of the harmony we have recognized.

We seem, in fact, to be caught between the rationalizations of the surface mind and the urgings of something so deep as to be almost unrecognizable as part of ourselves.

And since we are normally aware of things only when they find their way into the surface mind, the terms in which we become aware of this urge depend on how our surface minds interpret it. The divergences of these interpretations run through the whole gamut of possible human attitudes.

If we are fortunate, we may be able in one lifetime to leave these outer reflections of the inner call — reflections distorted in the troubled waters of life — and pass to a clearer formulation of what it is we feel ourselves called to seek. But we are still apt to accept the ready-made formulations of religious and philosophical systems. The inner resonances now sound more clearly, and we find ourselves responding to words, phrases, and concepts. Feeling wells up within us, triggered by names and ideas that seem infused with the being and power of what they represent. And here lies a trap for the unwary, for we are apt to take the concept for the reality and subtly assume that our pleasurable feeling is experience of what we seek.

A time comes when we need to question the terms of our search, terms drawn from the religious or philosophical systems with which we are familiar, and which arouse what we feel to be the right sorts of resonances in our beings. These terms are all

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*And here lies a trap for the unwary, for we are apt to take the concept for the reality and subtly assume that our pleasurable feeling is experience of what we seek.*

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very well so far as they go, because they have the validity that inheres in anything that has withstood the test of time. For countless generations they have expressed man's faith in an ultimate knowledge, and they were used by men who achieved that knowledge. We may even argue that we need no other terms.

Adequately or inadequately these terms express our aim and we humbly seek only to approach the mystery which others, greater than ourselves, have unveiled.

Yet a niggling doubt remains. Despite the promptings of the soul and faith in whatever teachings are received, we know that in this search there can be no substitute for personal experience. We are not looking merely for an adequate philosophy which will put the problems of life into a rational perspective and so make them more bear-

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***We seek the answer that only we can know, just as only we can eat our own meals.***

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able. We are not looking for someone to tell us the secrets of existence — as if such secrets could be told. We seek the answer that only we can know, just as only we can eat our own meals.

We know, or ought to know, that when the experience comes it will probably be so unlike anything we have ever imagined that we shall have to struggle to find terms to describe it. If we then use the familiar terms, it will be for the sake of being understood by others, and not because those terms are necessarily the best.

Such reflections on what is likely to be our state when we achieve our goal should make us cautious of using terms to describe it in a manner that suggests our already knowing what we are seeking. We may have feelings, such as I have called the promptings of the soul.

We may have had experiences of the psychic sort which enlarge the horizons of our world and, at least, allow us to expect that there may be something more be-

yond. But we cannot know what it is we are looking for. We can know it only by experiencing it. And to experience it we have to seek. But seek for what? We may justifiably say that we seek certainty, or that we seek to discover our place in the cosmic whole. Perhaps it would be more truthful to say that we seek to discover whether we have any place and whether there is any cosmic order to have a place in. The philosopher's prayer, "Oh God — if there be a God — Save my soul — if I have a soul," is perhaps not so stupid as it sounds.

This is the point at which we must come to terms with our own uncertainties. Instead of quelling them with affirmations of faith, we must learn to live with them. Indeed, instead of uncertainty being a hindrance, it is now seen as the spur which drives us to effort, for we cannot any longer tolerate substitutes for personal experience. It is perhaps here that the seeker appreciates that all the talk about there being many paths to the one goal expresses only a half-truth, for all paths end where the individual turns away from teaching, discussion, and obedient performance of set practices to face the trackless unknown of his inner being. To say that he follows in the footsteps of his predecessors is but metaphor; all he has is their assurance that they found their

way through. Occasionally, he may find recognizable similarities between his experience and that of another man, and the effect can be as encouraging as finding a tree blazed by another pioneer in unmapped forest. But the next sign he marks may have been left by a different pioneer on an apparently different route. None of these marks necessarily indicates that he is nearing his goal; they are indicative only in that others have been there. Like all pioneers, they may have had an aim, but they followed no path; and the route they followed may not have been the shortest, for each seeker takes the route dictated by his individual nature.

I am assuming that the seeker has already spent many questing years thinking, reading, discussing, and meeting teachers — possibly even meeting men whom he believes to have attained to the goal. And he may have submitted himself to one or more spiritual disciplines. All these have had their effect on him. He may feel himself a changed man, sure where he was previously uncertain, awake where he was previously asleep, more mature, controlled, and at peace with himself and the world. He has, in effect, gained sufficient experience to be sure that the results of the prescribed disciplines vindicate his having

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*Instead of uncertainty being a hindrance, it is now seen as the spur which drives us to effort, for we cannot any longer tolerate substitutes for personal experience.*

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followed the urgings that motivated his search.

But the disciplines do not by themselves bring him to the fulfillment of his search. They may refine his nature, free his emotional potential, and clarify his ideas, but, without the fire of aspiration, the burning desire to plunge into the unknown territory of the spirit, nothing “spiritual” will happen. He may become a remarkably disciplined man or a remarkably integrated and free man. He may, indeed, be higher in the scale of human evolution than most. But, if he is honest with himself, he will admit that there is still a core of uncertainty in his being which waits to be filled with something, something he may have tasted, whose presence he yearns for, an indefinable something whose promise of ultimate fulfillment has supported him throughout his years of seeking.

It is this “something” which he has habitually termed God,

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*Full attainment implies not merely that a man has at some time known what it is to be submerged in the universal awareness . . . but that he has wholly integrated his perception of the universal within his individual nature.*

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Spirit, the Void, the Goal of Life, etc., words that are but suggestive symbols which, by common agreement, represent what cannot be represented. If he is aware of this, then he knows that he is truly not seeking anything, and that to define his search in terms which, even if they are not descriptive, carry the associated value- attitudes of the systems that coined them, may result in vitiating his efforts.

These word associations also tend to attach themselves to the practices prescribed by the same schools that use the words. Thus, the usefulness of mantra repetition may seem vitiated because the words of the formula are associated with Hindu, Muslim, Christian, or Buddhist theological or philosophical formulations. Meditation may be understood to mean only those particular mental exercises prescribed

by a particular school and associated with particular mental and emotional attitudes. Such problems can be overcome when it is seen that, when many different schools prescribe variants of the same exercise, it is an indication that the exercise itself has recognized value, irrespective of the coloring attached to it in different localities.

The seeker thus finds that there are a number of exercises which common experience has found useful in the primary objective of withdrawing attention from outward sensing. They are well-trying tools, as common to the seeker as hammer and saw are to the carpenter. He may use them or not, as he pleases. And he may construct new tools, or variants of old ones, which are adapted to the peculiarities of his own nature. He should also know that tools serve different purposes according to who is using them. No tool, no discipline, no practice is in itself sufficient to take a man to the term of the inner search, whether the seeker uses it himself or whether he surrenders himself to be worked on by his teacher. In one way or another, this is expressed in many traditions by the saying that the final attainment is given by divine grace. The operation of that "grace" is in some way related to the seeker's ability to refuse substitute or partial experience for the whole.

## *The Value of Uncertainty*

Many genuine seekers harbor a belief that the numinous experience of the unity of being constitutes the spiritual attainment. In itself, it does not. Such an experience may be given by a man of actual attainment, and may occasionally be obtained through meditative practices and even by drugs. To taste a strange fruit is not to possess it. It may ensure that he who tastes will be able both to recognize it again and to appreciate something of what its possessors speak of. But he may not like it, may or may not be prepared to give his whole being to the task of possessing it or, more properly, of being possessed by it.

Full attainment implies not merely that a man has at some time known what it is to be submerged in the universal awareness, nor that he can so submerge himself when he pleases, but that he has wholly integrated his perception of the universal within his individual nature. As one of the Sufis said, "Anyone can understand how the drop can blend with the ocean. But how the ocean can be contained within the drop is a

very great mystery." Perhaps that very word "mystery," the word which is at the root of the meaning of mysticism, is the crux of the matter. The seeker must know that what he seeks is a mystery. No matter how profound or glowing the words in which it is described, the thoughts and feelings they arouse in their hearer are pale nothings before the splendor of the revealed mystery. To give a name to that splendor is to pretend that we know it — almost that we need not seek it. Puzzlement, doubt, uncertainty, despair are the lot of the man who seeks to discover it, for he must hold steadily to the knowledge that he does not know and cannot know what that mystery is until it is revealed.

Against this uncertainty he pits the instinctive yearning of his being which, like a homing horse, finds its way when the rider thinks himself lost. Hope sustains him where reason fails. Love guides him when all else is dismayed.

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AMERICA, PO BOX 270, WHEATON, IL 60187-0270  
USA



Our seeking is itself the beginning of the finding.

JULIAN OF NORWICH

I searched for God and found only myself. I searched for myself and found only God.

RABIA AL-ADAWIYYA

The only truly humane foods are those that  
don't come from animals



## The Organic, Free-Range, and Humane Myths

*Condensed from* PETA.ORG

PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

**T**HE factory farming industry strives to maximize output while minimizing costs — always at the expense of animals.

**Organic Meat, Eggs, and Dairy ‘Products.’** Don’t be misled by packages of meat, eggs, and dairy “products” with pictures of happy animals running near quaint country barns and reassuring labels proclaiming “organic” or “free-range.” Animals on typical organic and “free-range” farms often spend much of their time confined to crowded sheds or mud-filled pens, just as animals on conven-

tional factory farms do. While the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) requires animals on so-called “free-range” farms to have access to outdoor areas, it doesn’t specify how much time they must be allowed to spend outside the space they should be given.

Cows on organic dairy farms can be kept in crowded sheds, mired in their own waste, much like cows on factory dairy farms. They, too, are artificially impregnated every year, and their calves are taken from them soon after birth. Cows on organic farms often aren’t given antibiotics — even when they’re sick or

when their udders become infected, something that happens often — because medicated animals lose their “organic” status.

Animals on organic and “free-range” farms often endure the same cruel mutilations — such as debeaking, dehorning, and castration without painkillers — as animals on conventional factory farms. Cattle, for example, generally have their horns cut off and their testicles cut out of their scrotums, and many are branded with searing-hot irons. Pigs on organic farms often have their tails cut off and their ears notched, and some have rings forced into their sensitive noses in order to prevent them from rooting in the grass and dirt, which is a favorite pastime of pigs. Chickens on organic egg farms usually have part of their sensitive beaks cut off, which causes them both acute and chronic pain.

At the end of their miserable lives, these animals are typically shipped on trucks through all weather extremes — usually without food, water, or rest — to the same slaughterhouses used by factory farms. There, the animals are hung upside down and their throats are cut, often while they’re still conscious and struggling to escape. Many chickens are still able to feel pain when they’re submerged in the scalding-hot water of the defeathering tanks, and cows may be con-

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*There, the animals are hung upside down and their throats are cut, often while they’re still conscious and struggling to escape.*

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scious as their bodies are hacked apart.

**Are They Really Any Healthier?** The USDA “makes no claim that organically produced food is safer or more nutritious than conventionally produced food.” “Organic,” “natural,” “humane,” and “free-range” eggs, milk, and meat are filled with artery-clogging saturated fat and cholesterol, just like conventional meat, milk, and eggs. Study after study links the consumption of animal-derived foods to heart disease, cancer, and other serious health problems. And because organic and “free-range” animals are usually raised in crowded conditions and killed in the same filthy, excrement-ridden slaughterhouses as animals from factory farms, their flesh may also be contaminated with bacteria and other pathogens.

The only truly humane foods are those that don’t come from animals.

[HTTPS://WWW.PETA.ORG/ISSUES/ANIMALS-USED-FOR-FOOD/FREE-RANGE-ORGA](https://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-food/free-range-orga)

To practice silence is to  
allow truth to unfold

## To Be Silent

*Condensed from* THEOSOPHY  
IN AUSTRALIA  
TIM BOYD

LET us turn our minds towards something a bit deeper than just the surface. Because many of us have been involved in one or another form of spiritual search, some maybe even for decades, from time to time it is good to ask some simple questions to remind ourselves of what has brought us to a spiritual path.

A question for us to consider is a very basic one: Why is it that we are here, trying to live the spiritual life? Probably most of us can go back and track the course that brought us to the present moment. Yet even more important than the historical question is the process.



What happens when we ask ourselves a question? Questions, by their very nature, take place at many different levels. Ordinarily, we go through each day asking a number of them. If we have insufficient information, or if our knowledge or resources are not adequate, whether it is the grocery store or the internet, we ask questions. And what happens? Most of the time we are probably asking for simple information.

But when we find ourselves on the spiritual path, the nature of the questioning and of the questions becomes slightly, if not profoundly, different.

The process of questioning necessarily requires something of us. Most often, initially, we are looking for answers, and that is good enough. But answers are very small things. Questioning actually involves us in a process that requires that we listen. If we ask in the proper way, it requires us to listen to the response, or better yet, for the response. So we ask, we listen, and if we engage in the process properly, we hear. There is an old prayer that says: "May I see what I see and may I hear what I hear." On a superficial level this seems almost absurd. Of course, we see what we see, and if we hear, we hear. But do we?

In the United States, where two-wheeled vehicles and motorcycles are much less common

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*One of the main requirements to really listen is that, firstly, we have to drop whatever expectations we have.*

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than in other parts of the world, one major cause of road accidents is when people driving a car look into their mirror to see if it is safe to turn into the next lane, and not seeing another car, they make the turn. When they look in the mirror there is in fact a two-wheeler in the next lane, and although they see it, because their mind is used to looking for something else, they see nothing but a safe lane to turn into, and that causes the accident.

So, yes, the driver did look, but he did not see.

This is also true in our conversations with one another. We can take the case where there is an argument or discord going on. Very often one person will tell one story about what was said, and the other will tell the exact opposite. In such a case both heard but, because of their prejudices and expectations, they really did not hear.

So the process is one of listening, and there are requirements to genuinely listen. This is not

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*One of the beauties of the spiritual life is that the major focus every time we come into each other's presence is . . . how we are able to cultivate and then enter into the realm of silence.*

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merely turning our ears in a certain direction.

One of the main requirements to really listen is that, firstly, we have to drop whatever expectations we have. Whatever prejudices we have regarding the way a particular person has spoken to us in the past, they have to fall away at that moment.

**Silence.** So we listen, we create an open space, and then we have the possibility to hear. This requires a certain all-important quality, the quality of entering into silence. There is an occult maxim listing four activities that are the responsibility of anyone who engages in the spiritual life: to know, to will, to dare, and, most importantly, to be silent.

It is our habit to try to increase our knowledge. How deeply we assimilate it, is something else, but we are constantly in search of the next piece of information or knowledge. We are active in

that sense. Our will is something that we learn to exert from a very early age, perhaps not properly, but that is something that we refine. But then to dare, to actually move ourselves beyond what might be boundaries that would prevent us from that next step. To dare to be quiet, to dare to listen beyond the borders of our prejudices, is something that few of us are willing to undertake. It is asking just a bit too much. And then to be silent.

One of the beauties of the spiritual life is that the major focus every time we come into each other's presence is not the things we say, nor what we hear, nor the words that we recite, but how we are able to cultivate and then enter into the realm of silence. This silence allows for a presence which we might describe as that of the Inner Founders, or the Masters, the Holy Ones, a Higher Energy, or Divinity. How do we do that?

Over the summer, I was visiting with a number of groups in Europe. When I was in the Netherlands, I found it a fascinating country for a number of reasons. One of them is that in terms of the way that the earth was formed, that country should not even exist. The Dutch say that "God created the Earth and the Dutch created Holland." They say that for a very good reason. The entire country is below sea level, and it is right on the sea. A

thousand years ago, Holland was nothing but marshes and soggy land, until they started to build the walls against the sea they called dykes.

Over the years, they have developed a way to build this land to prevent the water from inundating it. Now they have a nation on dry land. In some places, when one is walking, there is the earth-covered dyke on one side and the sea on the other, and one realizes that, with only a few feet of separation, one is below the level of the sea.

This is remarkable, and it says something about the process of shaping things. For us, it is an interior process. In the case of the Dutch, they imposed their will upon the land — they dared. They developed the knowledge that was required to hold back the sea, and the land became dry.

For us, we are functioning within the land of consciousness; we have to hold back a sea of mental chatter that is the normal condition of our day. We have to hold back a flood of emotions, of feelings that are constantly coursing around us, and often through us, in order for something else to become possible. When we create that space, it is always related to silence.

When somebody speaks, a process of “meditative inquiry” can take place. It is the process of being silent in the presence of noise in a way that something else can

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*The experience of seeing from a higher, more expansive perspective changes us.*

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register itself on the screen of the mind. Something can descend or appear, but it only can occur when the chatter, the noise, is released.

The process begins with the imposition of the will. The body will not control this moment. The coursing emotions will not overwhelm this moment. In the Bible story of the Christ, he said to the raging sea, “Peace, be still,” and it quieted. This is not a description of a historical event. It is a description of an interior event that we hope to engage in each time that we are in relationship,

We learn to be silent even in the midst of our speaking, to cultivate that silent space out of which the words form. They are not projected by us. Perhaps, with time, our capacity to cultivate that silence increases.

During my recent travels, I was also in Paris. For most people, the prevailing image of that city is the Eiffel Tower. It is the tallest building in the center of Paris. There are no skyscraper buildings to obstruct one’s view of the city. When the elevator arrived at the top level of the tower

I was in the midst of maybe 150 people milling around and speaking about a dozen different languages. Soon, I was looking out over the expanse of the city, and seeing this vista before me, everybody around me faded into the background.

I spent the next 45 minutes in that condition, just looking out over the city. The elevation allowed one to see all the winding streets, the famous old buildings, the gardens scattered around. One could see how the city had changed in appearance over time. One could see the pattern of the traffic and people that looked like little different-coloured dots.

I was following them as they moved, each one thinking that it is moving in its own independent way, but each moving down these streets that channelled and limited their movement — streets that similar dots had walked over the centuries, each one moving to a different destination to do a different thing, but all of it taking place within this greater being that is the city of Paris.

From this elevated point of view, it became very clear in one sense how small we are, but in another sense how deeply connected we are with something much greater. The problem for us tends to be that we are unable to see this. It is only in our ele-

vated moments that we gain a deeper perspective. After a while my reverie ended. I realized that I had things to do, places to go, and I turned from my view of the city.

Once again, the voices of these 150 or so people and their many different languages rose just as if someone had turned up the volume. I turned my face from this vision back to the crowd, got on the elevator, and came back down to earth.

But I had not forgotten. The fragrance, or *vasana*, of that experience lingers. My Eiffel Tower moment was an experience of the mind and of the eyes, but for every one of us there are these elevated moments that occur from time to time. For each of us, the experience is similar. We rise in consciousness only to return. In the words of the poet Robert Frost, “I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep.” But the one who rises is not the one who returns.

The experience of seeing from a higher, more expansive perspective changes us. We are living from the memory of what we have seen. We are reminded of a Greater Presence — always present, but mostly forgotten. The hope for us is that we can remember.

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Equality and brotherhood are only possible if  
we all treat each other as human



## Rights and Brotherhood

*Condensed from THEOSOPHY NORTHWEST VIEW*  
SALLY DOUGHERTY

**T**HE First Amendment seeks to minimize the power of any group or government to impose restrictions on thought and its expression. It mandates toleration of a wide diversity of views, religious and secular, verbal and written, in private and public gatherings. Philosophically, it grows out of the idea that “all men are created equal,” an equality that can rest on a number of grounds, such as a single divine or natural source or shared human needs and potentials.

Broadening equality from “all (property-owning European)

men” to “all human beings” has been a slow process, not yet completed. Yet how many features of modern life can be traced directly to the idea that every person, simply by virtue of being human, has an innate and inalienable worth that demands respect and consideration from others, and that the fruits of this respect should show themselves now in earthly life rather than being deferred to some hypothetical future or after-death state. Its results include ending slavery throughout much of the world, more equal treatment of women, wider recognition that all chil-

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***Great spiritual sages have assured us repeatedly that the solution to mankind's problems lies in "loving one another."***

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dren deserve certain basic opportunities, suffrage for adults regardless of class, race or gender, and discrediting the claims of dominant groups to be innately superior people whose elevated political and economic status is divinely or naturally sanctioned. These changes have in common viewing every man, woman and child – rich or poor, weak or powerful, of high or low status, of whatever color or ethnicity – as equally and fully human.

But even these present results have not been completely realized. The degree of brotherhood attained today remains controversial, and many forces work against its expression in human life. Prominent political, religious and media figures encourage intolerance and conflict by appealing to fear and egoism. Successful economic players rationalize pursuit of unlimited self-interest at whatever cost to others as natural and good. The process of extending equality of rights and opportunity involves continuing departures from tra-

dition, a course where people find themselves forced again and again to confront new ideas and new situations that make them uncomfortable, even angry. Some who face losing privileges or having their own longstanding customs and norms displaced mount aggressive campaigns to prevent or overturn particular changes. But do we really wish to return to conditions of earlier decades, let alone centuries, once we remove the rosy patina from the past? Throughout history, life has been desperately hard for the great mass of people so a few can reap the benefits, and on a global scale continues to be so.

Of one thing we can be sure: if too few people actively support the equal humanity of every person regardless of race, gender, class, ethnicity or religion, the byproducts of brotherhood will erode and disappear. The ideal of respect and toleration for all could once again be considered misguided or even pernicious. The Enlightenment philosophy on which the American and French Revolutions were based continues to be attacked and distorted by those who would retain or return to traditional mindsets and preferential treatment. Even some theosophists and New Age advocates are apt to disparage it because they wish spiritual factors to have more dominance in current thought, not considering that their very

right to exist openly and publicly express their views depends on the ascendancy of such an Enlightenment philosophy.

Great spiritual sages have assured us repeatedly that the solution to mankind's problems lies in "loving one another." The compassionate directives of teachers such as Jesus on universal love, returning good for evil, and looking equally on the just and unjust appeal to the heart but are dismissed as too idealistic (if not wrongheaded) to put into practice. It takes strength and self-discipline to act from a conviction of the common humanity of all, and there is still a very long way to go before brotherhood is a practical reality. But it is something each of us can undertake step by step, if we wish to. We have opportunities every day to encourage mutual

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*There is still a very long way to go before brotherhood is a practical reality. But it is something each of us can undertake step by step, if we wish to.*

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respect, to react with kindness and openness, and to resist impulses of fear, hostility and exclusivity. It is such simple, achievable steps by people in their daily activities that will eventually bring oneness into the hearts and lives of human beings throughout the world.

THEOSOPHY NORTHWEST VIEW, FEBRUARY 2011.  
PUBLISHED BY THE NORTHWEST BRANCH OF THE  
THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, PO BOX 904, BELLEVUE,  
WA 98009-0904 U



As a mother protects her child, her only child with her life, even so let one cultivate a boundless love toward all beings.

THICH NHAT HANH

The Self is everywhere. Whoever sees all beings in the Self, and the Self in all beings, loses all fear.

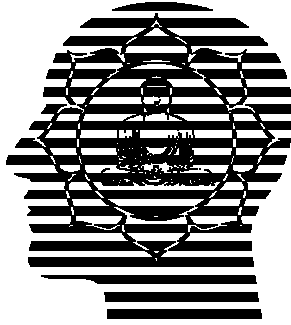
THE UPANISHADS

The whole universe is one. Only the One exists, and all else is but a manifestation.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

All things are but relatives; what we do to the web, we do to ourselves.

CHIEF SEATTLE



# Mind, Health, and Healing

*Condensed from* EXPLORING THEOSOPHY  
DAVID PRATT

**MIND and Body.** Since ancient times, it has been understood that a person's mental state influences their health and ability to heal: a positive outlook can help fend off illness and speed recovery, while stress, anxiety and depression can help induce illness and delay recovery. This means that treatments need to take account of behavioral and psychological factors, as well as physiological factors. Faith in the physician or healer is another key factor in healing. The ancient Greek physician Galen wrote: "He cures most successfully in whom the people have the most confidence."

There are countless examples of how psychology can influence our health. There are many stories, for instance, of recently be-

reaved individuals dying soon after their partner; a study of recently widowed individuals found that during the first week after bereavement, mortality was twice the expected rate. There are also cases where a terminally ill patient survives for months longer than expected in order to attend an important occasion, such as a family wedding. However, telling patients that they are terminally ill and have only a few months to live can also hasten their death.

A strong association has been found between sustained stressful life events and gastrointestinal disorders, inflammatory bowel disease and irritable bowel syndrome. It is well established that cancer patients' mood and outlook, and the psychological support they receive can

hugely impact the outcome of their disease. Studies have shown that elevated levels of fear or distress before surgery are associated with longer stays in hospital, more postoperative complications and higher rates of rehospitalization. A study of patients with chronic lower leg wounds found that those with the highest levels of depression and anxiety showed significantly delayed healing (Newman, 2016).

The level of social support from family, friends and the wider community is a vital factor in physical and mental health. People who feel lonely, depressed and isolated are significantly more likely to suffer illnesses and die prematurely (i.e. before their 70s) than those with adequate social support (Micozzi & Jawer, 2015b). In fact, being socially integrated is more important to a person's health than stopping smoking or reducing cholesterol levels. Moderate alcohol and tobacco consumption can often reduce the level of stress.

A happy, cheerful, optimistic attitude and positive emotions have a beneficial impact on health. Humour and laughter can reduce stress and boost the immune system, at least temporarily. Thomas Sydenham, a 17th-century physician, wrote: 'The arrival of a good clown exercises a more beneficial influence

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*There are countless examples of how psychology can influence our health.*

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upon the health of a town than of twenty asses laden with drugs.' And writer and humourist Mark Twain once said: "Humor is the great thing, the saving thing. The minute it crops up, all our irritations and resentments slip away and a sunny spirit takes their place" (Adams & Micozzi, 2015).

In the mid-1800s, Western scientists began to question the need for medicine to focus on the mind as well as the body. They came to believe that since the immune system's classical messaging system – the lymphatic system – is not present in the central nervous system, communication between the two was impossible. However, the 1970s and early 1980s saw the emergence of a new branch of science, known as psychoneuroimmunology, and various mechanisms have since been uncovered that allow neural processes to interact with the immune and endocrine systems. For example, in 1981 a network of nerves leading to blood vessels and cells of the immune system was discovered. In 1985, neurotransmitter and

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***Mind-body approaches can be used to reduce the severity and frequency of biological symptoms and can potentially help strengthen the body's resistance to disease.***

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neuropeptide receptors were discovered on the cell walls of both the brain and the immune system, showing that the nervous system's communication chemicals can directly influence the immune system.

Studies show that brief stressors, like examinations, tend to suppress cellular immunity (which deals with cellular invaders) while preserving humoral immunity (which normally deals with pathogens outside of cells, such as parasites and bacteria), while chronic stressors – such as caring for a partner with dementia – tend to suppress both types of immunity (Newman, 2016). Studies of cytokines (substances secreted by immune system cells) show that, in addition to the immune system being weakened by psychological factors such as stress, deviations in the immune system can trigger psychological and behavioral changes.

A 2004 survey found that one in five adults in the United States had used mind-body therapies during the previous year. The most frequently used therapies were relaxation techniques, guided imagery, biofeedback and hypnosis. Patients used these techniques for treating chronic diseases such as anxiety, depression, headaches, back or neck pain, heart problems or chest pain, arthritis, digestive disorders, and fatigue. Between 29% and 55% of patients found these therapies 'very helpful' (Amri & Micozzi, 2015).

While no serious practitioner can promise that people can completely cure themselves of disease solely by adjusting their mental attitudes, mind-body approaches can be used to reduce the severity and frequency of biological symptoms and can potentially help strengthen the body's resistance to disease. (Micozzi & Jawer, 2015a)

Orthodox, materialistic science reduces mind to a byproduct of the brain. Different mental states and processes are certainly correlated with different patterns of neural activity, but they cannot be equated with them. Even neuroscientists admit that "In the deepest sense, we do not know how information is processed, stored, or recalled; how motor commands emerge and become effective; how we experience the sensory world; how

we think or feel or empathize. . . [T]he brain is significantly more than the sum of its parts” (ncbi.nlm.nih.gov).

The theosophical tradition recognizes that consciousness is neither produced by nor confined to physical bodies; consciousness-substance is eternal, infinite and indestructible, but manifests in an infinite variety of impermanent, ever-changing, sentient forms. Humans consist of a series of interpenetrating and interacting vehicles of consciousness composed of different grades of energy-substance: the spiritual-divine self works through the reincarnating soul (higher mind), which works through the lower mind (*kamarupa* or desire body), which works through the astral model-body, which works through the physical body. All these various components separate and undergo different processes after death.

**Placebo effect.** A placebo is an inert substance (e.g., a sugar pill or saline injection) or a sham procedure that should have no therapeutic effect. However, patients who think they are receiving a genuine treatment often report positive results – this is known as the placebo effect or placebo response (placebo in Latin means “I will please”). In one study, for example, people were given a pill that they were told was a stimulant. As a result,

their pulse rate and blood pressure increased and their reaction speeds improved. When people were given the same pill and told it would help them sleep, they experienced the opposite effects. In another study, 30% of the patients unknowingly received placebos instead of chemotherapy but still experienced the expected hair loss.

Placebos have demonstrated remarkable potency in relieving intractable symptoms (pain, depression, anxiety, and so on), alleviating signs associated with a wide variety of illnesses (involving virtually every part of the body), shortening recovery time from invasive medical procedures and even reducing mortality. Objective and measurable physiologic functions that generally elude conscious control (e.g., concentrations of hormones, immunological markers, and neurotransmitters, as well as electrical activity of the heart) have been changed following participation in the placebo arms of research studies. (Micozzi & Jawer, 2015a)

Every therapeutic intervention – whether in complementary and alternative medicine, or in conventional (allopathic) medicine – involves a placebo effect. When a new treatment is introduced, most patients will tend to have a good or excellent response for several years, until the treatment becomes discredited or is

superseded by still newer technology. An estimated 50% of the therapeutic benefit of any drug is related to the placebo effect. On average, 35% of patients experience placebo effects, but response rates range from 15% to 80% (Beecher, 1955). The variation is due to factors like the patient's level of suggestibility and level of expectation, and the physician's ability to instil confidence and hope in their patients. There is evidence that patients who know they are receiving a placebo still report improvement in their condition if they are told that the placebo can make them feel better.

Patients can also experience adverse effects from a placebo – this is known as the nocebo effect (nocebo in Latin means 'I will harm'). 20% to 30% of patients who unknowingly receive placebos experience mild side effects, including swelling, pain, diarrhoea, nausea, palpitations, itchy skin and rashes. The rate of nocebo responses also varies considerably. One sham treatment (a nonexistent electric current applied to the scalp) produced headaches in 70% of healthy subjects. There are many anecdotes about physicians or clergy giving end-of-life care or administering extreme unction rites to the wrong patient; that patient subsequently dies, whereas the intended recipient survives for a lengthy period. Health scare sto-

ries in the media can also have a nocebo effect.

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) reported that the most successful physicians of his day made widespread use of bread pills or colored water. Jefferson called this practice a "pious fraud," as it was actually less harmful than the then-standard treatments, which included purging, puncturing, cupping, leeching, and the use of poisons (such as snake oil), lizard's blood, crocodile dung, and fox lungs. Within 50 years – despite the ethical issues involved – 40% of treatments prescribed had become placebos. (Micozzi & Jawer, 2015a)

Nowadays, most professional codes of ethics regard placebo use as unacceptable (except when people agree to take part in the testing of drugs). However, a survey of internists and rheumatologists in the United States found that half had prescribed placebo treatments on a regular basis within the previous year, including saline, sugar pills and vitamins (Amri & Micozzi, 2015). A study of physicians in Israel found that 60% used placebos in their medical practice. Of these physicians, 62% prescribed a placebo at least once a month, 68% told patients they were receiving actual medication, and 94% reported that they found placebos generally or occasionally effective (Nitzan & Lichtenberg, 2004).

**Psychotherapy.** Mental problems are common worldwide. Over a quarter of American adults experience depression, anxiety or some other mental disorder in any given year. People may need help coping with illness or the death of a loved one, or dealing with relationship problems, job loss, stress, obesity, smoking or drug addiction, and so on. Psychotherapy – sometimes called talk therapy – provides a supportive environment that allows people to talk openly with a neutral, nonjudgmental psychologist, who helps them to alter their thought and behaviour patterns for the better. This approach rejects the idea that psychological problems are simply the result of chemical imbalances that can be treated with drugs alone.

Surveys show that about 75% of people who enter psychotherapy show some benefit. A 2006 study of treatment for depression and anxiety found that there was a lower risk of symptoms returning after treatment ends (apa.org). Psychotherapeutic treatment can also hasten recovery from a medical crisis. Several hundred types of psychotherapy are available, provided individually or in groups, but research suggests that the methods do not differ greatly in effectiveness. Many psychologists blend elements from different approaches.

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*The theosophical tradition recognizes that . . . consciousness-substance is eternal, infinite and indestructible, but manifests in an infinite variety of impermanent, ever-changing, sentient forms.*

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The many different schools of psychology span a wide range of philosophical viewpoints, from mechanistic materialism to transpersonal and spiritual perspectives (Capra, 1983, chs. 6 and 11). For instance, behaviorism, founded by J.B. Watson, reduces mental phenomena to patterns of behavior, and reduces behavior to conditioned responses to environmental stimuli; it dismisses the notion of a conscious self as a fiction. According to Sigmund's Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, our conscious mind (ego) is engaged in a constant conflict between unconscious sexual and aggressive impulses arising from our unconscious (id) and societal demands to restrain these impulses, internalized in our conscience (superego). While behaviorist theories rely heavily on studies of animal behavior,

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***The long-term effects of stress can include physical illnesses.***

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Freud's theories are based largely on studies of neurotic and psychotic individuals.

According to Carl Jung's analytical psychology, in addition to our personal unconscious we have a collective unconscious, containing patterns of memories, instincts and experiences common to all humanity, including archetypal images and motifs. His personal religious experiences convinced him of the reality of the spiritual dimension of life, whereas Freud dismissed religion as an "obsessive-compulsive neurosis of mankind," and believed that the mystical quest could be explained as an infantile longing for the peaceful, "oceanic" feeling a person experienced as a child when suckling at their mother's breast!

The development of humanistic psychology was spearheaded by Abraham Maslow (1908-1970). He emphasized that humans should be studied as integral organisms, and concentrated on healthy individuals and positive aspects of human behavior. He believed that humans strive for Self-actualization, or realization

of their full potential, once their more basic needs are met.

Another approach that integrates psychological and spiritual elements is psychosynthesis, developed by Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974), who was deeply influenced by theosophy. He, too, felt that Freud had not given sufficient weight to the higher aspects of human nature. He stated that "spiritual drives or spiritual urges are as real, basic and fundamental as sexual and aggressive drives" (Assagioli, 1965, 194). The methods used in psychosynthesis include guided imagery, movement, creativity, meditation, will development, symbolic art work, journal keeping and development of intuition ([synthesiscenter.org](http://synthesiscenter.org))

Psychosynthesis identifies two overlapping phases in human development (Ferrucci, 1990). The first is personal psychosynthesis, where the goal is to create a harmonious, well-rounded personality by dis-identifying from our ever-changing sensations, feelings, desires, thoughts and ego patterns, and identifying with the self within, the true experiencer. The second is spiritual psychosynthesis, where the goal is to synthesize the integrated personality with the higher qualities and abilities associated with the transpersonal self or what is called in theosophy the higher self.

### **Relaxation and Meditation.**

Stressful situations need not undermine our health. Harmful stress results from an interaction between a negative environment, unhealthy lifestyle, and self-defeating attitudes and beliefs. The long-term effects of stress can include physical illnesses such as ulcers, headaches, chronic backaches and high blood pressure, which can ultimately result in heart disease, cancer or other chronic disorders. People who learn to manage stress are more resilient, experience fewer symptoms and enjoy a better quality of life.

Exercise and physical fitness can lessen the impact of stressful events on physical and psychological health. The same applies to relaxation and meditation, which can reduce metabolic rate, heart rate and blood pressure, and increase alpha brainwave activity.

Meditation has traditionally been used for religious and spiritual purposes, but over the past 30 years it has been explored for relaxing and calming the body and mind.

Although there is a strong home-grown tradition in Great Britain and America of contemplative thought and practice . . . many meditative practices came to the West from Asian religious practices, particularly those of India, Tibet, China, and Japan. Others can be traced to other

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*Meditation has traditionally been used for religious and spiritual purposes, but over the past 30 years it has been explored for relaxing and calming the body and mind.*

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ethnomedical traditions around the world. Although Western meditators practice a contemplative form of meditation, there are also many active forms of meditation, such as the Chinese martial art t'ai chi, the Japanese martial art aikido, and the walking meditations of Zen Buddhism.

Many methods of meditation include focusing on a single thought or word for a specific time. Some forms of meditation focus on a physical experience, such as the breath or a specific sound or mantra. All forms of meditation have the common objective of stilling the restlessness of the mind so that the focus can be directed inwardly.

Fast-paced Western society, filled with external stimuli, has conditioned us to push our minds and bodies to the point of exhaustion, often to the detriment of our own well-being. To be still, to experience the peace and con-

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***True meditation can be practiced anywhere, anytime, and need not involve special postures or techniques.***

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tentment that lies within, we must free ourselves from this external materiality. Meditation is a process for calming and releasing the distractions from the mind for the purpose of opening up and awakening to our true inner natures. (Micozzi & Jawer, 2015b)

As far back as 1997, more than 42% of the adult US population used complementary and alternative medicine to manage cancer and other chronic diseases. Meditation is one of the most common practices among them, and a growing body of evidence shows that it alleviates anxiety, fosters a positive attitude and improves the immune response.

Transcendental Meditation (TM) was introduced in the mid-1960s by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who simplified meditation by omitting difficult physical postures, procedures and mental exercises. Research has shown that TM is associated with reduced healthcare costs, increased longevity, better quality of life, reduced anxiety, low-

ered blood pressure, reduction in chronic pain, and alleviation of post-traumatic stress syndrome in war veterans (Micozzi & Jawer, 2015b).

True meditation can be practiced anywhere, anytime, and need not involve special postures or techniques. G. de Purucker writes:

The best meditation is a yearning to be one's best and to live one's noblest, and if this yearning is derivative from the spirit of compassion welling up in the heart like a holy river of energy, it will lead one quickly to the "Gates of Gold." (Dialogues of G. de Purucker, 3:144)

"Mindfulness" is a popular word nowadays. It is not just about feeling relaxed or stress free; the deeper purpose is to achieve an inner balance of mind that allows an individual to face life situations with greater clarity, understanding and equanimity. The theosophical philosophy is of vital importance in this regard: it teaches that we are not the helpless victims of chance or fate, but multidimensional beings whose purpose is to unfold our spiritual potential by pursuing the path of altruism and compassion; we learn from our mistakes by experiencing in each incarnation the karmic consequences of past thoughts and deeds.

[HTTPS://WWW.DAVIDPRATT.INFO/MINDHEAL.HTM](https://www.davidpratt.info/mindheal.htm)



## Wisdom Overheard

When we begin to see life as a school for the soul, every experience takes on a new meaning. Joy and sorrow, gain and loss, all become lessons through which the spirit learns balance and compassion. To resist suffering is to resist our own unfolding, for it is through pain that the heart deepens its capacity to love. The wise do not seek to escape the world but to understand its purpose and work in harmony with it.

HELENAP. BLAVATSKY

The greatest education is not that which fills the mind with facts, but that which awakens the soul to its own potential. A true teacher is one who inspires the student to discover truth from within, not to merely accept it from without. When knowledge serves love, education becomes liberation. The mind may shine with intelligence, but it is the heart that makes it humane.

JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI

Parenting is among the highest spiritual disciplines, for it demands endless patience, humil-

ity, and self-forgetfulness. Each child is a mystery, an individual soul with its own destiny and rhythm. The role of the parent is not to mold but to nurture, to provide soil and sunlight, and then to step back in trust. In guiding the child, we are ourselves guided toward greater understanding and love.

MARIA MONTESSORI

Spiritual growth is not about becoming something new, but remembering what we already are beneath the noise of conditioning. The light we seek has never left us; it is only veiled by our fears and attachments. Through silence, simplicity, and surrender, the coverings fall away. What remains is the still, luminous awareness that has watched over us from the beginning.

ECKHART TOLLE

The path of service is the path of awakening. When we act with genuine compassion, we dissolve the illusion of separateness and see ourselves in all beings. Service performed with love purifies

the heart and clarifies the mind, for it aligns the individual will with the universal. In serving others, we are merely returning to our natural state of unity with life.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

The child's mind is a delicate flame that must be kindled, not smothered. Education should draw out the latent divinity within, teaching not what to think but how to think clearly and lovingly. When imagination and reason grow together, the soul takes flight toward its higher possibilities. The goal is not competition, but cooperation with the larger rhythm of life.

SRI AUROBINDO

Every human being carries within the potential of a saint, a sage, or a savior. The divine seed is the same in all, differing only in the degree of its expression. Life's trials are the instruments of its awakening, shaping the soul through the friction of experience. Those who meet adversity with faith and courage discover that what seemed punishment was, in truth, preparation.

ANNIE BESANT

Peace is not a passive withdrawal from conflict but an active presence of understanding. It begins in the mind that refuses to judge and in the heart that refuses to hate. To create peace in

the world, we must first disarm the violence within ourselves.

DALAI LAMA XIV

Humility is the hallmark of true wisdom. The more deeply we see into life, the more we recognize the vastness of what we do not know. Arrogance closes the gates of learning; humility opens them wide. The wise bow not out of weakness, but because they see the divine presence shining in all.

MAHATMA GANDHI

When we learn to listen deeply — to nature, to others, to the still voice within — we begin to hear the harmony that underlies existence. The world is not a collection of separate things but a single living organism expressing itself in countless forms. To live wisely is to act as a conscious part of that wholeness. Then every gesture, however small, becomes an offering to the One Life.

ALAN WATTS

True love is not sentiment but vision. It sees beyond appearances and beholds the eternal in the transient, the sacred in the ordinary. Love does not bind but liberates, because it recognizes that the beloved is none other than the Self. In love, the walls between souls dissolve, and the universe remembers its unity.

MEISTER ECKHART



# The Wisdom of John Keats

*Condensed from* SUNRISE  
MADLINE CLARK

I sat down to read *King Lear* yesterday, and felt the greatness of the thing up to the writing of a Sonnet preparatory thereto," writes John Keats to his Oxford friend, Benjamin Bailey. There we have a tribute from genius to genius indeed, and a key to the character of the young Keats who, dead these 205 years, is still with us as vividly and warmly as when he moved among his circle of friends and was their lode-star and their hope — a hope which to them may seem never to have been fulfilled. Yet here we are at the beginning of the 21st century, prepared to recognize him as still able to lead us in thought where we have not as yet trod, though we have come forward a good way since his time. In spite of his

brief life and briefer flowering, packed into those few bright and tragic years was the wisdom and experience of lifetimes; and the essence of that is perhaps most easily come at in his letters.

All students of Keats agree that his letters are among our greatest literary treasures. As Lionel Trilling says in the Introduction to his collection of the letters:

even among the great artists, Keats is perhaps the only one whose letters are of such kind as to have an interest which is virtually equal to that of their writer's canon of created work. — *The Selected Letters of John Keats*,

They are a floodlight on the life of the poet, and illuminate the background of his poetry; therefore they are inseparable from

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*All students of Keats  
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both. But you do not have to be “literary” to enjoy them. You have only to be human — with a trust in something more than human — for these letters bring the reader within the glow of Keats’ own mind and heart. His poetry takes us into the imperishable realm of the Beauty he loved; but the letters are Keats himself.

They keep pace with his swiftly-moving life; they picture what he is doing or feeling at the moment; in them small incidents become adventures; they are gossipy in the best sense of the word, abounding in original comment on people and things innumerable. And the play of language can only be described as Shakespearian in its richness and spontaneity. Keats wanders with ease and freedom in the forest of words, and we follow along delightedly.

“I will be as punctual as the Bee to the Clover,” he writes to Cowden Clarke in accepting an invitation. To John Hamilton Reynolds he writes: “You must soon bring all your present troubles to a close, and so must I, but we must, like the Fox, prepare for

a fresh swarm of flies.” And on arriving in the Isle of Wight for the first go at his Endymion:

at this moment, I am about to become settled, for I have unpacked my books, put them into a snug corner — pinned up Haydon — Mary Queen [of] Scots, and Milton with his daughters in a row. In the passage I found a head of Shakespeare which I had not before seen. . . . Well — this head I have hung over my Books, just above the three in a row, having first discarded a french Ambassador — now this alone is a good morning’s work.

Money troubles, he says to Haydon, “are not like Envy and detraction stimulants to further exertion . . . but rather like a nettle leaf or two in your bed.”

There is plenty of fun and fooling in the letters, and there are times when Keats breaks into rhyme, either with some unforgettable doggerel, or to copy in a new poem that he has just completed. There is something new happening in almost every line, and the torrent of thought comes so fast that the pen can scarcely keep up with it — in this case commas are of no moment. All of which gives the reader a breathless feeling of being pulled along at great speed — rather odd for those leisurely days (1816-21). But this is perhaps one reason why Keats seems rather to belong to our own fast-moving age. He certainly was ahead of his own.

Keats was a member of Leigh Hunt's brilliant circle, where he met Shelley and Wordsworth, Lamb and Hazlitt, as well as Haydon, the painter: his comments on these celebrities and others have been fairly borne out by the verdict of time. Hunt and Haydon he largely outgrew, also his early worship of Wordsworth and of Byron. His coolness to Shelley, which has been attributed to the rather mean motive of a sense of the difference in their social status, we should note he explains in a letter to Bailey as due to his need of having his "own unfettered Scope" — there is real occultism in that; and modern thinkers will understand it and find it sufficient.

The brilliant sallies of wit in his letters are, however, hardly more than sunny sparkles on the surface of the deep-flowing stream of his life. There is present from the first that thread of ultimate intent that was his destiny. As early as 1816, he had written to Haydon: "I begin to fix my eye upon one horizon." And to show the extent of the interior pressure that was on him he writes to Reynolds in 1817:

I find that I cannot exist without poetry — without eternal poetry — half the day will not do — the whole of it — I began with a little, but habit has made me a Leviathan — I had become all in a Tremble from not having written anything of late — the Sonnet over leaf\* did me some good. I slept the

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*It had been his reading of Spenser while still at school that had awakened Keats's genius: Shakespeare he read and pondered constantly.*

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better last night for it — this Morning, however, I am nearly as bad again.

It had been his reading of Spenser while still at school that had awakened Keats's genius: Shakespeare he read and pondered constantly, and he wrote to Haydon:

I remember your saying that you had notions of a good Genius presiding over you. I have of late had the same thought — for things which [I] do half at Random are afterwards confirmed by my judgment in a dozen features of Propriety. Is it too daring to Fancy Shakespeare this Presidor?

When he speaks in this same letter of the artist's "readiness to Measure time by what is done" — i.e., accomplished, Keats is already reflecting his prophetic sense of his time being short in this life — he died at 25. There is too his Sonnet, "When I have fears that I may cease to be," and the letter to Bailey where he says: "I scarcely remember counting upon any Happiness — I look not for it if it be not in the

present hour — nothing startles me beyond the Moment." Dr. Trilling remarks: "He was one of that class of geniuses who early learn to trust themselves in an essential way."

One of the greatest charms of the letters is the appealing candor with which Keats communicates to his friends in perfect trust the high inspiriting visions that he felt rising in his soul, always pointing to something higher, a present exertion to lead to a future good. He writes:

I mean to follow Solomon's directions of "get Wisdom — get understanding" . . . I find that I can have no enjoyment in the World but continual drinking of Knowledge — I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world . . .

Keats' aspects of character gleam and glance through the letters, showing how very human he was, how well-balanced in practical things; how unaloof from the considerable men he counted his friends, and with what a serious humility he gradually came to recognize the gift that was his and strove by systematic application to use it worthily. Looking into most books about Keats, however, we are struck by two things: first, how easy it is for the best of minds to fall into previously prepared grooves; and second, the responsibility that attaches to formulating a criticism in words — too often it creates a dogma that dies

hard. For this reason we would be well advised to allow ourselves to form our own true impression from our reading of Keats' letters.

Going back to originals whenever possible to form one's own impressions has its application to the Fanny Brawne letters, those letters that were never meant for any eyes but hers. Hardly have they ever been commented upon without the shade of Mrs. Grundy peering over the critic's shoulder. It remains for modern students to see the whole episode of Keats' tragic final days in its true light — his reactions the most natural in the world. A strong soul of larger range than the ordinary, there was indeed an "epic greatness" about the tragic as well as the auspicious in his life — but there is no doubt that it was demanded of that soul that it drink the cup of bitterness to the dregs in full consciousness, for only so comes a still greater wisdom.

Whether considering the life or the works of any one of the great, we are always unconsciously looking for "the things that matter." We want to know what there is of enduring worth. Now this need not be in a philosophy spoken in so many words; though it often is so, it is quite as often something suggested that conveys itself through the channels of intuitive perception, rather than of reason. This is true of

Keats' poetry at its finest. We are lifted out into a world of impersonal Beauty (in his own sense of the highly spiritual), which is the natural home of the soul. Wisdom is native there, and we take of it whatever we can bring away. However, we look in vain for the didactic; it was the one thing which he abhorred. "We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us," he exclaims in a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds.

But with Keats' letters it was somewhat different. In them, when the spirit took him, he poured forth his inmost ponderings on the underlying shape of life and what it was all for. These portions of the letters can be called Keats's self-intuited philosophy, and they form undoubtedly the most valuable portions. But I do not doubt, if we could have knowledge of most of the secret thoughts of human beings today, that we would find similar preoccupations in every thinking mind, but in varying degrees of perception.

Most famous of all these projected seeds of philosophy is Keats' "Vale of Soul-making" in contrast to the "vale of tears" idea:

Call the world if you Please "The vale of Soul-making." Then you will find out the use of the world . . . I say 'Soul-making' Soul as distinguished from an Intelligence — There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in millions —

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*We are lifted out into a world of impersonal Beauty (in his own sense of the highly spiritual), which is the natural home of the soul*

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but they are not Souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself. . . . Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul? . . . Seriously, I think it probable that this System of Soul-making — may have been the Parent of all the more palpable and personal Schemes of Redemption, among the Zoroastrians, the Christians, and the Hindus.

Not only is this reminiscent of the teachings of Jacob Boehme and William Blake, but it is actually the fundamental teaching in the metaphysics of all the ancient religions. No doubt Keats had contacted these ideas in the course of his wide reading, but his intuition had recognized them as essential truth.

The question of the general good of the human race and its evolution along spiritual lines occupies Keats considerably, as in this famous passage:

Now it appears to me that almost any Man may like the spider spin from his own inwards his own airy

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*It is certain that in his search for Beauty, Keats often found Truth — and again it is human life that occupies him, and human consciousness*

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Citadel — the points of leaves and twigs on which the spider begins her work are few, and she fills the air with a beautiful circuiting. Man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Web of his Soul, and weave a tapestry empyrean full of symbols for his spiritual eye . . .

So he proceeds to show that if every man would reach out for the divine and “whisper results to his neighbor,”

every human might become great, and Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furze and Briars with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees!

It is certain that in his search for Beauty, Keats often found Truth — and again it is human life that occupies him, and human consciousness:

Well — I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments . . . The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think — We re-

main there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of this thinking principle within us — we no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight: However among the effects this breathing is father of, is that tremendous one of sharpening one’s vision into the heart and nature of Man — of convincing one’s nerves that the world is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and Oppression — whereby this Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken’d and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open — but all dark — all leading to dark passages — We see not the ballance of good and evil. . . . We are now in that state — we feel the “burden of the Mystery” . . .

There are other ideas that Keats develops, which the present generation is far better prepared to understand than was his own; they all lead to the freeing of the human mind from the bands of prejudice and dogma through a quite different and superior use of the faculties. One he calls Negative Capability:

that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason —

Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge.

In this same direction lie Keats' much misunderstood ejaculation, "O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!" and his conception of what he calls "diligent Indolence," in the famous letter to Reynolds of February 19, 1818. He is listening to an early thrush, and hears it sing:

O fret not after knowledge — I have none,

And yet my song comes native with the warmth.

O fret not after knowledge — I have none,

And yet the Evening listens . . .

These "sudden gleams and intuitions" of Keats invite to contemplative study. They are hardly more than hints, but they are glorious hints — and sufficient to start the soul on a voyage

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*These "sudden gleams and intuitions" of Keats invite to contemplative study . . . They are . . . sufficient to start the soul on a voyage of discovery of its own.*

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of discovery of its own. Out of the hurly-burly of modern life there is emerging a mind-set better able to appreciate some of the deeper aspects of philosophic thought independent of accepted dogma. Students today, once they realize the treasures that are in them, are not going to leave the letters of Keats confined on library shelves. They will be brought out into the light and put to a creative use important to our civilization.

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Poetry is not the assertion of truth but the making of truth more fully real. WALLACE STEVENS

Imagination is more important than knowledge. ALBERT EINSTEIN

Your visions will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. CARL JUNG

Stories are a way to see ourselves more clearly. MADELEINE D'ENGLE

Selflessness as the gateway to  
inner knowing and wisdom



## Ethical Values and Mysticism

*Condensed from* THEOSOPHY NORTHWEST VIEW  
ENID BRANDON

INTUITION derives from our center of awareness, which has been called the immanent Christ, inner Buddha, or higher self. It is innate in everyone, though few realize its existence and reality except in the occasional hunch or dream. In his thought-provoking book, *The Observing Self*, psychiatrist Arthur Deikman holds that organized religions encourage this lack of awareness when they locate God outside rather than within us. Traditional religions, as belief systems, differ sharply from mysticism, which is a psychological science. In religions, he points out, the motive for good behavior is reward, "the accumulation of heavenly credit, duly noted by a

divine accountant, in a layaway plan for life after death." To the mystic, on the other hand, virtue is necessary for the development of intuitive perception: "The ability to receive Knowledge is a functional matter, having nothing to do with reward or punishment in the usual sense. Thus, one does not 'earn' enlightenment, one becomes capable of receiving it."

The state of intuitive knowing, as opposed to intellect and sense perception, characterizes the evolution of human consciousness by self-devised means: "human beings evolving themselves through a special type of learning that they choose to acquire." It requires perceiving ourselves as

more than objects, and sustaining that perception. As Sufi mystic Rumi said: "New organs of perception come into being as a result of necessity. Therefore, O man, increase your necessity, so that you may increase your perception."

Unfortunately, most of us live automatically, half-asleep, immersed in fantasies brought about by unconscious needs and desires. To vanquish such limiting illusions is not easy, for we must want to upgrade our priorities. One successful method is to continually lessen self-interest, the source of selfishness, since any sincere effort in this direction opens us to the healing influence of the ground of our awareness which Dr. Deikman terms the observing self.

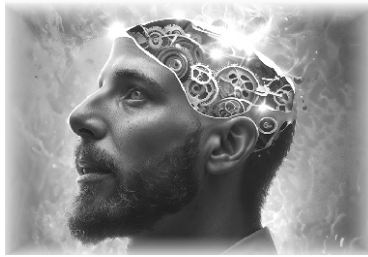
Meditation is a proven way to increase awareness and intuition, but Dr. Deikman points out that the purposes and requirements of those who originally created meditation systems are often ignored, particularly as concerns motivation. Traditional schools began with purification and development of a selfless orientation before seeking special powers, a process that might take years of effort. This step tends to be skipped today. Especially vital is recognizing "the practical importance of shifting from an acquisitive orientation to one centered in learning and service" when us-

ing such practices. Otherwise meditators will find that their efforts result in "garbage in, garbage out."

In discussing human development, Dr. Deikman also stresses the importance of the virtues. Ethics are not arbitrary since "the unity of all human beings, their interconnection and interdependence, is the primary vision of mysticism. It says that the virtue mystics practice is necessary not only because of its functional utility but because it is realistic. One should treat the other as oneself because below the surface we are all aspects of one being; the Golden Rule is not an arbitrary, culturally determined morality but an expression of the actual nature of the world. Our continued existence as a species and our further development depend on our capacity for recognizing this reality despite the compelling influence" of our everyday self which identifies with the contents of its own awareness. Moral relativism has undercut the rationale for ethics and the recognition of an underlying reality; yet the traditional virtues "provide the possibility of knowing that reality. Virtues prepare the mind for a more advanced perception."

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WA 98009-0904

The brain's hidden engines of creativity and insight



## The Neuroscience of the Creative Brain

*Condensed from* THEOSOPHY IN AUSTRALIA  
RICHARD SILBERSTEIN

I'D like to use the notion of creativity to explore a number of linked themes by looking at some of the recent neuroscience perspectives on the creative process. First, how is it that we can be presented with a particular problem, which we are getting nowhere towards solving, when suddenly a solution comes into our mind? What does neuroscience say about that process? I will then move onto some linked notions, one of which I call the Transpersonal Perspective, which goes to the nature of consciousness and the way that, for example, the processes that generate new ideas may be influenced by things outside of the

brain itself. Finally, I will touch on the idea of a creative universe and the implications of such a concept.

**Neuroscience and Creativity.** Many creative ideas seem to appear out of the blue. You may have been working on a problem for some time with no solution in sight when suddenly a solution pops into your head. This often occurs when you are not thinking about the problem or may have given up even trying to find a solution.

Most people are familiar with the "eureka" moment that was experienced by Archimedes when he was taking a bath. He had realized that there was a

way to determine whether or not a gold crown was, in fact, adulterated with lead. The important thing to note is that he may not have even been thinking about the problem when the solution came to him. Many creative ideas seem to arise in our minds out of the blue, when we are not concentrating on them.

**What is the Creative Process?** We have now looked closely at the neural networks whose activity seems to give rise to new ideas. Generally, creativity is seen as a reorganization of pre-existing ideas, which have been put together in different ways to solve a particular problem. There seem to be two processes, both of which are largely unconscious. The first one is coming up with possible ideas and this process of thinking about different alternatives, which some suggest may occur randomly, produces a range of solutions. Most of these ideas will fail or be defective. In fact, there appears to be another network that determines whether or not the idea is good enough to enter the person's consciousness. The Blind Variation and Selective Retention Theory of Creativity postulates that creative insights are comprised of two unconscious processes:

1. Multiple random combinations of existing concepts (creation).

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*Interestingly, damage to the judgement region of the brain has been shown to increase creativity by lowering the "standard" for acceptance.*

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2. Retention only of the combination that best solves the problem (judgment).

Each of these processes is mediated by a specific brain network. One of these networks is most active when you are daydreaming and not engaged in any particular task. This has been termed the Default Mode Network as it was assumed to be the default state of the brain. The other task networks become active when you engage in a thinking task. When the task networks are active, the Default Mode Network is inactive and vice versa. Recent research has revealed that it is the Default Mode Network that creates the new ideas. So, if the Default Mode Network creates the new ideas, what are the areas of the brain that determine whether or not these ideas are good enough?

An area in the left inferior-frontal cortex is believed to be involved in judgment of new ideas produced by the Creative Network. It is this region of the brain

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*Being relaxed, taking a break from work, and sleeping can all increase the activity of the Creative Network.*

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that seems to determine whether or not an idea is satisfactory and it is only after this determination has taken place that the idea will come into consciousness. It is like a yin/yang relationship between the areas of the brain involved in task-oriented activities and creative oriented activities. One is active while the other is inactive. Interestingly, damage to the judgment region of the brain has been shown to increase creativity by lowering the “standard” for acceptance. In other words, ideas previously rejected are now accepted, or at least given consideration, by a less demanding Judgment Network. This may result in a greater quantity of new ideas, although the quality may not be as good.

What are some practical steps for enhancing creativity? Being relaxed, taking a break from work, and sleeping can all increase the activity of the Creative Network. While maintaining a positive mood, being in a drowsy state and brainstorming

in a non-judgmental environment all contribute toward reducing the impact of the Judging Network and allowing other areas in the brain to “light up” thereby increasing your potential for creativity. When you are concentrating or focusing on a task you are, in fact, inhibiting this Creative Network because of the yin/yang relationship it has to the Judging Network. Many times, the Judgment Network has been too stringent and you need to relax and let through more ideas.

**Creativity: A Transpersonal Perspective.** Parapsychological research over the last 50 years suggests that consciousness cannot simply be considered to be the result of physical/chemical brain activity, that is, the data is not consistent with physicalist monism but is consistent with non-local dualism. This research indicates that some of the creative ideas produced by the default mode or Creation Network may originate from other levels of consciousness as well as other individuals, embodied or not. In other words, the Creation Network may respond to non-physical (psi) or transpersonal influences to produce novel ideas or insights.

So why can't we tap into these transpersonal domains of the creative process more easily? If we are more than just brain structures and there is evidence

of interaction at the level of consciousness, might we not have new ideas as a result of inspiration from others, either near or distant from us? Why, however, does this not occur on a continual or consistent basis? Why are these psi or transpersonal abilities not present all the time?

One view is that these psi effects are very weak and that the brain is an exquisitely sensitive receiver that imperfectly detects them. Another view is almost the converse of that. This perspective posits that the psi effects are very robust and that the brain's function is primarily to filter them out, if for no other reason than for purposes of survival. Just as the Judgment Network will inhibit the expression of the Creation Network, it is suggested that certain inhibitory brain networks act to suppress the expression of creative influences originating in the transpersonal domain as well as suppressing psi capacity. The notion of the brain acting as a filter to suppress transpersonal or psi influences is not new. It was advocated by the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) and the "Father of American Psychology" William James (1842-1910). If certain brain networks play a major role as "filters" does that mean that damage to these networks will increase psi capacity in the brain-damaged individual? The answer appears to be yes.

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*Some of the creative ideas produced by the default mode or Creation Network may originate from other levels of consciousness as well as other individuals, embodied or not.*

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A recent study demonstrated this effect. In the study, participants were required to influence the output of a quantum number generator by thought alone, an effect termed "micro psi." Readers are reminded, if any need reminding that micro-psi is considered impossible according to our understanding of the laws of physics. By way of background, successful micro psi studies using quantum physics based random number generators have been extensively replicated over the last 50 years and constitute some of the strongest laboratory-based evidence for non-local mind-matter interaction. What the Freedman study found was that the patients suffering brain damage to the left frontal cortex were able to influence the output of the quantum random number generator while the non-patient control group could not. This suggests that the left

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*Evolution can be considered a deeply creative process.*

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frontal region that prevents the appearance of inferior creative ideas in consciousness may also be a key part of the brain “filter” that suppresses transpersonal or psi phenomena.

**A Creativity Universe.** Evolution can be considered a deeply creative process. However, a materialist monist view of evolution has difficulty addressing two fundamental questions:

1. How does evolution account for the emergence of consciousness? (Also known as the “hard problem” of consciousness)

2. How did life originate?

How does consciousness emerge? From the literature, there are broadly two types of answers and one non-answer:

*Non-answer:* None of us is conscious, although we may think we are. From that perspective, we are all like zombies.

*Physicalist Monism* answer: We don’t know yet but we will eventually understand how physical/chemical brain function produces consciousness.

Dualism’s answer consists of:

*Dualism I- Pan-psychism.* Consciousness does not emerge from

brain function and cannot be reduced to brain function. Consciousness is an irreducible constituent of the universe as fundamental as matter and energy. The emergence or manifestation of consciousness under Dualism I is dependent on the structure or complexity of the system (i.e., the brain). One attempt to define the type of complexity necessary to manifest consciousness is the Integrated Information Theory of Consciousness (IIT). This theory suggests that there is a particular manner in which information is integrated, which can be quantified and measured. For example, measuring whether a person under anesthesia is conscious or not.

*Dualism II.* This is a more radical form of dualism. Here, consciousness and matter/energy are different systems or substances and can exist independently of each other. From the time it was first proposed by Descartes, the problem arose of how these different systems or substances can interact if they have nothing in common? Spinoza, Jung and numerous other authors have suggested matter, energy and consciousness are both manifestations of a more fundamental or deeper reality. Thus, consciousness and the domain of matter/energy, while different are able to interact because they both emerge from this deeper re-

ality. This view is consistent with Theosophical teachings on the subject and with many religions, especially from the Eastern traditions. In philosophy, it is sometimes referred to as “neutral monism.”

Scientific evidence from the fields of parapsychology, “near death experience” research, and Ian Stevenson’s work on children’s past life memories is consistent with the view that consciousness is not only an irreducible constituent of the universe but that it can exist independently of physical structures, such as the brain.

#### **How Did Life Originate?**

From what we know about physics and chemistry, it is unclear how the transition from “non-life” to “life” occurred on earth. The probability that early organic molecules such as amino acids and nucleotides formed increasingly complex and eventually self-replicating life-like systems through a long duration of random organic chemical reactions appears to be very low. There is a Neo-Darwinist approach, not related to the ideas of religious fundamentalism, such as intelligent design, which tries to grapple with this problem. Paul Davies, in his latest book, *The Demon in the Machine*, refers to the improbability of this process of arriving at living systems, on the basis of what we know, as “climbing mount improbable.”

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*Spinoza, Jung and numerous other authors have suggested matter, energy and consciousness are both manifestations of a more fundamental or deeper reality.*

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**Climbing Mount Improbable.** Now, if consciousness is an irreducible constituent of the universe, (Dualism I or II), can it “shift the odds” of chemical reactions to favor the sequence of chemical reactions leading to the emergence of life? Although this is still considered a controversial view, it is being proposed with increasing frequency. If consciousness were to influence chemical reactions favoring the emergence of organic life, then this would be through quantum processes as all chemical reactions are determined by quantum mechanics. Is there any evidence that consciousness can influence quantum systems? The short answer is yes.

Probably the best examples of consciousness influencing quantum processes comes from the single photon double slit experiments conducted by Dr. Dean Radin and his team at the Institute for Noetic Sciences. If photons (particles of light) pass

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***One conclusion that emerges from these experiments is that consciousness can indeed influence quantum processes.***

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through two closely spaced transparent slits, they form an interference pattern as if the particles of light were behaving like waves. What shocked physicists was this happened even when only one photon was passing through the double slit at a time. In other words, even though the single photon passed through one of the slits, it seemed to know about the other one and behaved as a wave. If we use instruments to see which slit the photon passes through, it behaves as a particle and does not produce an interference pattern. The act of physically observing a photon made it behave like a particle and not a wave.

Dean Radin wondered whether the light particles passing through a double slit would behave like a wave or a particle if they were observed mentally? In the experiments, participants were asked to “project their consciousness to imaginatively observe the photons passing through the double slit.” What Radin found was that the mere act of mentally observing the double slit caused the photons to change their quantum state and behave like particles. Interestingly, meditators showed this effect more strongly than non-meditators.

One conclusion that emerges from these experiments is that consciousness can indeed influence quantum processes. We are thus one step closer to answering the fundamental question “could consciousness make possible the most fundamental act of creation, the emergence of life in the universe?”

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Consciousness is the ground of all being.

AMIT GOSWAMI

The world is not outside you. Look inside yourself. Everything that you want you already are.

RUMI

Consciousness cannot be accounted for in physical terms, for consciousness is absolutely fundamental.

ERWIN SCHRODINGER



# Love Conquers All

*Condensed from* SUNRISE  
GRACE KNOCHE

**T**HE tension of opposites — love and hate, harmony and discord, day and night — holds our world in balance. So too the eternal contest between good and evil, progress and retrogression, marks every phase of human experience. Impelled into life by love, it is no less the duality of quality and expression that keeps us humans sufficiently in balance to flower, fruit, and die — and flower again in season: “Like corn, a mortal ripens and falls, and like corn, is born again” (Katha-Upanishad, I.i.6).

This repetitive procession of birth, growth, death, and resur-

gence is nature’s surest way of perpetuating her species and, indeed, the planet itself. In our human kingdom we see the identic pattern: continual death of form insuring renewal of spirit. Since nature is as perfect — and as imperfect — as are her human, animal, and plant children, imperfections are not faults or failures, but anomalies, differences, part of our growing experience. Those who intuit this truth live lives of serenity and fulfillment. The validity of this was borne home to the Kaufman family in the 1970s when their son Raun during his first year began sliding into autism. They discovered that our

world is full of “special children” — some born impaired physically, others mentally and/or emotionally, still others having become “special” through severe illness or accident. A fair percentage are diagnosed autistic.

“Raun was like a symphony without notes — like a song without words.” Inarticulate, withdrawn, totally self-focused, this beautiful little boy was a mystery child his loving and caring parents could not reach. Professionals were consulted every few months, and the diagnosis, vague at first, finally was autism. There was no hope of cure, they were told, for this was a life-long disability; place the child in an institution where trained personnel can help him develop what minimal skills he may have.

Barry and Samahria Kaufman chose differently: instead they would enter Raun’s world and identify with his need, whatever the consequences — a profoundly compassionate choice. With their two young daughters, they entered into a conspiracy of love and acceptance. But the boy, encapsulated in an impenetrable shield of self-absorption, remained insensible to any influence not self-generated. Drawing upon their profoundest resources of patience, dedication, and wisdom, at length they observed small, incremental steps of awareness in their son —

awareness of his mother first, then of others, as gradually his focus of attention shifted from himself to other people and things.

After months and months of feeling out his new environment, Raun apparently made a conscious decision to live permanently in this world, where humans experience love and warmth, and can aspire to the heights of achievement if they will. By this time, he was four years old. The Kaufmans had witnessed their little son’s “second birth,” his autism dropping away like autumn leaves, his future bright with promise. Would this be permanent? They did not know. The transformation seemed no less than a miracle.

Learning in the meantime of the hundreds, possibly thousands of “different” children systematically being warehoused in institutions for the hopeless and incurable, thereby becoming even more isolated and warped, in 1979 Barry Neil Kaufman wrote the book *Son-Rise*. NBC turned it into an award-winning television special aired worldwide. It was like rain to a parched land for hundreds of families. In order to meet their need, in 1983 Kaufman founded the Option Institute and Fellowship at Sheffield, Massachusetts, which not only works specifically with special-needs children and their parents, but also

seeks to improve the quality of life for others overcome by adversity.

Eleven years later, Kaufman wrote *Son-Rise: The Miracle Continues* (H. J. Kramer, Inc., Tiburon, California, 1994) dedicated to “all the special children” who so often are cast aside, their lives seen as “tragedies.” A Foreword by Raun, then a sophomore in a prestigious college, is a glowing tribute to his parents’ courage to “try” against the advice of “experts.” They and their daughters dared the impossible and proved that love and acceptance can win out over seemingly insurmountable barriers. *The Miracle Continues* also chronicles the flowering of several children once trapped behind impairment. The author and his equally remarkable wife are testimony to the power and reality of love, unconditionally shared, to build bridges of trust over which “hurt” souls may cross.

Nature ever gives value for value. The challenges faced by families with “special children,” whatever the physical or mental deprivation, often find their emotional and physical resources drained, especially when the child shows little or no progress. The natural tendency is for parents and relatives to feel that they are somehow to blame. We dare not be judgmental in these matters. Every individual is unique, with his own back-

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*Every individual is unique, with his own background of experience going back scores of millennia into the past, for humanity is not just a recent phenomenon on this planet.*

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ground of experience going back scores of millennia into the past, for humanity is not just a recent phenomenon on this planet. Nor may we discount the potency of love and devotion to exert a healing and beneficent influence, however invisible the response may be.

It is curious that no question as to why this little boy, and the family also, should have had to experience this trauma seems to have arisen in the author’s mind — possibly because of the futility of asking it, for who can answer it? Certainly, no one knows what may have occurred in previous lives — a great many people today consider reincarnation to be the most reasonable explanation of the seemingly unjust happenings in our lives. We venture the thought that possibly this particular soul may have chosen his present life situation in order to clear the slate for the future, and

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*Nor may we discount the potency of love and devotion to exert a healing and beneficent influence, however invisible the response may be.*

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in so doing experience firsthand what this particular birth opportunity could afford him and his family in deepening compassion for those who suffer.

Our long line of births and deaths is our warranty of eternal growth and becoming. We are, all of us, gods-in-the-making, with a magnificent destiny before us. It is love, attraction, magnetic lines of force, that bring us into being, keep us here

in orbit, and bear us to the "other shore." This is assured, for though a person may die alone, bereft of friends, always our higher self is with us, and at the nodal points of birth and death is particularly close.

How fortunate that we do not know the causes behind our lives, or those of others. Such knowledge could deflect the soul from its true purpose, which is to bring the compassionate presence of our inner divinity more fully into our daily relationships, and thus be, in however minor a degree, a "light unto the world." "Love ye one another" is still a new commandment, so little has it been tried. It only needs putting into practice to prove its worth. This is not an impossible task, for are we not made in the image of the Divine?

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Love is the strongest force the world possesses, and yet it is the humblest imaginable. MAHATMA GANDHI

Love alone is capable of uniting living beings in such a way as to complete and fulfill them. TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

Love is the very meaning of the soul. HAZRAT INAYAT KHAN

Even after all this time, the sun never says to the earth, "You owe me." Look what happens with a love like that. It lights the whole sky. HAFIZ

# Ponder on These

To know yourself is to forget  
yourself. DOGENZENJI

Simplicity is the ultimate so-  
phistication.  
LEONARDO DA VINCI

Education is not the filling of a  
pail, but the lighting of a fire.  
WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

Gratitude is the fairest blossom  
which springs from the soul.  
HENRY WARD BEECHER

When you change the way you  
look at things, the things you  
look at change. WAYNE DYER

What doesn't kill you makes  
you stronger.  
FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

The best way to find yourself is  
to lose yourself in the service of  
others. MAHATMA GANDHI

Truth is a pathless land.  
JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI

You are exactly where you need  
to be. MODERN SAYING

Ignorance is bliss.  
THOMAS GRAY

True joy is not found in things,  
but in the peace that comes from  
within.  
PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

The measure of a person's  
greatness is not the number of  
servants they have, but the num-  
ber of people they serve.  
JOHN C. MAXWELL

Self-knowledge is the begin-  
ning of all wisdom.  
ARISTOTLE

Love is the bridge between you  
and everything. RUMI

In teaching others, we teach  
ourselves. SENECA

Pain is the greatest teacher.  
MODERN PROVERB



# Teaching Children Humility

*Condensed from* **AWAKE!**  
EDITORIAL TEAM

**H**UMBLE people are respectful. They do not behave arrogantly, nor do they expect others to treat them as special. Rather, a person with humility takes genuine interest in others and is willing to learn from them.

Sometimes humility is misjudged as a weakness. In reality, it is a strength that helps people recognize their faults and acknowledge their limitations.

## WHY IS HUMILITY IMPORTANT?

1. **Humility benefits relationships.** “Overall, humble people are more connected to others,” says the book *The Narcissism Epidemic*. It adds that such people find it “easier to relate to other people and the wider world.”

**Humility benefits your child’s future.** Learning to be humble will help your child both now and later in life — for example, when seeking employment. “The young person with bloated self-esteem, unaware of her own deficiencies, is unlikely to do well in the job interview,” writes Dr. Leonard Sax. “But the young person who is genuinely interested in what the recruiter has to say is more likely to get the job.”

## HOW TO TEACH HUMILITY

Here are ways you can teach humility to your children:

1. **Encourage a balanced view of self.** Here are ways this can be done:

*Avoid misleading maxims.* Sayings like “All your dreams can come true” and “You can be anything that you want to be” might sound inspiring, but they often do not prove true in real life. Your children will likely be more successful if they have reasonable goals and work hard to achieve them.

*Praise specific actions.* Simply telling a child that he or she is “awesome” does not encourage humility. Be specific.

*Limit your child’s use of social media.* Often, social media is linked with self-promotion — broadcasting a person’s talents and accomplishments — the very opposite of humility.

*Encourage your child to apologize quickly.* Help your child to see where he is wrong and to acknowledge it.

**2. Promote gratitude.** Children should also be taught that following kinds of gratitude:

*Gratitude for creation.* Children should appreciate nature and how much we depend on it for survival. We need air to breathe, water to drink, and food to eat. Use these examples to instill appreciation, awe, and gratitude for the wonders of the natural world.

*Gratitude for people.* Remind your child that everyone is superior to him in one way or another and that instead of being jealous of others’ skills and abilities, he can learn from them.

*Expressing gratitude.* Teach your children to say “thank you,” not just with words but with genuine appreciation. A grateful spirit has been called a building block of humility.

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*Learning to be humble  
will help your child both  
now and later in life*

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**3. Teach your children that there is value in serving others.** This can be done through the following ways:

*Expect your child to do chores.* Exempting your child from family chores might give him the message, “You are too important to do this!” Family duties should come first, and playing second. Point out how chores benefit others and how others will appreciate and respect him for doing them.

*Emphasize that serving others is a privilege.* Doing so is a primary way to develop maturity. Therefore, encourage your child to identify those in need. Discuss with him what he can do to help them. Commend and support your child as he serves others.

**4. Teach by example.** Ask the following questions: Do I let my children know that at times I also need help from others? Do I speak positively and apprecia-

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*Limit your child's use of social media. Often, social media is linked with self-promotion — broadcasting a person's talents and accomplishments — the very opposite of humility.*

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tively about others, or do I belittle them? Do my children see that I value serving others?

Here are helpful quotes from parents which say what they did to teach their kids humility:

“Our daughter told us about a classmate who, she said, is mean to others and is not liked. I told her to think of what that girl might be going through at home. After all, not everybody has a good family life. That helped our daughter to see that she is not better than others. She may just have better circumstances.” — Karen.

“We encourage our daughters to enjoy what they learn in school and simply to do their best without comparing themselves to others. We want them to know that we will not compare them to others either.” — Marianna.

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You can teach a child the importance of humility by showing it yourself. FRED ROGERS

Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less. C.S. LEWIS

Pride makes us artificial; humility makes us real. THOMAS MERTON

Humility is the solid foundation of all virtues. CONFUCIUS

Children are not things to be molded, but people to be unfolded. JESS LAIR

Every child is born a naturalist. Their eyes are, by nature, open to the glories of the stars, the flowers, and the earth. R. SEARCH

One voice, global impact: Malala's fight  
for girl's education



## Malala Yousafzai and the Power of a Voice

*Condensed from* THEOSOPHY FORWARD  
EDITORIAL TEAM

*[The story of Malala Yousafzai serves as an inspiring reminder of the importance of free speech. Her unwavering courage continues to demonstrate the power of a single voice — a shining example for all of us, wherever we may be. With her, let us stand up with courage, conviction, and dignity. — TF Ed.]*

**T**HE story of Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani activist for female education, is a modern testament to the inspiring power of free speech. In a region dominated by the Taliban, where girls' education was forbidden, Malala began writing a blog for the BBC at age 11, documenting her experiences and

speaking out publicly on behalf of girls and their right to learn.

Her words, broadcast from a forbidden place, were a radical act of defiance. They became a symbol of hope and a challenge to the Taliban's tyranny. For her, free speech wasn't an abstract right; it was the essential tool for building a more just world.

This made her a target. In 2012, a masked Taliban gunman boarded her school bus and shot her in the head. The terrorists believed that bullets could silence a voice.

But they were wrong. The attack did not silence her. Instead, it magnified her voice and ignited thousands of others. As

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*Her words, broadcast from a forbidden place, were a radical act of defiance. They became a symbol of hope and a challenge to the Taliban's tyranny.*

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Malala herself said in her speech to the United Nations on her 16th birthday, "The terrorists thought that they would change my aims and stop my ambitions, but nothing changed in my life except this: weakness, fear, and

hopelessness died. Strength, power, and courage was born."

After her recovery, Malala continued her fight, not with anger, but with courage and conviction. Her free speech, amplified by the attempt to silence it, led to her becoming the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate and established the Malala Fund to ensure every girl has the opportunity to learn. Her story reminds the world that an individual's courage to speak freely can inspire millions and create lasting change.

Malala Yousafzai, now 28 years old, is an education activist, and producer of film and television.

[HTTPS://WWW.THEOSOPHYFORWARD.COM/INSPIRATIONAL-STORIES-%E2%80%93-JUST-A-RE-MINDER](https://www.theosophyforward.com/inspirational-stories-%E2%80%93-just-a-reminder)



If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.

GEORGE ORWELL

Freedom of speech is a human right and the foundation upon which democracy is built.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI

The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet.

ARISTOTLE

It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.

E.E. CUMMINGS

The only way to counter bad ideas is with better ideas.

ALFRED WHITNEY GRISWELD

The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Loving karma and consciousness behind  
poverty and wealth



## Poverty and Riches

*Condensed from* THEOSOPICAL MOVEMENT  
EDITORIAL TEAM

**T**HE terms poverty and riches are descriptive of the condition of various aspects of human life, and, therefore, have many shades of meaning according to the context in which they are used; the context may be the condition of the moral, spiritual, mental, intellectual, or physical aspects of man or his actual circumstances of life. These various aspects are interrelated and subject to the Law of Karma. Hence the issue of poverty and riches is very complex. Therefore, the problem of poverty does not lend itself easily to conventional solutions to alleviate it. This is evident from the fact that poverty persists in every society the world over despite efforts made to eradicate it. Even in so-called

rich and prosperous countries, we find a large number of people in wretched conditions of poverty and destitution. States make liberal budgetary provisions for the implementation of various schemes to uplift poorer sections of society. International efforts are made under the aegis of the UNO under the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), covering almost all the countries of the world. Numerous efforts are made by sincere and well-meaning people in their individual capacity and through philanthropic organizations towards the same end. Such efforts are not entirely in vain. Physical conditions of many poverty-stricken people are indeed improved by such schemes and

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***The key to understanding the paradox of poverty and riches . . . is to be found in a knowledge of the true and permanent nature of man to be Soul and Spirit, and of the twin laws of Karma and Reincarnation.***

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programs. Yet the problem of poverty persists among large sections of society. This is a paradox that has defied solution in terms of the usual socio-political or socio-economic remedies.

Dichotomy between riches and poverty is another perplexing paradox in that it is often seen that fortune seems to favor some people who are wanting in character, while men of good report are found suffering from lack of means and opportunities. Yet another paradox which baffles philanthropists who labor for the cause of poverty alleviation is the fact that their labor of love often elicits ingratitude from the beneficiary; while in some, vice and wickedness seem to spring up which the conditions of adversity in which they were had, kept these in check. Large amounts of money unwisely expended with the intention of relieving com-

munities in wretched social conditions are often productive of widespread evil consequences. Sociologists and social psychologists have formulated theories of human behavior based merely on symptomatic appearances, and completely miss out taking into consideration the underlying unseen moral causes.

Theistic religions when asked to explain the paradox say that it is the will of God that some must suffer from want of the wherewithal, while some others should be happily circumstanced, irrespective of their moral character — an explanation, so unjust and unreasonable, so revolting to conscience, that it has bred in a thinking portion of humanity an attitude of agnosticism and atheism. Yet, true knowledge exists, which is perfectly reasonable, verifiable, and just, which resolves paradoxes and apparent contradictions, unravels the mystery of human nature and cosmic riddles.

The key to understanding the paradox of poverty and riches, as all such apparent inconsistencies, is to be found in a knowledge of the true and permanent nature of man to be Soul and Spirit, and of the twin laws of Karma and Reincarnation — the innate law of our being. The eternal Ego is the permanent Individuality, the Real Man, the immortal pilgrim Soul in quest of absolute perfection by garnering

and assimilating life-experiences through a numberless reincarnations under Karmic Law. Unexceptionally, every man, imperfect in his terrestrial nature is nevertheless perfect in his divine nature, his Higher Self; the latter can manifest itself on the terrestrial plane in each life through the former, its proxy on earth — the mortal personal self. Ego is “divine in its essential nature, yet not pure enough to be one with the ALL, and having, in order to achieve this, to so purify its nature as to finally gain that goal. It can do so only by passing individually and personally, i.e., spiritually and physically, through every experience and feeling that exists in the manifold or differentiated Universe.” (*The Key to Theosophy*, Indian Edition p. 181).

It is self-evident truism that Nature and our perceptive faculties are pervaded by duality, or pairs of opposites, such as, light and darkness, good and evil, vice and virtue, affinity and aversion, life and death, and so on; and that through contrasting experience of the opposites as effects of our Karmic action, and by comparison, and idealized reflection, that we learn lessons of life. It is through long and bitter experience, life after life, that man learns that there is in reality no separateness, that he is an integral portion of all humanity, of all life, and that true happiness

and bliss is found in renunciation of personal self — the rife and the sole source of all sorrow and suffering — and seeks union with changeless Eternal Self, the Self of ALL, that transcends pairs of opposites in which they become one, free from the binding influence of the three qualities — of light, action, inertia.

As nothing can come to pass in our lives without an antecedent cause which we ourselves have produced by our action, circumstances of poverty or riches in human life, therefore, is necessarily the fruit of Karma of the individuals. Similarly, riches and conveniences one enjoys is a reward for their good deeds in the past; which may also be a Karmic compensation for much suffering endured by the action of others. Life teaches us the lesson that we retain what we give and lose whatever we selfishly keep for ourselves without thought for others.

Charity is the foundation of all virtues, the scientific basis of which is found in the implacability of the Law of Karma. One who is aware of it would never avenge, even in thought, any injury done to him by another but forgives the offender, and bids him well, instead, knowing well that the hand that smote him is his own. “Vengeance is mine; and I will repay, saith the Lord [Law],” is a biblical saying pregnant with meaning. “As Karma

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***Neither is poverty bad  
Karma nor riches good  
Karma per se. It is we  
who make of them good or  
bad by our attitude while  
experiencing them.***

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is sure to punish the man who wronged him, by seeking to inflict additional punishment on his enemy, he, who instead of leaving that punishment to the great Law adds to it his own mite, only begets thereby a cause for the future reward of his enemy and a future punishment for himself." (*The Key to Theosophy*, Indian Edition, p. 198). In the working of this aspect of the Karmic Law is found the explanation of the paradox of fortune often favoring unworthy persons and good people in dire straits.

Theosophy teaches that people in poverty and want in a society is not always the fruit of individual Karma but is also the result of the distributive effect of the collective Karma of a nation, and due to the fact of actual interdependence of humanity. The social phenomenon of collective suffering of vast masses deprived of basic necessities and opportunities, stunted and arrested in physical and mental development, is the direct result of

neglect of social duty on the part of the other well-to-do section of society. It is only when altruism becomes the basis of thought and action in the life of individuals consequent on a profound awareness of the truth of interdependence of humanity and of the Karmic Law, that each individual will conscientiously live for all, and all for every individual, that the solution to the terrible iniquity of mass deprivation is to be found. Humanity is destined by the compulsion of Karmic and evolutionary law to arrive at such an enlightened state of soul development, however far its consummation may appear in the present.

Shakespeare had an uncanny insight into the human psyche when he penned, "Sweet are the uses of adversity." A life of ease and pleasures, of luxuries and comforts—pleasant and attractive as they seem — teach us nothing. In fact, selfish indulgence in them drains the Soul of its spiritual vitality, weakens our moral fiber, which is adverse to the Soul development and evolution. But an individual so favored, if wise, will recognize the happy circumstance of his life to be the fruit of the Karmic merit he has earned, and following the mandate of conscience, use the same for the benefit of fellowmen and especially for those in need and help. Adversities and challenges which come into our lives

either as the fruit of retributive Karma — whose heart is Mercy — or as the result of deliberate choice of the Ego, are our greatest friend and benefactor as, by no other means, can we learn patience, endurance, empathy, strengthen will, and elevate character, thus grow in Soul-life. This truism is enunciated in an episode in the Mahabharata wherein Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, prays to Sri Krishna, when He was bidding them parting farewell after the war, to grant her always adversities in life so as to be ever drawing closer to Him in mind and heart.

Neither is poverty bad Karma nor riches good Karma per se. It is we who make of them good or bad by our attitude while experiencing them. Poverty is bad Karma in respect of the one who resents the adverse conditions in which his Karma has placed him and envies others who are better off, or is wicked in character. One blessed with good things of life is not necessarily enjoying his good Karma if he neglects to share it with others and indulges in selfish gratification. Both these kinds of people slide down in soul-life and impair their character.

We need to rise above the tastes and preferences of evanescent personality and learn to follow

the dictates of the Higher Self and place reliance on the absolutely just and never erring Law. The one unflinching touchstone of right discrimination and judgment is found in the ancient axiom: “Good Karma...is that which is pleasing, and bad that which is displeasing, to the Higher Self [Ishwara].” The Master [Ego] often makes deliberate choice to be circumstanced in a birth under poor and adverse conditions to cultivate virtues of patience, develop will, and strengthen character, as in no other way but through trial and suffering can the soul evolve. Though such a prospect may be felt as unsavory to the personality, the wise willingly submits to the wish of the Divine.

Resigning oneself to the dictates of Ishwara, the very embodiment of absolute Justice and Mercy, seeking neither the pleasant nor shunning the unpleasant, looking upon both with an equal mind, one strikes off the bonds of Karma and rises to the higher unity of Eternal Self where Karma ceases to operate. He is liberated, and being free labors for the redemption of beings in bondage.

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## Knowledge, illusion, and Ultimate Reality in the non-dual path of Advaita Vedanta



# Vedanta

*Condensed from* THEOSOPEDIA  
RICHARD WILLIAMS BROOKS

**A**DVAITA Vedanta is one of the major philosophical systems of India. Its present form derives from the writings of the 8th-9th century philosopher Sri Sankaracarya (or Sankara for short), but it obviously has a more ancient history. Sankara identifies Gaudapada (7th cent.) as his *paramaguru*, usually taken to mean “teacher’s teacher,” though that cannot be its meaning in this instance — perhaps “paramount teacher” would be more literally appropriate. But an initial formulation of the ideas of the school was made by Badarayana (6 BCE) in his cryptic summation of the teachings of the principal Upanishads, variously called Vedanta

Sutras or Brahma Sutras, the name “Vedanta” indicates that the system derives its philosophical inspiration from the end (*anta*) or final texts of the Vedas, i.e., the Upanishads. The school also interprets “end” to mean (as it does ambiguously in English as well as in Sanskrit) “final teaching” or “purpose.”

The basic teaching of the Advaita, or non-dualist school of Vedanta is that there is only one fundamental reality in the world, usually termed “Brahman” when discussing the underlying reality of external objects and termed “atman” when referring to the basic consciousness or Self of every sentient being. In other words, the Self is

identical with Brahman, not in the sense of participating in Brahman's nature or being an evolute from Brahman, but in the sense of strict identity. Since we obviously perceive the world in terms of a duality of subject and object, the term "advaita" is intended to reject that prima facie view, rather than to assert a monism. Furthermore, reality is generally identified in Indian philosophy as something which exists independently of everything else and is unchanging. Brahman is real because it is, in the words of the Katha Upanishad (2.18), "Unborn, unchanging, eternal, primeval." But since Brahman-atman is, in the often quoted words of the Chandogya Up. (6.2.1), "One only, without a second," the question immediately arises: how is it we perceive a pluralistic world? The first answer is: because we are ignorant of the true nature of reality. Obviously, the only way to get rid of ignorance (*ajñāna*, *avidya*) is by knowledge (*jñāna*, *vidya*), and since one can only know for oneself. The idea of vicarious atonement is incompatible with this philosophy. The basic path to release (*moksa*) in Advaita is Jnana Yoga. When one attains that realization of one's conscious identity with Brahman, one "obtains all one desires along with the unfettered consciousness of Brahman" (Taittiriya Up. 2.1).

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*The basic teaching of the Advaita, or non-dualist school of Vedanta is that there is only one fundamental reality in the world, usually termed "Brahman"*

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The second answer is: because of *maya*. That is, we are under the influence of an illusion when we assume that the way we perceive and conceive (analyze, conceptualize) the world is the way the world really is. Since Advaita defines "real" (*sat*) as unchanging and independent, but capable of being experienced, and "unreal" (*asat*) is "incapable of being experienced in any of the three times [i.e., past, present, or future]," it identifies the ontological status of the phenomenal world as "indefinable (*anirvacaniya*) as either real or unreal." In other words, it exists, but is not the way things really are in the final analysis. This is consistent with Advaita's analysis of our ordinary perceptual illusions, such as mistaking a shiny shell on the beach for a silver coin, a stump or post off in the distance for a human being, or a rope coiled in a dimly lit room for a snake, to use some of the stock examples in Advaita literature. First of all,

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***Brahman is real because it is, in the words of the Katha Upanishad (2.18), “Unborn, unchanging, eternal, primeval.”***

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one does not perceive the actual object clearly (otherwise one would not misperceive it); that is analogous to our ignorance of Brahman-atman. Secondly, there must be an actual object which is misperceived — or, to put it in their philosophical jargon, a substratum or locus (*upadhi*) of the illusion. The substratum is the shell, stump, or rope in the examples given, but could also be the mind in the case of dreams, hallucinations, or hypnotically suggested impressions. In other words, Advaita states, illusions are illusions of something (unlike the Buddhist analysis of illusion). That is analogous to Brahman as the substratum of the world and atman as the substratum our empirical consciousness. But, thirdly, one must have a memory, derived from previous perceptions, of actual silver, human beings, snakes, etc.; one cannot mistake a coiled rope for a snake if one has never seen a snake before. This correlates with the Advaita view that the universe is begin-

ningless (*anadi*) — that our individual, deluded souls have always existed, that we never became deluded at some beginning of time. We continue to be deluded about the world and ourselves because we were similarly deluded in previous lives and carry over that memory into this life. And finally, Advaita points out the interesting psychological fact that in our mistaken perception of the silver, human being, snake, etc. we not only overlook or “cover up” the actual locus, but that we psychologically project onto that locus the image we mistakenly perceive it to be. The first is termed the power of overlooking or “covering” (*avarana-sakti*); the second is termed the power of projecting (*viksepa-sakti*). If one analyzes one’s perceptual illusions of the sort mentioned (and the possibilities of such mistaken perceptions are innumerable), one will find that one actually did see the silver, person, snake, or whatever at the time of the mistake. This is important to Advaita’s theory of error, since it indicates that even in ordinary perceptual illusions the ontological status of the mistaken impression is neither real nor unreal, but merely phenomenal, that is to say, it actually exists, it is not a mere nothing. Advaita frequently draws an analogy, as already suggested, between the substratum of our ordinary illusions (shell, stump,

rope) and our mistaken perceptions of them (silver, human, snake) on the one hand and the substratum of the world illusion (Brahman-atman) and our empirical experience of the world on the other. Their basic epistemological defense of their position, then, is argument by analogy.

Like all other schools of Indian philosophy, Advaita has both a theory of knowledge and a theory of error. The latter has already been sketched out above. The former falls into two categories: a theory of empirical (*vyavahara*) knowledge (derived from perception or *pratyaksa*, inference, verbal testimony, etc.) and a theory of transcendental (*paramartha*) knowledge. Advaita rejects all other theories that attempt to account for how we distinguish between knowledge and error, substituting its own unique theory in their place. Essentially, it states that perception, or more generally experience, which is not superseded — or, to use their technical term, sublated (*abadhita*) — by any future perception, or experience, is true. Since Self-Knowledge (*atma-vidya*) is an experience which cannot be sublated, in the final analysis it alone is true.

When it comes to giving a cosmological theory of the world, early Advaita utilizes Sankhya categories, while rejecting the basic dualism of Sankhya philosophy. It also makes a distinction

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*Even in ordinary perceptual illusions the ontological status of the mistaken impression is neither real nor unreal, but merely phenomenal, that is to say, it actually exists, it is not a mere nothing.*

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between the transcendental reality or “higher (*para-*) Brahman” and Brahman as the apparent creator of the phenomenal world or “lower (*apara-*) Brahman,” a distinction which goes back to the earliest Upanishads (see, for instance, Brhadaranyaka Up. 2.3.1). The term Parabrahman (or Parabrahm) also is used frequently in early theosophical literature to refer to Absolute Reality. Advaitins, further, often speak of the “lower Brahman” in theistic terms as Isvara or Siva. (Sankara, in fact, is just another name for Siva, indicating the Saivite orientation of this philosophic system.) Thus, they can view the recurrent creation and dissolution of the universe as acts of God. Although there is not much discussion of it in Advaita literature, they accept the general theory of a manifestation-dissolution cy-

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***Parabrahman (or Parabrahm) also is used frequently in early theosophical literature to refer to Absolute Reality.***

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cle, with the former consisting of four ages (*yugas*) and the latter being a “rest” period of equal duration to the former.

Contemporary Advaitins tend to use categories of modern science instead of those of Sankhya. But whichever one prefers, it really does not matter, since whatever explanation one chooses is still an explanation of mere appearance, not of ultimate reality, according to Advaita. But Advaita philosophers do make a distinction between analogies used to explain the superimposition (*adhyasa*) of the empirical world upon Brahman and those used to explain the superimposition of our limited consciousness, soul or ego (termed *jiva* by them), upon atman. The shell-silver, stump-person, rope-snake, etc. analogies are used for the former purpose, but at least two funda-

mentally different analogies are used for the latter. They are referred to as limitation (*avacchedaka*) and reflection (*pratibimbaka*) analogies. The stock example of the former is our conceptual attitude toward space within a room or a pot as separate from space generally, i.e., as if it had a separate, independent existence (for example, we say a parking area has a lot of space for cars or say that a building has lots of space for storage in it). The stock example of the latter is our conceptual attitude of taking a reflection as if it were a separate entity from the object reflected. Sankara himself uses both analogies in his writings, but later Advaitins tended to prefer one or the other, giving rise to two different post-Sankara schools of Advaita, respectively the Bhamati School (named after a commentary by Vacaspati Misra on Sankara’s commentary on the Vedanta Sutras) and the Vivarana School (named after a similar commentary by Padmapada, one of Sankara’s own pupils).

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The Self is everywhere. Bright is the Self, indivisible.

MUNDAKU UPANISHAD



# Meditation: From Breath to Boundlessness

*Condensed from* THE PHILIPPINE THEOSOPHIST  
SAT CHIT ANANDA

When you meditate, you are not doing something; you are ceasing to do everything that hides the light within you.

MEISTER ECKHART

**M**EDITATION has always been at the heart of mystical practice, the gateway through which seekers of different religions and spiritual traditions glimpse the hidden Unity of all reality. From the hallowed caves of India to the storied monasteries of Europe, from desert hermits to Zen monks sitting silently in their dojos, one finds the same essential act: human beings pausing, stilling themselves, and turning inward to touch what words cannot

name. Across cultures and ages, humanity's quintessential method for waking up to who we really are has remained the same: stilling the mind so that it can, in time, empty itself into this boundless ocean of pure being that we've come to call by different names — Pure Consciousness, Ultimate Reality, the Absolute, Truth, Suchness, God, Brahman, Divine Love, Sunyata, Tao, Ain Soph, Paramatman, the Unborn, and so on.

Hence, meditation is not merely a practice but a profound transformative journey. It invites us to shift from the surface restlessness of ordinary thought into a direct, unmediated experience of what is Real. In this

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*Meditation has less to do with techniques and more to do with opening ourselves to what is already present . . . Mystics across traditions describe this as an awakening.*

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sense, meditation has less to do with techniques and more to do with opening ourselves to what is already present; to what is always waiting, like the vast blue sky behind the ever-changing clouds. Mystics across traditions describe this as an awakening: a luminous realization that transcends the intellect, allowing one to see that all of life is held within a deeper interconnectedness, radiant and whole.

**Steps of Zen Meditation.** Zen meditation (or *zazen*), for example, embodies this timeless path with simplicity and precision, as well as profound depth. Here are its basic steps which, incidentally, are quite similar to those of many other forms of meditation:

1. *Find your place.* – Choose a quiet, uncluttered space. Sit on a cushion on the floor or on a chair with your back straight but relaxed. Let your body be alert, yet at ease.

2. *Posture* – Sit so your hips tilt slightly forward. Cross your legs in a manner that is most comfortable to you — full lotus, half lotus, Burmese, and so on — and rest your hands in your lap, right over left, thumbs lightly touching (cosmic mudra). Keep your spine straight, shoulders relaxed, chin slightly tucked, and eyes half-closed.

3. *Breathing* – Breathe naturally through the nose. Bring gentle attention to the breath: feel its entering and leaving, its rise and fall. Allow the breath to anchor you in the now.

4. *Focus and awareness* – When thoughts arise, just let them come and go like passing clouds in the sky or leaves on a stream. Do not cling to them, nor push them away. Maintain a soft, open awareness, returning gently to the breath as the activity of the present moment whenever the mind wanders.

5. *Counting* (optional for beginners) – To stabilize attention, you may count each exhale from one to ten, then start over. If the mind drifts, simply return to counting without judgment.

6. *Duration* – You may begin with short sessions of 10-15 minutes. Gradually extend to sessions of 25 minutes each, as your concentration and comfort grow.

7. *Ending the practice* – Slowly open your eyes, noticing the world around you with renewed clarity and presence. Carry the

calm, mindful awareness, and compassion cultivated during your sit into each moment of daily life.

**Steps of Mantra Meditation.**

Another timeless form of meditation, widely practiced in the yogic tradition, involves the use of a sacred sound or mantra. Perhaps the simplest and yet most powerful is the syllable “OM,” considered the primordial vibration of the universe. Here are the basic steps for practicing mantra meditation:

1. *Find your place* – Sit comfortably on a cushion or chair with your spine straight but relaxed. Close your eyes gently, allowing your body to settle.

2. *Posture* – Rest your hands on your knees or in your lap. Keep your shoulders relaxed and your chin slightly tucked. Let your body be alert but at ease.

3. *Breathing* – Take a few natural, deep breaths, feeling the movement of air into and out of your lungs. Allow the breath to calm and center you.

4. *Chant the mantra* – Inhale naturally, then exhale slowly while mentally or audibly repeating the word “OM.” You can elongate the sound of the mantra, letting it resonate through your body. Allow the vibration to fill your awareness.

5. *Focus and awareness* – If your mind wanders, gently re-

turn your attention to the sound of OM. Let the mantra serve as both anchor and guide, uniting body, mind, and spirit in the present moment.

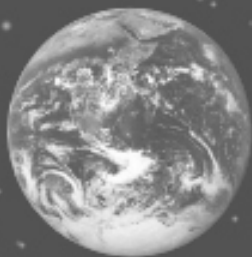
6. *Duration* – Begin with 10-15 minutes, gradually extending the session as you feel comfortable. As in other forms of meditation, consistency is more important than length.

7. *Ending the practice* – Slowly bring your attention back to your surroundings. Set the intention of carrying the mindful clarity and calm into your daily life.

To sit in stillness is to discover that nothing need be added to us, nor taken away, for the truth of our being is already whole and complete. In the stillness of the body and the silence of the mind, the habitual sense of separation eventually dissolves, revealing the intimate connection between self, other, and all of existence.

This is why meditation matters so much in our time. In a world fractured by division and noise, this time-tested ancient practice restores us to the ground of unity that has always been. It is not an escape from life, but an immersion into its deepest currents, where wisdom and compassion naturally arise.

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# WORLDWATCH

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## World's First Wooden Satellite

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Japan has successfully launched the world's first wooden satellite, called LignoSat, a collaborative project of Kyoto University and Sumitomo Forestry. The mission of the compact cube-shaped satellite, built from magnolia wood is to test whether wood can endure the vacuum, radiation, and extreme temperature shifts of space. Ingeniously constructed without screws or glue, LignoSat relies on traditional Japanese joinery techniques that have withstood centuries on Earth. *(Reuters)*

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## Australian Rainforests Now Carbon Source

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Rainforests are supposed to be carbon sinks, but researchers have found that tropical forests in north-eastern Australia have shifted from being a carbon sink to a net carbon source — a global

first for a major rainforest ecosystem. The study, covering nearly 50 years of data from 11,000 trees across 20 sites in Queensland, indicates that increased tree mortality and reduced regrowth caused by warming and drying are tipping the forest into net emissions. This finding challenges the long-held assumption that tropical forests will continue to offset large amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> and calls for urgent revision of carbon-budget models. Experts warn that if similar shifts occur in other global tropical forests, the planet's ability to absorb human emissions could be significantly compromised. *(The Guardian)*

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## World's First Biological Computer

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Scientists have created the first biological computer, named CL1, which integrates lab-grown human neurons with silicon hardware. The device was unveiled at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona recently, and is designed for research applications

such as drug-discovery, disease modelling and advanced artificial intelligence. Unlike conventional silicon-only AI systems, the CL1 promises significantly lower energy consumption and the ability to learn and adapt through living neural networks rather than purely programmed circuits. Each unit houses hundreds of thousands of stem-cell-derived brain cells grown onto an electrode array, maintained via an internal life-support system that provides nutrients, gas control and waste filtration. The company offers both outright purchase options (around US \$35,000) and “Wetware-as-a-Service” cloud access for users without lab-scale hardware. While marking a milestone in biocomputing, the breakthrough has also sparked ethical debate about the status and possible sentience of living neuronal systems. (*ABC News*)

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## Modern Slavery On the Rise

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A new global report by the Walk Free Foundation warns that an estimated 50 million people are now trapped in modern slavery, including forced labor and forced marriage — 10 million more than a decade ago. Researchers attribute this alarming rise to armed conflicts, climate-related disas-

ters, and the global economic instability that leaves vulnerable populations open to exploitation. The report highlights that one in every 150 people worldwide is living in conditions of coercion, with women and children disproportionately affected. (*Walk Free Global Slavery Index*)

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## World’s First Artificial Embryo

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Scientists at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel have created the world’s first synthetic human-embryo model made entirely from stem cells — no egg, sperm, or womb involved. Published in a peer-reviewed journal, the structures mimic the earliest post-implantation stage of human development, forming cell types that would normally become the embryo, yolk sac, and placenta. This achievement allows researchers to study the origins of human life and the causes of early miscarriages and congenital disorders in ways never before possible. Many scientists view this breakthrough as a turning point that could transform regenerative medicine and infertility research. As one researcher remarked, it opens a scientific frontier as vast as it is delicate. (*Al Jazeera*)

Book Section:



# Walden

*Condensed from the book*  
HENRY DAVID THOREAU

# Walden

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

*[In a time when our planet faces unprecedented ecological challenges, Thoreau's reflections on simplicity, self-reliance, and mindful living offer profound guidance. This condensed edition of Walden highlights lessons from the natural world, encouraging readers to observe, respect, and live in harmony with the environment. Thoreau's wisdom reminds us that attentive living is not only a personal practice but also a path toward ecological responsibility and stewardship of the Earth – Ed.]*

**W**HEN I wrote the following pages, I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labor of my hands only. I lived there two years and two months. At present, I am a sojourner in civilized life again.

**Economy.** The very simplicity and nakedness of man's life in the primitive ages imply this advantage at least, that they left him still but a sojourner in nature. When he was refreshed

with food and sleep, he contemplated his journey again. He dwelt, as it were, in a tent in this world, and was either threading the valleys, or crossing the plains, or climbing the mountain tops. But lo! Men have become the tools of their tools. The man who independently plucked the fruits when he was hungry is become a farmer; and he who stood under a tree for shelter, a housekeeper. We now no longer camp as for a night, but have settled down on earth and forgotten heaven. We have adopted Christianity merely as an improved method of agriculture. We have built for this world a family mansion, and for the next a family tomb. The best works of art are the expression of man's struggle to free himself from this condition, but the effect of our art is merely to make this low state comfortable and that higher state to be forgotten.

Near the end of March, 1845, I borrowed an axe and went down to the woods by Walden Pond, nearest to where I intended to build my house, and began to cut down some tall arrowy white pines for timber. I went on for

some days cutting and hewing timber, and also studs and rafters, all with my narrow axe. By the middle of April, for I made no haste in my work, but rather made the most of it, my house was framed and ready for the raising.

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*Men have become the tools of their tools.*

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At length, in the beginning of May, I set up the frame. Before winter, I built a chimney, and shingled the sides of my house, which were already impervious to rain, with imperfect and sappy shingles made of the first slice of the log. I have thus a tight shingled and plastered house, ten feet wide by 15 long, and eight-foot posts, with a garret and a closet, a large window on each side, two trap doors, one door at the end, and a brick fireplace opposite.

I found that the student who wishes for a shelter can obtain one for a lifetime at an expense not greater than the rent which he now pays annually. Before I finished my house, wishing to earn 10 or 12 dollars by some honest and agreeable method, in order to meet my unusual expenses, I planted about two acres and a half of light and sandy soil

near it chiefly with beans, but also a small part with potatoes, corn, peas, and turnips. The whole lot contains 11 acres, mostly growing up to pines and hickories, and was sold the preceding season for eight dollars and eight cents an acre.

The next year, I did better still, for I spaded up all the land which I required, about a third of an acre, and I learned from the experience of both years, not being in the least awed by many celebrated works on husbandry, Arthur Young among the rest, that if one would live simply and eat only the crop which he raised, and raise no more than he ate, and not exchange it for an insufficient quantity of more luxurious and expensive things, he would need to cultivate only a few rods of ground, and that it would be cheaper to spade up that than to use oxen to plough it, and he could do all his necessary farm work as it were with his left hand at odd hours in the summer; and thus he would not be tied to an ox, or horse, or cow, or pig, as at present. I desire to speak impartially on this point, and as one not interested in the success or failure of the present economical and social arrangements. I was more independent than any farmer in Concord, for I was not anchored to a house or farm, but could follow the bent of my genius, which is a very crooked one, every moment. Be-

side being better off than they already, if my house had been burned or my crops had failed, I should have been nearly as well off as before.

I am wont to think that men are not so much the keepers of herds as herds are the keepers of men, the former are so much the freer. Certainly no nation that lived simply in all respects, that is, no nation of philosophers, would commit so great a blunder as to use the labor of animals.

I learned from my two years' experience that it would cost incredibly little trouble to obtain one's necessary food, and yet retain health and strength. I have made a satisfactory dinner simply off a dish of purslane which I gathered in my cornfield, boiled and salted.

There is a certain class of unbelievers who sometimes ask me such questions as, if I think that I can live on vegetable food alone; and to strike at the root of the matter at once — for the root is faith — I am accustomed to answer s that I can live on board nails. If they cannot understand that, they cannot understand much that I have to say.

**Where I Lived and What I Lived For.** When first I took up my abode in the woods, that is, began to spend my nights as well as days there, which, by accident, was on Independence Day, or the fourth of July, 1845, my house was not finished for win-

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*There is a certain class of unbelievers who sometimes ask me such questions as, if I think that I can live on vegetable food alone.*

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ter, but was merely a defense against the rain, without plastering or chimney, the walls being of rough weather-stained boards, with wide chinks, which made it cool at night.

I was seated by the shore of a small pond, about a mile and a half south of the village of Concord and somewhat higher than it, in the midst of an extensive wood between that town and Lincoln, and about two miles south of that our only field known to fame, Concord Battle Ground; but I was so low in the woods that the opposite shore, half a mile off, like the rest, covered with wood, was my most distant horizon.

Though the view from my door was still more contracted, I did not feel crowded or confined in the least. There was pasture enough for my imagination. The low shrub-oak plateau to which the opposite shore arose, stretched away toward the prairies of the West and the steppes of Tartary, affording ample room

for all the roving families of men. "There are none happy in the world but beings who enjoy freely a vast horizon," said Damodara, when his herds required new and larger pastures.

Both place and time were changed, and I dwelt nearer to those parts of the universe and to those eras in history which had most attracted me. Where I lived was as far off as many a region viewed nightly by astronomers. We are wont to imagine rare and delectable places in some remote and more celestial corner of the system, behind the constellation of Cassiopeia's Chair, far from noise and disturbance. I discovered that my house actually had its site in such a withdrawn, but forever new and unprofaned, part of the universe.

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole

and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.

Simplify, simplify. Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion. Our life is like a German Confederacy, made up of petty states, with its boundary forever fluctuating, so that even a German cannot tell you how it is bounded at any moment. The nation itself, with all its so called internal improvements, which, by the way, are all external and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, as the million households in the land; and the only cure for it as for them is in a rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose. It lives too fast. Men think that it is essential that the Nation have commerce, and export rice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride 30 miles an hour, without a doubt, whether they do or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain.

Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life? We are

determined to be starved before we are hungry. As for work, we haven't any of any consequence.

When we are unhurried and wise, we perceive that only great and worthy things have any permanent and absolute existence — that petty fears and petty pleasures are but the shadow of the reality. This is always exhilarating and sublime. By closing the eyes and slumbering, and consenting to be deceived by shows, men establish and confirm their daily life of routine and habit everywhere, which still is built on purely illusory foundations. Children, who play life, discern its true law and relations more clearly than men, who fail to live it worthily.

Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that alluvion which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through Church and state, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality.

**Reading.** With a little more deliberation in the choice of their pursuits, all men would perhaps become essentially students and observers, for certainly their nature and destiny are interesting to all alike. In accumulating

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property for ourselves or our posterity, in founding a family or a state, or acquiring fame even, we are mortal; but in dealing with truth we are immortal. The oldest Egyptian or Hindu philosopher raised a corner of the veil from the statue of the divinity; and still the trembling robe remains raised, and I gaze upon as fresh a glory as he did, since it was I in him that was then so bold, and it is he in me that now reviews the vision. No dust has settled on that robe; no time has elapsed since that divinity was revealed. That time which we really improve, or which is improvable, is neither past, present, nor future.

My residence was more favorable, not only to thought, but to serious reading, than a university; and though I was beyond the range of the ordinary circulating library, I had more than ever come within the influence of those books which circulate round the world, whose sentences were first written on

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bark, and are now merely copied from time to time on to linen paper.

However much we may admire the orator's occasional bursts of eloquence, the noblest written words are commonly as far behind or above the fleeting spoken language as the firmament with its stars is behind the clouds. The works of the great poets have never yet been read by mankind, for only great poets can read them. I think that having learned our letters, we should read the best that is in literature, and not be forever repeating our ABCs, and words of one syllable.

**Sounds.** But while we are confined to books, though the most select and classic, and read only particular written languages, which are themselves but dialects and provincial, we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard. What is a course of history, or philosophy, or po-

etry, no matter how well selected, or the best society, or the most admirable routine of life, compared with the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen? Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer? Read your fate, see what is before you, and walk on into futurity.

I did not read books the first summer; I hoed beans. Nay, I often did better than this. There were times when I could not afford to sacrifice the bloom of the present moment to any work, whether of the head or hands. I love a broad margin to my life. Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a reverie, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, or the noise of some traveler's wagon on the distant highway, I was reminded of the lapse of time. I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been. They were not time subtracted from my life, but so much over and above my usual allowance. I realized what the Orientals mean by contemplation and the forsaking of works.

I silently smiled at my incessant good fortune. As the sparrow had

its trill, sitting on the hickory before my door, so had I my chuckle or suppressed warble which he might hear out of my nest.

**Solitude.** This is a delicious evening when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself. As I walk along the stony shore of the pond in my shirt sleeves, though it is cool as well as cloudy and windy, and I see nothing special to attract me, all the elements are unusually congenial to me. The bullfrogs trump to usher in the night, and the note of the whippoorwill is borne on the rippling wind from over the water. Sympathy with the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost takes away my breath; yet, like the lake, my serenity is rippled but not ruffled. These small waves raised by the evening wind are as remote from storm as the smooth reflecting surface. Though it is now dark, the wind still blows and roars in the wood, the waves still dash, and some creatures lull the rest with their notes.

When I return to my house, I find that visitors have been there and left their cards, either a bunch of flowers, or a wreath of evergreen, or a name in pencil on a yellow walnut leaf or a chip. They who come rarely to the woods take some little piece of the forest into their hands to

play with by the way, which they leave, either intentionally or accidentally.

I experienced sometimes that the most sweet and tender, the most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural object, even for the poor misanthrope and most melancholy man. There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still. There was never yet such a storm but it was music to a healthy and innocent ear. Nothing can rightly compel a simple and brave man to a vulgar sadness. While I enjoy the friendship of the seasons, I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me. The gentle rain which waters my beans and keeps me in the house today is not drear and melancholy, but good for me too. Though it prevents my hoeing them, it is of far more worth than my hoeing. If it should continue so long as to cause the seeds to rot in the ground and destroy the potatoes in the low lands, it would still be good for the grass on the uplands, and, being good for the grass, it would be good for me.

I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude. We are for the most part

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more lonely when we go abroad among men than when we stay in our chambers. A man thinking or working is always alone, let him be where he will. Solitude is not measured by the miles of space that intervene between a man and his fellows. The really diligent student in one of the crowded hives of Cambridge College is as solitary as a dervish in the desert. The farmer can work alone in the field or the woods all day, hoeing or chopping, and not feel lonesome, because he is employed; but when he comes home at night he cannot sit down in a room alone, at the mercy of his thoughts, but must be where he can "see the folks," and recreate, and as he thinks remunerate himself for his day's solitude; and hence he wonders how the student can sit alone in the house all night and most of the day without ennui and "the blues;" but he does not realize that the student, though in the house, is still at work in his field, and chopping in his woods, as the farmer in his, and in turn seeks the same recreation and society that the latter does, though it

may be a more condensed form of it.

The indescribable beneficence of Nature — of sun and wind and rain, of summer and winter — such health, such cheer, they afford forever! And such sympathy have they ever with our race, that all Nature would be affected, and the sun's brightness fade, and the winds would sigh humanely, and the clouds rain tears, and the woods shed their leaves and put on mourning in midsummer, if any man should ever for a just cause grieve. Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mold myself?

What is the pill which will keep us well, serene, contented? Not my or thy great-grandfather's, but our great-grandmother Nature's universal, vegetable, botanic medicines, by which she has kept herself young always, outlived so many old Parrs in her day, and fed her health with their decaying fatness.

**The Bean-Field.** Meanwhile my beans, the length of whose rows, added together, was seven miles already planted, were impatient to be hoed, for the earliest had grown considerably before the latest were in the ground; indeed they were not easily to be put off. What was the meaning of this so steady and self-respecting, this small Herculean labor, I knew not. I came to love my rows, my beans,

though so many more than I wanted. They attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antaeus. But why should I raise them? Only Heaven knows. This was my curious labor all summer — to make this portion of the earth's surface, which had yielded only cinquefoil, blackberries, johnswort, and the like, before, sweet wild fruits and pleasant flowers, produce instead this pulse. What shall I learn of beans or beans of me? I cherish them, I hoe them, early and late I have an eye to them; and this is my day's work.

It was a singular experience that long acquaintance which I cultivated with beans, what with planting, and hoeing, and harvesting, and threshing, and picking over, and selling them — the last was the hardest of all — I might add eating, for I did taste. I was determined to know beans. When they were growing, I used to hoe from five o'clock in the morning till noon, and commonly spent the rest of the day about other affairs.

Those summer days which some of my contemporaries devoted to the fine arts in Boston or Rome, and others to contemplation in India, and others to trade in London or New York, I thus, with the other farmers of New England, devoted to husbandry. Ancient poetry and mythology suggest, at least, that husbandry was once a sacred art; but it is

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pursued with irreverent haste and heedlessness by us, our object being to have large farms and large crops merely. We have no festival, nor procession, nor ceremony, not excepting our Cattle-shows and so called Thanksgivings, by which the farmer expresses a sense of the sacredness of his calling, or is reminded of its sacred origin. It is the premium and the feast which tempt him. He sacrifices not to Ceres and the Terrestrial Jove, but to the infernal Plutus rather. By avarice and selfishness, and a grovelling habit, from which none of us is free, of regarding the soil as property, or the means of acquiring property chiefly, the landscape is deformed, husbandry is degraded with us, and the farmer leads the meanest of lives. He knows Nature but as a robber. Cato says that the profits of agriculture are particularly pious or just, and according to Varro, the old Romans "called the same earth Mother and

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*According to Varro, the old Romans "called the same earth Mother and Ceres, and thought that they who cultivated it led a pious and useful life.*

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Ceres, and thought that they who cultivated it led a pious and useful life, and that they alone were left of the race of King Saturn."

We are wont to forget that the sun looks on our cultivated fields and on the prairies and forests without distinction. They all reflect and absorb his rays alike, and the former make but a small part of the glorious picture which he beholds in his daily course. In his view, the earth is all equally cultivated like a garden. Therefore, we should receive the benefit of his light and heat with a corresponding trust and magnanimity. What though I value the seed of these beans, and harvest that in the fall of the year? This broad field looks not to me as the principal cultivator, but to influences more genial to it, which water and make it green.

**The Ponds.** The scenery of Walden is on a humble scale, and, though very beautiful, does not approach to grandeur, nor can it much concern one who has

not long frequented it or lived by its shore; yet this pond is so remarkable for its depth and purity as to merit a particular description. It is a clear and deep green well, half a mile long and a mile and three quarters in circumference, and contains about 61 and a half acres; a perennial spring in the midst of pine and oak woods, without any visible inlet or outlet except by the clouds and evaporation. The surrounding hills rise abruptly from the water to the height of forty to eighty feet, though on the south-east and east they attain to about one hundred and one hundred and fifty feet respectively, within a quarter and a third of a mile. They are exclusively woodland. All our Concord waters have two colors at least, one when viewed at a distance, and another, more proper, close at hand. The first depends more on the light, and follows the sky. In clear weather, in summer, they appear blue at a little distance, especially if agitated, and at a great distance all appear alike. In stormy weather they are sometimes of a dark slate color. The sea, however, is said to be blue one day and green another without any perceptible change in the atmosphere. I have seen our river, when, the landscape being covered with snow, both water and ice were almost as green as grass. Some consider blue "to be the color of pure wa-

ter, whether liquid or solid." But, looking directly down into our waters from a boat, they are seen to be of very different colors. Walden is blue at one time and green at another, even from the same point of view. Lying between the earth and the heavens, it partakes of the color of both. Viewed from a hilltop, it reflects the color of the sky, but near at hand it is of a yellowish tint next the shore where you can see the sand, then a light green, which gradually deepens to a uniform dark green in the body of the pond. In some lights, viewed even from a hill-top, it is of a vivid green next the shore. Some have referred this to the reflection of the verdure; but it is equally green there against the railroad sand-bank, and in the spring, before the leaves are expanded, and it may be simply the result of the prevailing blue mixed with the yellow of the sand. Such is the color of its iris. This is that portion, also, where in the spring, the ice being warmed by the heat of the sun reflected from the bottom, and also transmitted through the earth, melts first and forms a narrow canal about the still frozen middle. Like the rest of our waters, when much agitated, in clear weather, so that the surface of the waves may reflect the sky at the right angle, or because there is more light mixed with it, it appears at a little distance of a

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darker blue than the sky itself; and at such a time, being on its surface, and looking with divided vision, so as to see the reflection, I have discerned a matchless and indescribable light blue, such as watered or changeable silks and sword blades suggest, more cerulean than the sky itself, alternating with the original dark green on the opposite sides of the waves, which last appeared but muddy in comparison. It is a vitreous greenish blue, as I remember it, like those patches of the winter sky seen through cloud vistas in the west before sundown. Yet a single glass of its water held up to the light is as colorless as an equal quantity of air. It is well known that a large plate of glass will have a green tint, owing, as the makers say, to its "body," but a small piece of the same will be colorless. How large a body of Walden water would be required to reflect a green tint I have

never proved. The water of our river is black or a very dark brown to one looking directly down on it, and, like that of most ponds, imparts to the body of one bathing in it a yellowish tinge; but this water is of such crystalline purity that the body of the bather appears of an alabaster whiteness, still more unnatural, which, as the limbs are magnified and distorted withal, produces a monstrous effect, making fit studies for a Michael Angelo.

The water is so transparent that the bottom can easily be discerned at the depth of 25 to 30 feet. You may see many feet beneath the surface the schools of perch and shiners, perhaps only an inch long, yet the former easily distinguished by their transverse bars, and you think that they must be ascetic fish that find a subsistence there.

The shore is composed of a belt of smooth rounded white stones like paving stones, excepting one or two short sand beaches, and is so steep that in many places a single leap will carry you into water over your head; and were it not for its remarkable transparency, that would be the last to be seen of its bottom till it rose on the opposite side.

We have one other pond just like this, White Pond in Nine Acre Corner, about two and a half miles westerly; but, though I am acquainted with most of the

ponds within a dozen miles of this center, I do not know a third of this pure and well-like character. Successive nations perchance have drank at, admired, and fathomed it, and passed away, and still its water is green and pellucid as ever. Not an intermitting spring! Perhaps on that spring morning when Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden Walden Pond was already in existence, and even then breaking up in a gentle spring rain accompanied with mist and a southerly wind, and covered with myriads of ducks and geese, which had not heard of the fall, when still such pure lakes sufficed them. Even then it had commenced to rise and fall, and had clarified its waters and colored them of the hue they now wear, and obtained a patent of heaven to be the only Walden Pond in the world and distiller of celestial dews. Who knows in how many unremembered nations' literatures this has been the Castalian Fountain? Or what nymphs presided over it in the Golden Age? It is a gem of the first water which Concord wears in her coronet.

The Walden Pond was my well ready dug. For four months in the year its water is as cold as it is pure at all times; and I think that it is then as good as any, if not the best, in the town.

In September or October, Walden is a perfect forest mirror, set round with stones as precious

to my eye as if fewer or rarer. Nothing so fair, so pure, and at the same time so large, as a lake, perchance, lies on the surface of the earth. Sky water. It needs no fence. Nations come and go without defiling it.

**Higher Laws.** It is hard to provide and cook so simple and clean a diet as will not offend the imagination; but this, I think, is to be fed when we feed the body; they should both sit down at the same table. Yet perhaps this may be done. The fruits eaten temperately need not make us ashamed of our appetites, nor interrupt the worthiest pursuits. But put an extra condiment into your dish, and it will poison you. It is not worth the while to live by rich cookery. Most men would feel shame if caught preparing with their own hands precisely such a dinner, as is every day prepared for them by others. Yet till this is otherwise we are not civilized, and, if gentlemen and ladies, are not true men and women. This certainly suggests what change is to be made. It may be vain to ask why the imagination will not be reconciled to flesh and fat. I am satisfied that it is not. Is it not a reproach that man is a carnivorous animal? True, he can and does live, in a great measure, by preying on other animals; but this is a miserable way — as anyone who will go to snaring rabbits, or slaughtering lambs, may learn — and

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*I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals.*

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he will be regarded as a benefactor of his race who shall teach man to confine himself to a more innocent and wholesome diet. Whatever my own practice may be, I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals, as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other when they came in contact with the more civilized.

If one listens to the faintest but constant suggestions of his genius, which are certainly true, he sees not to what extremes, or even insanity, it may lead him; and yet that way, as he grows more resolute and faithful, his road lies. The faintest assured objection which one healthy man feels will at length prevail over the arguments and customs of mankind. No man ever followed his genius till it misled him. Though the result were bodily weakness, yet perhaps no one can say that the consequences were to be regretted, for these were a life in conformity to higher principles. If the day and

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*All nature is your congratulation, and you have cause to bless yourself. The greatest gains and values are farthest from being appreciated . . . We soon forget them.*

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the night are such that you greet them with joy, and life emits a fragrance like flowers and sweet-scented herbs, is more elastic, more starry, more immortal — that is your success. All nature is your congratulation, and you have cause to bless yourself. The greatest gains and values are farthest from being appreciated. We easily come to doubt if they exist. We soon forget them. They are the highest reality.

Perhaps, the facts most astounding and most real are never communicated by man to man. The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening. It is a little star-dust caught, a segment of the rainbow which I have clutched.

Our whole life is startlingly moral. There is never an instant's truce between virtue and vice. Goodness is the only investment that never fails. In the mu-

sic of the harp which trembles round the world it is the insisting on this which thrills us. The harp is the travelling patterer for the Universe's Insurance Company, recommending its laws, and our little goodness is all the assessment that we pay. Though the youth at last grows indifferent, the laws of the universe are not indifferent, but are forever on the side of the most sensitive. Listen to every zephyr for some reproof, for it is surely there, and he is unfortunate who does not hear it. We cannot touch a string or move a stop but the charming moral transfixes us. Many an irksome noise, go a long way off, is heard as music, a proud sweet satire on the meanness of our lives.

We are conscious of an animal in us, which awakens in proportion as our higher nature slumbers. It is reptile and sensual, and perhaps cannot be wholly expelled; like the worms which, even in life and health, occupy our bodies. Possibly we may withdraw from it, but never change its nature. I fear that it may enjoy a certain health of its own; that we may be well, yet not pure. The other day, I picked up the lower jaw of a hog, with white and sound teeth and tusks, which suggested that there was an animal health and vigor distinct from the spiritual. This creature succeeded by other means than temperance and pu-

urity. "That in which men differ from brute beasts," says Mencius, "is a thing very inconsiderable; the common herd lose it very soon; superior men preserve it carefully." Who knows what sort of life would result if we had attained to purity? If I knew so wise a man as could teach me purity I would go to seek him forthwith. "A command over our passions, and over the external senses of the body, and good acts, are declared by the Ved to be indispensable in the mind's approximation to God." Yet the spirit can for the time pervade and control every member and function of the body, and transmute what in form is the grossest sensuality into purity and devotion. The generative energy, which, when we are loose, dissipates and makes us unclean, when we are continent invigorates and inspires us. Chastity is the flowering of man; and what are called Genius, Heroism, Holiness, and the like, are but various fruits which succeed it. Man flows at once to God when the channel of purity is open. By turns our purity inspires and our impurity casts us down. He is blessed who is assured that the animal is dying out in him day by day, and the divine being established.

**Winter.** After a still winter night, I awoke with the impression that some question had been put to me, which I had been

endeavoring in vain to answer in my sleep, as what — how — when — where?

But there was dawning Nature, in whom all creatures live, looking in at my broad windows with serene and satisfied face, and no question on her lips. I awoke to an answered question, to Nature and daylight. The snow lying deep on the earth dotted with young pines, and the very slope of the hill on which my house is placed, seemed to say, Forward! Nature puts no question and answers none which we mortals ask. She has long ago taken her resolution. "O Prince, our eyes contemplate with admiration and transmit to the soul the wonderful and varied spectacle of this universe. The night veils without doubt a part of this glorious creation; but day comes to reveal to us this great work, which extends from earth even into the plains of the ether."

**Spring.** One attraction in coming to the woods to live was that I should have leisure and opportunity to see the spring come in. The ice in the pond at length begins to be honey-combed, and I can set my heel in it as I walk. Fogs and rains and warmer suns are gradually melting the snow; the days have grown sensibly longer; and I see how I shall get through the winter without adding to my wood-pile, for large fires are no longer necessary. I am on the alert for the first signs

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*In proportion as he  
simplifies his life, the  
laws of the universe will  
appear less complex, and  
solitude will not be  
solitude, nor poverty  
poverty, nor weakness.  
weakness.*

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of spring, to hear the chance note of some arriving bird, or the striped squirrel's chirp, for his stores must be now nearly exhausted, or see the woodchuck venture out of his winter quarters. On the 13th of March, after I had heard the bluebird, song-sparrow, and red-wing, the ice was still nearly a foot thick. As the weather grew warmer, it was not sensibly worn away by the water, nor broken up and floated off as in rivers, but, though it was completely melted for half a rod in width about the shore, the middle was merely honey-combed and saturated with water, so that you could put your foot through it when six inches thick; but by the next day evening, perhaps, after a warm rain followed by fog, it would have wholly disappeared, all gone off with the fog, spirited away.

The change from storm and winter to serene and mild

weather, from dark and sluggish hours to bright and elastic ones, is a memorable crisis which all things proclaim. It is seemingly instantaneous at last. Suddenly an influx of light filled my house, though the evening was at hand, and the clouds of winter still overhung it, and the eaves were dripping with sleety rain. I looked out the window, and lo! Where yesterday was cold gray ice there lay the transparent pond already calm and full of hope as on a summer evening, reflecting a summer evening sky in its bosom, though none was visible overhead, as if it had intelligence with some remote horizon. I heard a robin in the distance, the first I had heard for many a thousand years, methought, whose note I shall not forget for many a thousand mor — the same sweet and powerful song as of yore. O the evening robin, at the end of a New England summer day!

As every season seems best to us in its turn, so the coming in of spring is like the creation of Cosmos out of Chaos and the realization of the Golden Age.

Early in May, the oaks, hickories, maples, and other trees, just putting out amidst the pine woods around the pond, imparted a brightness like sunshine to the landscape, especially in cloudy days, as if the sun were breaking through mists and shining faintly on the

hill-sides here and there. On the third or fourth of May I saw a loon in the pond, and during the first week of the month I heard the whippoorwill, the brown-thrasher, the veery, the wood-pewee, the chewink, and other birds. I had heard the wood-thrush long before. The phoebe had already come once more and looked in at my door and window, to see if my house was cavern-like enough for her, sustaining herself on humming wings with clinched talons, as if she held by the air, while she surveyed the premises.

And so the seasons went rolling on into summer, as one rambles into higher and higher grass. Thus was my first year's life in the woods completed; and the second year was similar to it. I finally left Walden September 6th, 1847.

**Conclusion.** I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open.

The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now.

I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.?

I do not suppose that I have attained to obscurity, but I should be proud if no more fatal fault were found with my pages on

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***Humility, like darkness,  
reveals the heavenly  
lights.***

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this score than was found with the Walden ice. Southern customers objected to its blue color, which is the evidence of its purity, as if it were muddy, and preferred the Cambridge ice, which is white, but tastes of weeds. The purity men love is like the mists which envelop the earth, and not like the azure ether beyond.

Some are dinning in our ears that we Americans, and moderns generally, are intellectual dwarfs compared with the ancients, or even the Elizabethan men. But what is that to the purpose? A living dog is better than a dead lion. Shall a man go and hang himself because he belongs to the race of pygmies, and not be the biggest pygmy that he can? Let every one mind his own business, and endeavor to be what he was made.

Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away. It is not important that he should mature as

soon as an apple-tree or an oak. Shall he turn his spring into summer? If the condition of things which we were made for is not yet, what were any reality which we can substitute? We will not be shipwrecked on a vain reality. Shall we with pains erect a heaven of blue glass over ourselves, though when it is done we shall be sure to gaze still at the true ethereal heaven far above, as if the former were not?

However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The fault-finder will find faults even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours, even in a poor house. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the alms-house as brightly as from the rich man's abode; the snow melts before its door as early in the spring. I do not see but a quiet mind may live as contentedly there, and have as cheering thoughts, as in a palace. The town's poor seem to me often to live the most independent lives of any. Maybe they are simply great enough to receive without misgiving. Most think that they are above being supported by the town; but it oftener happens that they are not above supporting themselves by dishonest means, which should be more disreputable. Cultivate

poverty like a garden herb, like sage. Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends. Turn the old; return to them. Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts. God will see that you do not want society. If I were confined to a corner of a garret all my days, like a spider, the world would be just as large to me while I had my thoughts about me. The philosopher said: "From an army of three divisions one can take away its general, and put it in disorder; from the man the most abject and vulgar one cannot take away his thought." Do not seek so anxiously to be developed, to subject yourself to many influences to be played on; it is all dissipation. Humility, like darkness, reveals the heavenly lights. The shadows of poverty and meanness gather around us, "and lo! Creation widens to our view." We are often reminded that if there were bestowed on us the wealth of Croesus, our aims must still be the same, and our means essentially the same. Moreover, if you are restricted in your range by poverty, you are but confined to the most significant and vital experiences. It is life near the bone where it is sweetest. You are defended from being a trifler. No man loses ever on a lower level by magnanimity on a higher. Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not re-

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*As I stand over the insect  
crawling amid the pine  
needles on the forest floor . . .  
I am reminded of the  
greater Benefactor and  
Intelligence that stands  
over me, the human insect.*

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quired to buy one necessary of the soul.

I live in the angle of a leaden wall, into whose composition was poured a little alloy of bell metal. Often, in the repose of my mid-day, there reaches my ears a confused tintinnabulum from without. It is the noise of my contemporaries. My neighbors tell me of their adventures with famous gentlemen and ladies, what notabilities they met at the dinner-table; but I am no more interested in such things than in the contents of the *Daily Times*. The interest and the conversation are about costume and manners chiefly; but a goose is a goose still, dress it as you will. I delight to come to my bearings — not walk in procession with pomp and parade, in a conspicuous place, but to walk even with the Builder of the universe — not to live in this restless, nervous, bustling, trivial 19th century, but stand or sit thoughtfully while it goes by. What are men

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*Only that day dawns to  
which we are awake.  
There is more day to  
dawn. The sun is but a  
morning star.*

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celebrating? They are all on a committee of arrangements, and hourly expect a speech from somebody. God only is the president of the day.

Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth. I sat at a table where were rich food and wine in abundance, and obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board. The hospitality was as cold as the ices. I thought that there was no need of ice to freeze them. They talked to me of the age of the wine and the fame of the vintage; but I thought of an older, a newer, and purer wine, of a more glorious vintage, which they had not got, and could not buy. The style, the house and grounds and "entertainment" pass for nothing with me. I called on the king, but he made me wait in his hall, and conducted like a man incapacitated for hospitality. There was a man in my neighborhood who lived in a hollow tree. His manners were truly

regal. I should have done better had I called on him.

How long shall we sit in our porticoes practicing idle and musty virtues, which any work would make impertinent? As if one were to begin the day with long-suffering, and hire a man to hoe his potatoes; and in the afternoon go forth to practice Christian meekness and charity with goodness aforethought! Consider the China pride and stagnant self-complacency of mankind. This generation reclines a little to congratulate itself on being the last of an illustrious line; and in Boston and London and Paris and Rome, thinking of its long descent, it speaks of its progress in art and science and literature with satisfaction. There are the Records of the Philosophical Societies, and the public Eulogies of Great Men! It is the good Adam contemplating his own virtue. "Yes, we have done great deeds, and sung divine songs, which shall never die" — that is, as long as we can remember them. The learned societies and great men of Assyria — where are they? What youthful philosophers and experimentalists we are! There is not one of my readers who has yet lived a whole human life. These may be but the spring months in the life of the race. If we have had the seven-years' itch, we have not seen the 17-year locust yet in Concord.

We are acquainted with a mere pellicle of the globe on which we live. Most have not delved six feet beneath the surface, nor leaped as many above it. We know not where we are. Beside, we are sound asleep nearly half our time. Yet we esteem ourselves wise, and have an established order on the surface. Truly, we are deep thinkers, we are ambitious spirits! As I stand over the insect crawling amid the pine needles on the forest floor, and endeavoring to conceal itself from my sight, and ask myself why it will cherish those humble thoughts, and hide its head from me who might perhaps be its benefactor, and impart to its race some cheering information, I am reminded of the greater Benefactor and Intelligence that stands over me the human insect.

There is an incessant influx of novelty into the world, and yet we tolerate incredible dullness. I need only suggest what kind of sermons are still listened to in the most enlightened countries. There are such words as joy and sorrow, but they are only the burden of a psalm, sung with a nasal twang, while we believe in the ordinary and mean. We think that we can change our clothes only. It is said that the British Empire is very large and

respectable, and that the United States are a first-rate power. We do not believe that a tide rises and falls behind every man which can float the British Empire like a chip, if he should ever harbor it in his mind. Who knows what sort of 17-year locust will next come out of the ground? The government of the world I live in was not framed, like that of Britain, in after-dinner conversations over the wine.

The life in us is like the water in the river. It may rise this year higher than man has ever known it, and flood the parched uplands; even this may be the eventful year, which will drown out all our muskrats. It was not always dry land where we dwell. I see far inland the banks which the stream anciently washed, before science began to record its freshets.

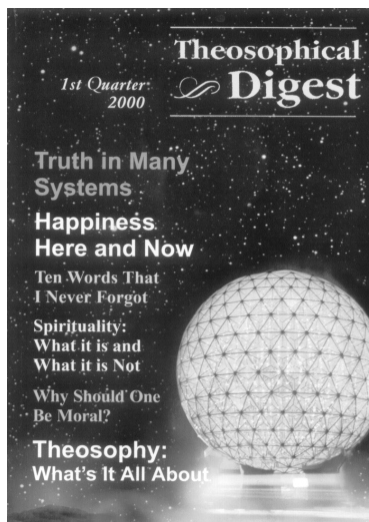
I do not say that John or Jonathan will realize all this; but such is the character of that morrow which mere lapse of time can never make to dawn. The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.

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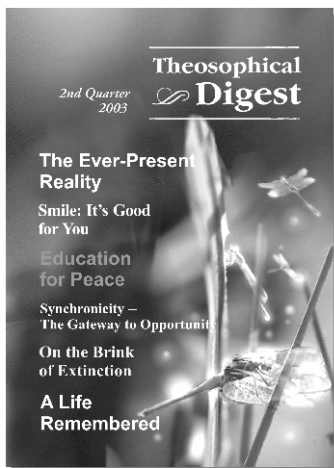
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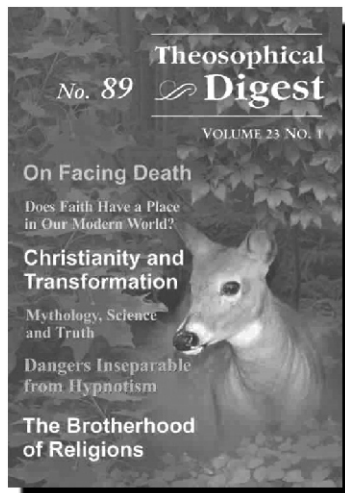
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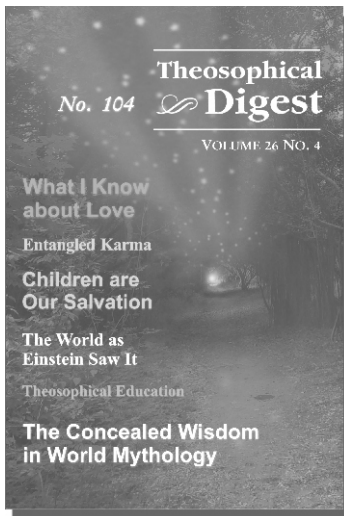
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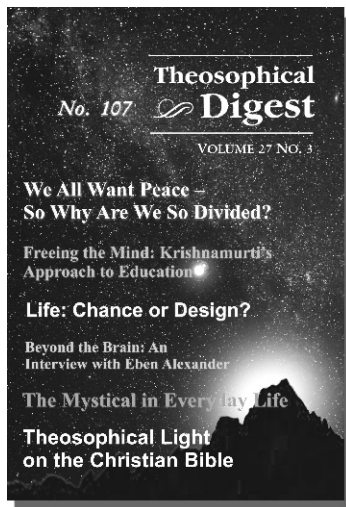
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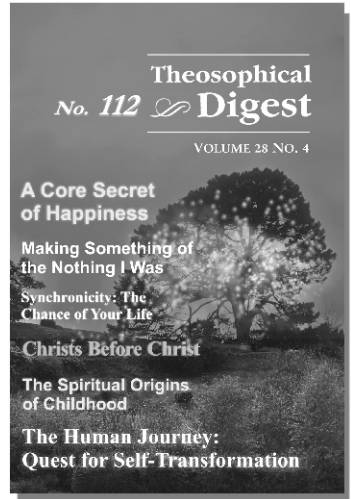
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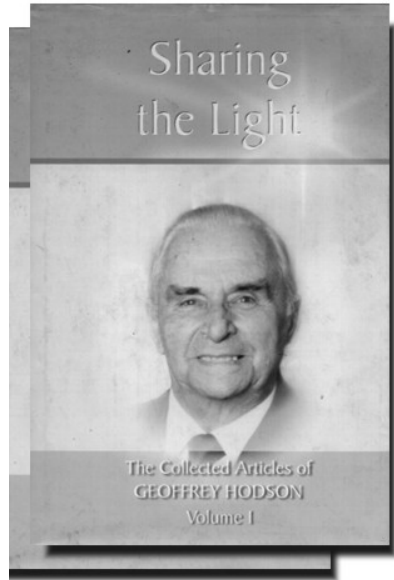
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