

AWAKENING THE INNER SELF

By Edward Abdill

We human beings have always made assumptions about our origin and destiny. Over the centuries, widely accepted views have been codified into tenets of religious faith or presented as scientific theories, and most of us have accepted what we have been told by those who claim to know. To borrow an idea from *The King and I*, we are convinced that what we really do not know is so.

Contrary to the belief systems offered by many religions, the Theosophical view is that we must *discover* Truth within ourselves. It must result from our experience rather than from our belief.

To experience Truth is to understand a principle. That understanding comes to us in a sudden, timeless flash. One minute we do not understand, and the next we do. There is no measurable time between knowing and not knowing. When such insight illumines the mind, belief is replaced by understanding. The result of that intuitive flash is an experience of integration, wholeness, peace, and in some cases even bliss. For a timeless moment, we may say that our mind has become one with the universal mind, with Truth itself. The knower and the known have become one and there is no longer self and the truth, but only Truth.

To say that Truth must be experienced is not to say that intellectual knowledge is unimportant. There are many critically important facts that we must learn, such as our home address, the number of miles between our city and another that we wish to visit, or where we keep our coat. There are, however, other kinds of knowledge that we get only from experience. For example, we may read books on how to ride a bicycle, but we'll never be able actually to ride until we get on a bicycle and learn to manage it by trial and error.

What ancient sages have said or what our contemporaries teach may fascinate us. The words of others may even stimulate us to search further. Yet, believing something simply because someone has told it to us is much like reading books on bicycle riding, remembering what was said, and thinking that we now know how to ride a bicycle.

Even though the Theosophical Society has no creed or required beliefs, we who are members of the Society are not exempt from the centuries during which humanity has been conditioned to rely on authority rather than to discover for ourselves. We, too, tend to believe what we are told by those whom we admire or by those who appear to know what is true. We, too, often rely on some authority figure such as Helena Blavatsky, Annie Besant, or a contemporary member of the Theosophical Society.

In less than twenty-five years after the founding of the Theosophical Society, one of

HPB's adept teachers noticed that the members of the Society were falling into the same old rut of belief. While saying that they had no dogma, they were taking his words and those of others as a creed, even though they insisted that no member had to believe those words. They, like many of us now, felt that they knew the truth because someone they respected had told them.

Blavatsky, like other wise teachers, insisted that Truth could not be taught in words. "The teacher can but point the way," says *The Voice of the Silence* (fragment 3). Words can do no more. We can express our beliefs and theories in words, but we cannot cause others to *experience* a truth simply by telling them.

Moreover, belief and theory alone are not only insufficient; when they crystallize into a belief system they can actually block our understanding and spiritual development. That can be illustrated by a simple example: Some friends describe their home to us. They tell us about the various rooms, about their garden and front lawn, and even about the surrounding neighborhood. All they say is completely accurate. We form a picture of their house and its environs as they talk, and we are invited to visit. However, when we actually see the house and the neighborhood, they are different from what we had imagined. A description can only prompt us to discover the reality of the thing described. To know our friends' home, we must experience it for ourselves. When we do, it is different from what we believed, based on the description.

Likewise, if friends describe a delicious but rare tropical fruit that we have never seen or tasted, their description may be completely accurate. It is sweet, they tell us. It tastes something like a blend of mango, peach, and pineapple. Having heard their accurate description, do we now know its taste? Of course not, we must taste it ourselves in order to know, and when we do, it will inevitably taste different from what we imagined.

In the same way, when we hear or read a teaching or doctrine, we form an idea out of our own experience of what it refers to. But if we have not ourselves had the experience that the teaching refers to, the ideas we form about it are inevitably false.

To say that Truth cannot be conveyed in words does not mean that we should abandon Theosophical theories or reasonable assumptions about reality. The theories may be quite accurate, the teachings sound. Yet unless we verify them both outside and inside ourselves, we will be caught in error. What we are asked to do is to realize that all theories are maps; they are not the places the maps represent.

For millennia we have been taught that each of us either has or is a soul, a spirit, an inner self. Without proof, many choose to believe that. Without proof, others choose not to believe it. Surrounded by a multitude of conflicting theories and beliefs, can we ever really come to know truth from falsehood?

Theosophical and other spiritual literature offers clues that may lead us to awakening

our inner self and to discover that we not only have a soul but *are* it. Those clues are not a series of facts to be learned. They are not instructions for setting up a scientific laboratory in which we can prove to ourselves and others the truth or falsehood about the inner self. Rather the clues are guidelines for living in such a way that we actually become the scientific laboratory ourselves.

At the very heart of this way of life leading to certain knowledge are two essential principles:

- A relentless pursuit of Truth
- Compassion

The first of these, a relentless pursuit of Truth, is implied by the Theosophical Society's motto: "There is no religion higher than Truth." But what is Truth? When Pilate asked that question, Jesus did not answer. He was silent perhaps because, although ideas, theories, and opinions can be put into words, Truth cannot.

In Helena Blavatsky's affirmation, "The Golden Stairs," two of the requirements for reaching the temple of divine wisdom are an open mind and an eager intellect. The temple of divine wisdom is synonymous with the inner self. To reach that temple is to awaken the inner self.

Most of us would like to think that we have an open mind and an eager intellect. But when it comes to Theosophical or other spiritual literature, do we acknowledge inconsistencies, contradictions, errors in fact, and even blatant prejudice if we find it? Or do we explain it away or ignore it like those who believe blindly in the doctrine of their choice? Moreover, do we clearly see our own failings, inconsistencies, and inadequacies? Are we searching for understanding or are we defending our beliefs?

If we persist in holding on to our beliefs in spite of evidence to the contrary, we may fall into a subtle form of selfishness that Blavatsky's adept teacher, Kuthumi, called a dangerous selfishness "in the higher principles." As an example, he states that there are persons "so intensely absorbed in the contemplation of their own supposed 'righteousness' that nothing can ever appear right to them outside the focus of their own vision... and their judgment of the right and wrong" (*Mahatma Letters*, chronological no. 134, 3rd ed. no. 64).

The adepts claim that they teach only what they know for themselves. If one of their brotherhood claims to have discovered a principle, no adept will accept it until it can be verified and reverified by the other adepts. Since the adepts will not accept any doctrine without verification, why should we? They reject blind belief, and they encourage us to do the same. Kuthumi writes:

[A student] is at perfect liberty, and often quite justified from the standpoint of appearances—to suspect his Guru of being "a fraud"... the greater, the sincerer his

indignation—whether expressed in words or boiling in his heart—the more fit he is, the better qualified to become an *adept*. He is free to [use] ... the most abusive words and expressions regarding his guru's actions and orders, provided ... he resists all and every temptation; rejects every allurements, and proves that nothing, not even the promise of ... his future adeptship ... is able to make him deviate from the path of truth and honesty. (*Mahatma Letters*, chronological no. 74, 3d ed. no. 30)

It should be self-evident that pursuing “the path of truth and honesty” is ultimately best for everyone. Yet few are willing to make the personal sacrifices necessary to do it. Many are so attached to their beliefs that they identify with them. They think of themselves as Christians, Jews, or atheists. The search for Truth is not an effort to prove what we believe. The search begins with an open mind and an acceptance of our ignorance. But pride, vanity, and status stand in the way. We do not want to take a courageous stand that may alienate us from the community. We tend not to want evidence that might contradict our beliefs because a challenge to our worldview threatens our security. We prefer the comfort of an acceptable worldview held by many. To step outside of that requires not only courage, but genuine humility. Lacking those qualities, we accept conclusions that feel comforting rather than Truth, which may require radical self-transformation. We see the emperor fully clothed when he is indeed naked.

In *The Voice of the Silence* (fragment 2) we read:

The “Doctrine of the Eye” is for the crowd, the “Doctrine of the Heart,” for the elect. The first repeat in pride: “Behold, I know,” the last, they who in humbleness have garnered, low confess, “thus have I heard” ...

Be humble, if thou wouldst attain to Wisdom. Be humbler still, when Wisdom thou hast mastered. Be like the Ocean which receives all streams and rivers. The Ocean's mighty calm remains unmoved; it feels them not.

Wisdom (or Truth) and the inner self have a very curious relationship. More than a relationship, it is an identity. *The Voice of the Silence* (fragment 2) also says:

Have perseverance as one who doth for evermore endure. Thy shadows live and vanish; that which in thee shall live for ever, that which in thee *knows*, for it is knowledge, is not of fleeting life: it is the man that was, that is, and will be, for whom the hour shall never strike.

The search for knowledge, Truth, and wisdom are intricately woven together with compassion. Annie Besant once said, “Love is the response that comes from a realization of oneness.” Compassion is impersonal love, and it is a response that comes from a realization of our deepest unity. While the search for knowledge alone may lead to selfishness, the search for ultimate Truth leads toward realization of unity, and the response to that realization is universal compassion.

Perhaps the most powerful statement on compassion ever written is in *The Voice of the*

Silence (fragment 1):

Let thy soul lend its ear to every cry of pain like as the lotus bares its heart to drink the morning sun. Let not the fierce sun dry one tear of pain before thyself hast wiped it from the sufferer's eye. But let each burning human tear drop on thy heart and there remain, nor ever brush it off, until the pain that caused it is removed.

These two principles—the relentless pursuit of Truth and compassion—are the hallmarks of the true Theosophist, and they lead to the awakening of the inner self, an altruistic life, and the “regenerating practical Brotherhood” that the adepts say they want. They lead to those results, that is, if our motive is impersonal and without thought of self.

If in our search we are motivated by hope of personal gain, then we are “laying up treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt.” But if we are motivated by what Helena Blavatsky calls “an inexpressible longing for the infinite,” then we cannot go wrong.

The great search requires study, meditation, and service. It requires above all that we forget self. If we will do that, we can awaken the inner self. When that happens, for a fleeting eternity, we are one with the infinite. Out of that timeless flash there comes bliss, joy, and the peace that passes understanding. Yet even though we experience that awesome reality, we have not yet won the victory. It is only after the first awakening that the arduous work begins—the work of gaining complete mastery over our whole nature.

Like Plato's wild horses, our bodies, emotions, and mind drag us in all directions, and we feel helpless to master them. Have we not all noticed that at times our body demands that we overeat, oversleep, or under-exercise? Is it not also true that when we allow our emotions to rage or to drag us down in depression we cannot think and work effectively? As to the mind, the most difficult of all to master, it leads us where it wants to go with its apparently unending stream of thoughts and memories. We become distracted and unable to focus the mind, to make it one-pointed, to direct it to the area of search rather than the repeated thoughts stored up as memory.

Once the inner self has been experienced, the great work begins: the work of gaining mastery over our whole nature. We begin to learn how to direct our bodies, emotions, and mind from that unspeakable center while yet functioning in the everyday world. Self-transformation such as that requires effort and perseverance. It is not accomplished in a moment or even in years. It takes lifetimes.

To follow the spiritual path is not easy. It is steep and thorny. Yet, if we persevere to the end, we will reach the temple of divine wisdom, which is at the very heart of our universe. When victory is won, the reward past all telling is there. We will have awakened the inner self and we will be it.