

Will Windham Lecture

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE FIRST TEN YEARS OF THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT?

30 minute talk with discussion, Sunday 15th August 2010

**In thanks to the Inspirers, Founders and all the workers of the 1875
"Centenary Effort",
500 years after Tson Kha Pa's first Western project in 1375.**

1. INTRODUCTION

A few opening words

It was only after a comparatively short time of studying theosophy that those older students pointed out to me the value of familiarising myself with and understanding the history of the movement, esp. since the 1875 founding of the TS.

As we heard in the opening address of Thursday there is a Dutch expression which translated into English says that those who don't study the history of the past are condemned to repeat earlier mistakes. It is a simple way of stating the aphorism that "karma ceases when the lesson is learnt", so this talk is simply to pass on that advice, because there's much of value and meaning in both the success and failures of these early periods that is highly relevant to us today.

The great thing is to be able to extract the lessons from these experiences, much as one does at the end of the day when in quiet contemplation one briefly reviews the events of the day and reflects on them so to understand what is contained in them for us – for, as the esoteric doctrine teaches, nothing happens by blind chance and – strange as it may seem to those new to the idea – there are meanings and lessons for us even the smallest of events.

Before we start, the other point to be mentioned is the difficulty of addressing this subject in a way that is universal, rigorous and philosophically sound – and so of practical use under all conditions – but also in a way that perhaps gives some more definite conclusions about how we go forward as theosophical groups and organisations in the early part of 21st c. Part of the answer to this difficulty was well given in several of the earlier talks, which is that of using the deductive or Platonic method, of working from universal principles to the particulars of the circumstances.

How we got to where we are

Starting as we must from where we find ourselves, it helps if we momentarily recall to mind relevant guiding principles in the teachings (in this case on the law of cycles) before exploring the remarkable subject of the “Purpose of Movement” and drawing out of it something to take forward for our contemplation on what the future may hold.

So we will review briefly what has been said about the theory of cycles in a very general way, this leading to the idea of historical reoccurrences and how to prepare ourselves for a) better times and b) to be able to also benefit from the lessons of the harder ones.

All of us differ in our experiences of similar situations and for some they come with sunshine, for others rain – whereas the beauty of the perennial philosophy is that it equips us equally well for both, because in good weather or foul there are simultaneously opportunities and dangers that require the exercise of observation, discrimination and a sense of justice.

... and in order to sense the “climate” around us and others we need to be dispassionate observers of life, careful meditators, and to be mindful... of all of which gives the ability to “to look into the hearts of men”, not personally but Egoically, to look for explanations, for reason, so we can understand friends and enemies alike.

In this, part of our work as students of the philosophy is to recognise ***not only the perennial ideas, but also the current ideas of the age*** and their impact on society, on the family, on work and technology, and on our human relationships with their forms and institutions (that is one’s neighbours, marriage or partnerships, and professions etc) – all of which are manifestations on the outer planes of life of man’s inner, often secret ideas. And in the great changes of 19th, 20th and 21st c. that we are living through, these “Questions” are asking for answers... the more so as progress puts the old forms of thought under relentless pressure.

It is true that we have much knowledge today, yet it is equally true that many people feel quite unable to respond meaningfully and in any really satisfactory way to their circumstances. For how many feel themselves able to reach out and know **HOW** to assist others, much less know **WHO** “to help and teach” (and who are not ready?), so that in the end it leaves them strengthened, more able to cope independently, less dependent to others for aid? On this point H.P. Blavatsky’s famous article “Let Every Man Prove His Own Work” goes into the great question of social service which is at the core of many individual’s private work. We say ***private work*** because HPB made the point many times – and we will later read an example – that while Theosophical organisations themselves don’t venture out to do “good works”, each individual will sooner or later find himself moved to answer the ever-stronger calls of his conscience. Indeed, each one has to do this in his own way and following his own line, which is his path and Dharma, in his own way, using his own capabilities. This is indeed part of the

Heart Doctrine of Compassion, which as William Q Judge says truly, is “the heart and bowels of Theosophy”.

But looking around us at all the well-intentioned efforts to ameliorate the condition and suffering of others isn't the opposite often seen to be true? Don't we see that both internationally and individually it's often the case that the enormous and well-meant resources of individuals, NGOs and governments make little lasting impression, and often do great harm, creating dependencies and biases within the societies they touch. Karmically and compassionately this is a very serious matter if our good resolutions come to little or indeed create harm!

So what is the analysis to the great problem of suffering?

It is well known that the Buddha spent his whole life finding, then teaching, the solution to the great problem of suffering – and later on we will give an example from his Four Truths as they are recorded in the mystic work “The Voice of the Silence”. So from this esoteric tradition let us take an aphorism that seems to go to the heart of the matter: it is said that “Desire creates blindly, Will creates intelligently.”

Now looking to the Voice, it gives us the intelligent way to create, without sentimentalism or authority, the two extremes, following a “middle path” of rationality and compassion, of “mind and heart”:

Point out **the "Way"**—however dimly, and lost among the host—
as does the evening star to those who tread their path in darkness.

[The Voice of the Silence, p 38-39]

What is this evening star? The morning and evening star is the bright Venus which is closely connected to the Mind principle in man (or Manas in Sanskrit) and is the faculty of superior intelligence, of discernment and inner knowing; it is the knowledge of principles and laws of being, of karma and of right action, which are so important to us in knowing HOW and WHO to help.

Further, we note that this passage tells us the answer is contained in “**the Way**”. So the lesson we seek is more about this mysterious “Way” and how to point it out to others:

Follow the wheel of life; follow the wheel of duty to race and kin,
to friend and foe, and **close thy mind to pleasures as to pain**.
Exhaust the law of Karmic retribution. Gain Siddhis for thy future birth.

[ibid]

“Follow the wheel... of duty to race and kin.” And the Voice also says “work on with Nature and she will regard thee as one of her creators” – this is co-operation with Greater Nature, the One Life, and an intelligent **translation of ideals** into something practical and helpful, which is every man's duty, that is, “**what is due to humanity**”. It's to become a responsible citizen of the world, free of bias, quite impartial, self-controlled and able to exercise discrimination and compassion.

2. HISTORICAL SECTION

What are these perennial ideals, the principles of ONE LIFE?

These ideals are formed in “the world of Devas” – and HPB after having been directly and indirectly schooled in them for 20 years+ in this life by her Master M – gives them to us as the Archetypes, the AEons, the Virtues, the Hierarchies, the Elohim etc etc, which are the perennial principles whose *hazy images* are found in all religions, for instance in the origin of the Catholic “Archangels & Principalities, the Powers & Thrones, the Cherubs & Seraphs” which Isis and the Secret Doctrine lay out in full. The gradual achievement of this awareness and their recognition is what which HPB most desired; that all humanity could and must eventually have it, it being made more urgent by her observation that ***we are behind where we should be at our stage of evolution.*** It’s a chiding from a wise teacher, for humanity to raise itself up over the coming period...

Countess Wachmeister in writing about HPB after she died in 1891 said HPB ***“used often to deplore the indifference of TS members in this respect (to help in the work), and she said that if she could only raise the veil for one moment, and let them see into the future, what a difference it would make...”*** [“In Memory of HPB” by Some of her Pupils, 1991, p 27]

This is a very similar point to the one made in the talk on Asclepian Healing in which those who return from an NDE experience, where they see themselves passing down a tunnel of light and experience the peace and bliss of spiritual consciousness, often come back with a wholly changed perspective and view of life; they may lead the remainder of their days in quite different ways than before: as that speaker said “The Being returns changed, returns healed.”

How do we reach the insight of her vision for mankind? What is the vehicle?

Well, as we are not all imminently about to be initiated into a high state of consciousness by HPB or anyone else, we have to use our own “self-devised ways and means” to slowly or quickly raise up our perceptions and ideas, and so to reach to this truer and deeper vision.

One idea given is that it comes from ***“the mediate state”***, which means a “linking” state, that which provides an insight via a “bridge or ladder”, also known as the Antaskarana between the higher and lower mind of man, the two phases of Manas or our ***dual*** consciousness.

As an intermediary effect it starts by a faint intuitional knowing – the quiet “Voice of the Silence” – or we can say “Voice in the Silence”, that descends from Buddhi-Manas to Lower Manas, illuminating it with bright and true ideas.

In so many of the esoteric traditions in the world, there is a formula given by which we may learn and work on “the mathematics of the soul”, and so develop self-knowledge which is the basis of discrimination and “right thought”, and so with it the “right speech” and “right action” which must inevitably follow.

In the early days, when HPB wrote Isis in 1877, she expressed this formula in the TRIUNE form, the best for general use and explanation; later on she developed it more fully into the SEPTENARY form, of which it is a natural extension.... but that is another talk. It is the “threefold Nature and threefold Man”; it’s the threefold form we see in the three Halls of the Voice, the three states of consciousness, the three gunas, the three (really four) Truths.

Now let us ask how many know what are “the Three Objects of the Theosophical Society”? (show of hands by audience)

Let’s see how she put it in the back of “The Key to Theosophy”, and briefly review the “Three Objects of the TS”:

1. the formation of a ***nucleus of Universal Brotherhood first and foremost***
2. to study the world’s religions – esp. those of the East – and
3. to investigate the unexplained laws of nature, and also in man, as his Siddhis or so-called “supernatural powers”.

The order is very important here. And this threefold classification is as relevant today as it was then, because for beginners its simple formula can be easily applied in life, to liberation, and if students of esotericism should decide – in work for the movement.

As we want to cover a little about the great and inspiring details of what happened in India in the first Ten Years of the TS (where HPB, Col Olcott and others successfully applied the perennial principles which give us this universal formula), we’ll read from an account of the remarkable results in India as given by HPB in her article “Our Three Objects”. It was both a breaking down of the barriers of prejudices (the iconoclastic element), and formation of new brotherhood that saw Indians of all religions and caste meeting in greater harmony and respect than ever before, one offshoot and manifestation of it being the formation of the Indian National Congress, the creative aspect.

One of the first things she tells us is that between the Hindus of India and the modern Sinhalese Buddhists, there had been no religious discussion “since some remote epoch”.

Let’s read what she says in her own words from “Our Three Objects”, taking a few short selections from the first section on “Brotherhood”; and as we read it we can consider how relevant it is as an illustration for our topic on the 21st c. future:

“When we arrived in India, in February, 1879, there was no unity between the races and sects of the (Indian) Peninsula, no sense of a common public interest, no disposition to find the mutual relation between the several sects of ancient Hinduism, or that between them and the creeds of Islam, Jainism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism...

“As for any international reciprocity, in either social or religious affairs, between the Sinhalese and the Northern Buddhistic nations, such a thing had never existed. Each was absolutely ignorant of and indifferent about the other's views, wants or aspirations.

“Finally, between the races of Asia and those of Europe and America there was the most complete absence of sympathy as to religious and philosophical questions...

“Ten years have passed and what do we see?... that throughout India unity and brotherhood have replaced the old disunity...”

This had been achieved by the work done by HPB and Col Olcott over many trips throughout the whole of India addressing “vast crowds” on the ideas of “brotherhood and mutual dependence”. HPB continues in her own words:

“...the growth of this kindly feeling has been proven in a variety of ways:

“first, in the unprecedented gathering of races, castes, and sects in the annual Conventions of the Theosophical Society;

“second, in the rapid growth of a theosophical literature advocating our altruistic views... and in the rapid cessation of sectarian controversies... [as an observation in 2010, don’t we see that these have been resurrected – if they had ever fully ceased – in the sub-continent and the wider world today, hence underpinning the necessity of continuing the work that got off to such an inspiring start?];

“third, in the sudden birth and phenomenally rapid growth of the patriotic movement which is centralized in the organization called the Indian National Congress.”

This remarkable political body was planned by certain of our Anglo-Indian and Hindu members after the model and on the lines of the Theosophical Society, and has from the first been directed by our own colleagues; men among the most influential in the Indian Empire.

It is an interesting fact that Theosophists were among many of the founders of the INC but nevertheless that Mme Blavatsky is very clear about drawing a line between theosophical activities as they relate to the Society’s “Three Objects” and this wider work of applying them in daily life, which is the work of each individual and to be kept distinct from it:

“At the same time, there is no connection whatever, barring that through the personalities of individuals, between the Congress and its mother body, our Society. It would never have come into existence, in all probability, if Col. Olcott had suffered himself to be tempted into the side paths of human brotherhood, politics, social reforms, etc., as many have wanted him to do.” (from “Our Three Objects”)

Note that HPB refers to “*the side paths* of human brotherhood, politics...” – what does that mean? Perhaps it is put that way to make the distinction between “human brotherhood” (which can be partial or even limited by jingoism?) and “Universal Brotherhood”, which is the first Object, embracing all people, in all places, at all times.

3. THEORY

Let’s start with some general statements about Cycles

How did our Universe and man come into being?

A useful building block to begin with in the esoteric system of cycles is the period of manifestation of planets, called a “Day” of Brahma, in each one are one thousand Manvantaras.

This “Day in the Life of Brahma” (also called a Kalpa) contain a 1,000 Manvantaras, and is a cycle measuring approximately 4 billion solar years, the lifetime of planets or suns. A single of these Manvantaras (literally a period between two Manus or teachers) contains four Yugas or Ages: the Gold, Silver, Bronze and Iron...

Now this brings us to the **first important cycle** that immediately concerns us; it is the Kali-Yug, our present Iron Age, the first 5,000 years of which ended in 1897, having started in February 3102 BC.

The second important cycle mentioned at this time is the end of the Piscean era and the transition into the New Age of Aquarius. Each of these Zodiacal cycles takes approximately 2,155 years, the Sun traversing all twelve signs of the Zodiac in about 26,000 years. As we enter Aquarius – and although Western Astronomers’ opinions differ on when this transition started and how long this overlap period is – we have witnessed a great number of changes in the arts, in science and medicine, in psychology... in fact in almost every area of life especially since 1900; and at a rate of change that is unparalleled at least **in modern history**.

The third cycle is the well-known ‘fin de siècle’ of 1875 which Tson Kha Pa initiated in 1375, and in 1875 we see that it came at the important time of 500 years, or half millennium point, since the initial effort was made.

The main idea we want to illustrate is that **cycles are very real and definite forms on the archetypal planes that have influences on our worldly experiences**. Evidence for these in manifested nature are shown in the seasons, in life and death, in man’s spring of blossoming and growth, followed by autumn’s withdrawal into “seeds” and winter’s death or outer “silence”... but this outer silence is only in the sense “what is Night to the profane, is Day to the Sage”. The movement of the Sun and Earth through the Zodiac has a profound effect on the sensitive inner make up of both man and nature, shown in cycles of health and disease, of turbulence and calm, of which a true astronomer (ie one at a most advanced degree of initiation) can easily foresee.

4. PREDICTIONS

Following some hints

So this briefest introduction to the theory of time and cycles hopefully puts the evolution into a theosophic perspective – and that it will also help us as we look at the development of the modern world, and how it was the intention of the movement to bring about a closer union between East and West, between ones inner wisdom of life’s purpose and the others outer energy and zeal, the Western dynamo of pragmatic action...

We see that one of HPB's methods of teaching used in Isis Unveiled and the Secret Doctrine was to show how to cope with the West's over-materialistic reaction against the orthodox dogmas and the abuses of the Churches during the Dark Ages. The way is by a realisation and deep knowledge of perennial Truth, because when this is realised and really internalised it will foster a love and respect for all men and also for Nature, both in its sacred, as also in its objective aspects. It is really only this realisation and its practice in life that can lead to any degree of sustained change in behaviour among men.

Let us return to the subject of the development of our personal consciousness. The Three Halls are they key to it, given out in the Voice so that those so motivated can start on their own Path of exploration.

As said earlier it also is important in relation to the order of three objects of the TS, as we see a significant change between it and the Halls. Since it is these Objects which are especially designed to achieve the needed end of raising the tone of man's thought, his Buddhi-Manas (the one sure way of uniting humanity in co-operation and mutual progress) we should look at why this is so. The first two Objects are in the order:

- **1st : to form nuclei of brotherhood in Lodges and workers.** These are for the use of other teachers coming later, who would have a great advantage. They would be an ambassadors from the universal fraternity which is called by many names, the Great or White Brotherhood, the Lodge of Masters, the Brothers, the protectors of mankind who make up the Guardian Wall etc;
- **2nd : to start on the outer work of promulgation of the ancient teachings.**

The first is to enable schools (perhaps we can think of them like those of the Neo-Platonists in the second or third century Alexandrian Egypt) to be set up for the benefit of students for their inner psychological study (**ie learning "right thought"**), thus leading to the second, which is it's promulgation in daily life, of practicing the perennial ideas that are relevant to today's world (**which is carrying out harmonious, "right action"**).

How is this done? It's simply a translation of the archetypal forms into those of practical structures of beauty and order, for instance in social structures as we find in the "ideal of universal education", of "impartial justice" and "fair punishment" (**ie not retributive**).

The perennial ideals as a TRIUNE formula - the Three Halls and Four Truths

Semi-esoteric stages (with the three lines of evolution from the physical...)	Consciousness [& 7 fold principles]	Buddhist Four Truths	Cautions
Hall of Ignorance (physical) The phenomenal World of Senses and of terrestrial consciousness	Waking Physical awareness [body & life force]	Ku – the first truth Life is suffering and misery	Don't mistake the fires of lust for the sunlight of life!

Hall of Learning (mental)
The astral region of psychics and deceptive sights passed through in probation

Dreaming - Swapna
Psychic state
[Astral & kama desire]

Tu – second truth
the assembling of temptations

It is the world of illusion and “sweet-tongued voices”.
“Seek not for thy Guru in those mayavic regions.”

Hall of Wisdom (spiritual)
Where the light of truth shines and *shadows are unknown*

Deep sleep - Sushupti
Region of full Spiritual Consciousness (p 7 fn), the “State of Faultless Vision”
[Buddhi-Manas]

Mu – third truth
the destruction of temptations, the path that leads to knowledge

Here still possible to be subjected to passions and thus mistakes?

Looking at this we see the natural order of evolution is a progressive march from the physical to the spiritual, a return journey to the source of Being; from a manifestation of the ideals returning to their home, the container of the archetypes, a return to that source but with the accumulated intelligence from this manifestation, to which it is combined with that from numberless prior periods.

Now the warning comes as we compare this logical order, the incremental march through the states of consciousness as they naturally arise in nature and man, with that of the pilgrim who wishes to accelerate his development by means of the science of Raja Yoga or other tradition.

The danger is that if his acquirement of psychic powers (the lower siddhis in Sanskrit) outstrips his ethical development (both of which go pari pasu in the usual state of affairs), then the attainment of the higher or spiritual Siddhis is left behind that of the intellectual and mental-psychic. In this case there is a very great risk for then he will almost inevitably fall into the “left hand path”, which is been known in many of the world’s traditions as the path of Black Magicians or sorcerers, who use these powers for selfish ends.

Mme Blavatsky was very clear about these dangers and in much of her writing she shows the differences between these two paths and gives good warning to all so they can recognise and avoid the pitfalls. This applies to us as just as much now than ever before – perhaps more so – as none of us are perfect, not yet Buddhas! We will all have some selfishness remaining until we go through these Three Halls – perhaps many times – only after which when ones reaches the Fourth State, when “there is no longer danger for him who has reached it.”

“The Hall that lies beyond”
The Universal the White Light, all colours in one

Beyond dreaming – Turiya
The region of highest Spiritual Consciousness (p 6)
[Atma]

The Tau – the Path
“The Way”
“Thou canst not travel on the Path before thou has become that path itself.” (p 14)

“There is no longer danger for him who has reached it.”

Regarding this state, it is worth remembering that we are at all times surrounded by this purely spiritual Atmic region, or force, even in Kali Yuga, and it is only poor attitude and thoughts that affect our bodies and so shut us out from it.

It is that pure ideation, the “pristine force” which:

- provides the beneficial impulses to Nature (so helping those elementals who are hindered by our adverse impulses),
- it is that which puts all her materials at our disposal and uses cycles to periodically clean up the world, which refreshes its tired continents and give rest so afterwards it allows a further working out of the ideals.
- it is that which lightens our every day and throws off our cares by transcending the mundane.
- One could say it is PURE AKASA, in Hinduism it’s called Daiviprakriti, the light of the Logos and of the World... one can say it is literally “the Elixir of Life”.

The more we see into these states and their cycles, the more we recognise the intimate pattern in our lives, and if successfully integrated we come closer to the One Life, which leads to the highest form of work.

So it is this work that is “the Way” HPB pointed to... by her example and **service**, and it is these which destroy illusion and its self-imposed barriers. This Way was taken up by William Q Judge and many others, in fact it still is by all those who use more of their intuition than of intellect, more of the Heart or soul-force as Mahatma Gandhi called it, than of the head or the Eye Doctrine.

This bring us on to the idea of Service, which is in the Sanskrit:

“The Yajna... (it) exists as an invisible presence at all times, extending from the sacrificial fire to the heavens, forming a bridge or ladder by means of which the sacrificer can communicate with the world of devas, and even ascend when alive to their abodes.”
... It is one of the forms of Akasa. (Isis xliii, and Glossary)

As Judge said, “Generosity and Love are the abandonment of the self”, and Robert Crosbie, his student said that altruism is a great destroyer of the personal idea, which is the thing we are trying to get rid of, the thing that prevents us from sensing the truths, the ideals, of forms of law, justice and harmonious order, and of applying them and brightening ours and other’s lives.

Service and altruism are the universal ethics of the Third Hall, they are applicable equally to individuals and as well as Theosophical organisations, and it seems that these are embodied in the first two of the “Three Objects”, which may be the best and most efficient path for Theosophical groups and organisations of what ever ‘stripe’ as we move further forward into the 21st century.

Remembering what we read from Mme Blavatsky on the first 10 years in India, we can make a start along those lines.

What could be more worthwhile than to have a concern for “other’s views, wants or aspirations”, or to find in us springing up a mutual “sympathy as to religious and philosophical questions”, a sense of “common public interest” and a disposition to find “mutual relations”.

Robert Crosbie wrote about the energy of UNION from such shared values:

Theosophy... forms in itself a **common ground of interest and** effort, above and beyond all differences of opinion; and being the philosophy of Unity, it calls for the essential union of those who profess and promulgate it.

[The Friendly Philosopher, p 411]

So what is real Union?

“This Union does **not mean a sameness of organization or method**, but a friendly recognition, mutual assistance and encouragement among all engaged in the furtherance of Theosophy.”

When the next teacher comes, won't we wish them to have the benefit of however few or many Theosophical organisations there may be, all united through their individual work for these ideal forms?

Returning to the first two Objects, we attempt to relate the question of future work to them:

First Object: service forms the nucleus of Brotherhood, in our case to work to share the ideal of similar aims and teachings among Theosophists; (without dogma or authority, but with a “similar” but not necessary an identical aim); and

Second Object: to study and promulgate the universal ideas, to bring them alive and make them available, all this through the simple way of many individuals practicing “the Path”, so that they demonstrate it is a robust system, one that makes its exponents a LIVING POWER for good.

questions – 10 mins