

Conversations on Spirituality

living skilfully, happily & helpfully

Introduction

The Theosophical Movement was established with three Objects, the first two of which are Brotherhood and the study of Ancient Scriptures: they are philosophical and educational, not being religious in the conventional sense, but to spiritualise, universalise and encourage mysticism. The aim is to improve understanding and relations between the religions and classes (the wealthy to the poor), creating better social conditions, and promoting a wider scope of science that respects the ethical principles behind the natural world.

The ULT does this through a study of Theosophy, the ancient philosophy and system of ethics.

Reading

The Buddha on the Elephant, from the [*Dhammapada*](#), Ch 25

1. I shall endure abuse even as the elephant on the battlefield endures the arrows shot from the bow. The many of this world are ill-natured. (320)

2. A tamed elephant is led on to the battlefield. The king mounts a tamed elephant. The tamed is the best among men—he who in patience endures hard words. (321)

3. Good are mules when tamed. Good are Sindhu horses when tamed. Good are great elephants when tamed. Better than all these is he who has tamed himself. (322)

4. With such mounts no man can reach the untrodden land called Nirvana. A tamed man riding on his tamed self arrives there. (323)

5. The elephant Dhanapalaka even in captivity is uncontrollable when, at the time of rut, his temples are running with a pungent sap. He will not touch food but longs for the elephant grove. (324)

6. Sluggish and gluttonous, spending time in sleep rolling from side to side, eating like a hog—such a foolish fellow falls to birth again and again. (325)

7. Aforetime this mind of mine would wander as it liked, as it desired, as it pleased. Now I control it completely even as a rider controls with his hook a rutting elephant. (326)

8. Rejoice in wakefulness. Guard well your thoughts. Draw yourself out of evil, like an elephant sunk in the mud. (327)

9. If you find a prudent companion, upright and self-possessed, walk with him, joyfully and mindfully, overcoming all dangers. (328)

10. If you do not find a prudent companion, upright and self-possessed, then walk alone like a king who has renounced his kingdom and his conquests. Be like a free elephant in the forest. (329)

11. It is better to live alone. There is no companionship with a fool. Let a man advance alone, committing no sin, like an elephant in the forest. (330)

12. Companions are pleasant in times of need. Enjoyment is pleasant when shared by others. Merit is pleasant in the hour of death. Giving up of all sorrow is pleasant. (331)

13. To have a mother in the world is happiness; to have a father in the world is happiness. To have a recluse in the world is happiness; to have a sage in the world is happiness. (332)

14. Virtue lasting in old age is happiness. Faith firmly rooted is happiness. Attainment of Wisdom is happiness. Avoidance of sins is happiness (333)

Where do Spirituality, Truth and the daily practicalities of life converge?

As our individual mode of life affects all areas of our life, so our collective mode affects all relationships from society and education, to politics and economics. It determines what we do in our youth and maturity our work and rest and how we respond to life changes. When friends and family retire or get sick, all these questions that have a spiritual aspect, but only if the soul can make its choices felt.

And outside our human relationship we can lift our view to the physical environment and its wildlife (ecology), to the farms and its animals and to manufacturing and commerce (viz. morality & sustainability), and the psychic health and influences we give and receive from our locality via our spiritual practices. All these are part of an ongoing conversation on spirituality in 21st c. as people strive to harmonise the inharmonious they see around them. They are between our conscience and our wishes, between friends and family, and in the last 20 years increasingly in the media, plays and films.

So we can now ask, is spiritual progress attainable without a knowledge of all this, what is true and false?

And is *some knowledge of Truth* a prerequisite, without which we will get stuck or fall back, or does it come naturally as we develop finer perceptions?

Let us listen to the first of two contemporary conversations on spirituality, this one between Rupert Sheldrake (science author) and Mark Vernon (psychologist) on “Science and Spiritual Practices” <https://www.sheldrake.org/audios/science-set-free-podcast> (listen from start up to 13.51 mins)

So which path should we follow? Some clarifications from Theosophy’s universal perspective were given by H. P. Blavatsky in her well known article “Spiritual Progress”. Note especially what is said regarding value of our perceptions in not “seeking the permanent in the impermanent”:

“CHRISTINA ROSSETTI’s well-known lines: Does the road wind up-hill all the way? Yes, to the very end. Does the journey take the whole long day? From morn to night, my friend.

are like an epitome of the life of those who are truly treading the path which leads to higher things. Whatever differences are to be found in the various presentations of the Esoteric Doctrine, as in every age it donned a fresh garment, different both in hue and texture to that which preceded; yet in every one of them we find the fullest agreement upon one point—the road to spiritual development. One only inflexible rule has been ever binding upon the neophyte, as it is binding now—the complete subjugation of the lower nature by the higher. From the Vedas and Upanishads to the recently published *Light on the Path*, search as we may through the bibles of every race and cult, we find but one only way,—hard, painful, troublesome, by which men can gain the true spiritual insight. And how can it be otherwise, since all religions and all philosophies are but the variants of the first teachings of the One Wisdom, imparted to men at the beginning of the cycle by the Planetary Spirit?

The true Adept, the developed man, must, we are always told, become—he cannot be made. The process is therefore one of growth through evolution, and this must necessarily involve a certain amount of pain.

The main cause of pain lies in our perpetually seeking the permanent in the impermanent, and not only seeking, but acting as if we had already found the unchangeable in a world of which the one certain quality we can predicate is constant change; and always, just as we fancy we have taken a firm hold upon the permanent, it changes within our very grasp, and pain results.

Again, the idea of growth involves also the idea of disruption: the inner being must continually burst through its confining shell or encasement, and such a disruption must also be accompanied by pain, not physical but mental and intellectual.

One of the subtlest forms of this evil is the hope and desire of reward. Many there are who, albeit often unconsciously, are yet spoiling all their efforts by entertaining this idea of reward, and allowing it to become an active factor in their lives, and so leaving the door open to anxiety, doubt, fear, despondency—failure.

Acting on this mistaken idea (re. the adepts) they fancy that the first thing to be done towards attaining adeptship is to acquire “powers”—clairvoyance and the power of leaving the physical body and travelling to a distance are among those which fascinate the most.

To those who wish to acquire such powers for their own private advantage, we have nothing to say; they fall under the condemnation of all who act for purely selfish ends. But there are others, who, mistaking effect for cause, honestly think that the acquirement of abnormal powers is the only road to spiritual advancement.

It is perfectly true that some Theosophists have been (through nobody’s fault but their own) greatly disappointed because we have offered them no short cut to Yoga Vidya, and there are others who wish for practical work. And, significantly enough, those who have done least for the Society are loudest in fault-finding. Now, why do not these persons and all our members who are able to do so, take up the serious study of mesmerism? Mesmerism has been called the Key to the Occult Sciences, and it has this advantage that it offers peculiar opportunities for doing good to mankind. If in each of our branches we were able to establish a homeopathic dispensary with the addition of mesmeric healing, such as has already been done with great success in Bombay, we might contribute towards putting the science of medicine in this country on a sounder basis, and be the means of incalculable benefit to the people at large.

... It would be a good thing if the members of each branch would put their heads together and seriously consult as to what tangible steps they can take to further the declared objects of the Society. In too many cases the members of the Theosophical Society content themselves with a somewhat superficial study of its books, without making any real contribution to its active work.

Above all we would reiterate the fact that the Society is no nursery for incipient adepts...; the branches must study for themselves; books are to be had, and the knowledge there put forth must be practically applied by the various members: thus will be developed self-reliance and reasoning powers.

from [Spiritual Progress](#) H. P. Blavatsky *Theosophist*, May 1885

Let us listen to a second contemporary talk on spirituality from Jay Lakhani (theoretical physicist) on “Spiritual Humanism” via the Hindu Academy London from TEDxLoughborough.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3ylfozOG1o>

First excerpt from start to 4.50 mins on challenging why we need God as a being.

Second excerpt from 7.45 mins to mins on rescuing science from its material deity, the Atom. Note esp. at 9.45 to 10.00 mins on Russian Dolls.

Pause at 13.05 – new section on Spiritual Humanism – then up to 18:35 mins.

Why is Truth of Value?

In the current times we may think half-truths are new, but consider this timeless perspective:

“As physical man, limited and trammelled from every side by illusions, cannot reach truth by the light of his terrestrial perceptions, we say—develop in you the inner knowledge. From the time when the Delphic oracle said to the enquirer “Man, know thyself,” no greater or more important truth was ever taught. Without such perception, man will remain ever blind to even many a relative, let alone absolute, truth. Man has to know himself, i.e., acquire the inner perceptions which never deceive, before he can master any absolute truth.

Absolute truth is the symbol of Eternity, and no finite mind can ever grasp the eternal, hence, no truth in its fulness can ever dawn upon it. To reach the state during which man sees and senses it, we have to paralyze the senses of the external man of clay. This is a difficult task, we may be told, and most people will, at this rate, prefer to remain satisfied with relative truths, no doubt. But to approach even terrestrial truths requires, first of all, love of truth for its own sake, for otherwise no recognition of it will follow’ [...]

The fair heavenly maiden descends only on a (to her) congenial soil—the soil of an impartial, unprejudiced mind, illuminated by pure Spiritual Consciousness; and both are truly rare dwellers in civilized lands. In our century of steam and electricity, when man lives at a maddening speed that leaves him barely time for reflection, he allows himself usually to be drifted down from cradle to grave, nailed to the Procrustean bed of custom and conventionality. Now conventionality—pure and simple—is a congenital LIE, as it is in every case a “simulation of feelings according to a received standard” ...; and where there is any simulation there cannot be any truth. How profound the remark made by Byron, that “truth is a gem that is found at a great depth; whilst on the surface of this world all things are weighed by the false scales of custom,” is best known to those who are forced to live in the stifling atmosphere of such social conventionalism, and who, even when willing and anxious to learn, dare not accept the truths they long for, for fear of the ferocious Moloch called Society. [...]

SELFISHNESS, the first-born of Ignorance, and the fruit of the teaching which asserts that for every newly-born infant a new soul, separate and distinct from the Universal Soul, is “created”—this Selfishness is the impassable wall between the personal Self and Truth. It is the prolific mother of all human vices, Lie being born out of the necessity for dissembling, and Hypocrisy out of the desire to mask Lie. It is the fungus growing and strengthening with age in every human heart in which it has devoured all better feelings. Selfishness kills every noble impulse in our natures, and is the one deity, fearing no faithlessness or desertion from its votaries. Hence, we see it reign supreme in the world and in so-called fashionable society. [...]

We see smooth-tongued DECEIT and BRUTE FORCE—the Jachin and Boaz of every International Temple of Solomon—called Diplomacy, and we call it by its right name. Because the diplomat bows low before these two pillars of national glory and politics, and puts their masonic symbolism “in (cunning) strength shall this my house be established” into daily practice; i.e., gets by deceit what he cannot obtain by force—shall we applaud him? A diplomat’s qualification—“dexterity or skill in securing advantages” —for one’s own country at the expense of other countries, can hardly be achieved by speaking truth, but verily by a wily and deceitful tongue; and, therefore, LUCIFER calls such action—a living, and an evident LIE. [...]

A Scientist is as ready to suppress damaging evidence against a current scientific hypothesis in our times, as a missionary in heathen-land, or a preacher at home, to persuade his congregation that modern geology is a lie, and evolution but vanity and vexation of spirit.

One who is skilled in divine alchemy, or even approximately blessed with the gift of the perception of truth, will find and extract it from an erroneous as much as from a correct statement. However small the particle of gold lost in a ton of rubbish, it is the noble metal still, and worthy of being dug out even at the price of some extra trouble. As has been said, it is often as useful to know what a thing is not, as to learn what it is. The average reader can hardly hope to find any fact in a sectarian publication under all its aspects, pro and con, for either one way or the other its presentation is sure to be biased, and the scales helped to incline to that side to which its editor's special policy is directed. A Theosophical magazine is thus, perhaps, the only publication where one may hope to find, at any rate, the unbiased, if still only approximate truth and fact.

Naked truth is reflected in LUCIFER under its many aspects, for no philosophical or religious views are excluded from its pages.

To sum up the idea, with regard to absolute and relative truth, we can only repeat what we said before. Outside a certain highly spiritual and elevated state of mind, during which Man is at one with the UNIVERSAL MIND—he can get nought on earth but relative truth, or truths, from whatsoever philosophy or religion. Were even the goddess who dwells at the bottom of the well to issue from her place of confinement, she could give man no more than he can assimilate. Meanwhile, every one can sit near that well—the name of which is KNOWLEDGE—and gaze into its depths in the hope of seeing Truth's fair image reflected, at least, on the dark waters.

This, however... presents a certain danger. Some truth, to be sure, may be occasionally reflected as in a mirror on the spot we gaze upon, and thus reward the patient student. But "I have heard that some philosophers in seeking for Truth, to pay homage to her, have seen their own image in the water and adored it instead."

It is to avoid such a calamity—one that has befallen every founder of a religious or philosophical school—that the editors are studiously careful not to offer the reader only those truths which they find reflected in their own personal brains. They offer the public a wide choice, and refuse to show bigotry and intolerance, which are the chief landmarks on the path of Sectarianism. [...]

This, however, only within the cover of the public magazine, and so far as regards the merely intellectual aspect of philosophical truths. Concerning the deeper spiritual, and one may almost say religious, beliefs, no true Theosophist ought to degrade these by subjecting them to public discussion, but ought rather to treasure and hide them deep within the sanctuary of his innermost soul. Such beliefs and doctrines should never be rashly given out, as they risk unavoidable profanation by the rough handling of the indifferent and the critical. Nor ought they to be embodied in any publication except as hypotheses offered to the consideration of the thinking portion of the public.

Theosophical truths, when they transcend a certain limit of speculation, had better remain concealed from public view, for the "evidence of things not seen" is no evidence save to him who sees, hears, and senses it. It is not to be dragged outside the "Holy of Holies," the temple of the impersonal divine Ego, or the indwelling SELF. For, while every fact outside its perception can, as we have shown, be, at best, only a relative truth, a ray from the absolute truth can reflect itself only in the pure mirror of its own flame—our highest SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS. And how can the darkness (of illusion) comprehend the LIGHT that shineth in it?

from [What is Truth](#) H. P. Blavatsky, *Lucifer*, February 1888

PRACTICAL EXERCISE: How do these movements fare?

On the question of Freedom of Spirit and their Love of Truth (rigour), are they high, medium or low?

	Gnosticism 1 st c. BCE	Christianity 10 th c. BCE	New Age 1960s/70s	Post Modern New Age 2018	An Ideal Group
Freedom of Thought & Action	Hi M Lo	Hi M Lo	Hi M Lo	Hi M Lo	Ⓜ M Lo from whose view?
Rigour in Reasoning, Conduct etc	Hi M Lo	Hi M Lo	Hi M Lo	Hi M Lo	Ⓜ M Lo from whose view?
Transcendental Wisdom and Knowledge	<p>The occultist's view is definite and ethical, but hard to classify due the numbers of varying factors only adepts can accurately qualify and know.</p> <p>Patanjali states it as a law: "The work of the ascetic is neither pure nor dark, but is peculiar to itself, while that of others is of three kinds." [Aph 7 Book IV]</p> <p>W. Q. Judge comments these three are "(1) pure in action and motive; (2) dark, such as that of infernal beings; (3) that of the general run of men, pure-dark. The 4th is that of the ascetic", ie hard to categorise, unknown and of its own kind, sui generis.</p>				

This is similar to the *Hegelian dialectic* which comprises three stages: a thesis (the positive), giving rise to its reaction, an antithesis (the negative), which contradicts or negates the thesis; and the tension between the two being resolved by means of a synthesis...

[As it happens it is not Hegel's terminology, he rightly credited it to Kant, and Fichte popularised it].

The formula... the concrete, the synthesis, the absolute, must always pass through the phase of the negative, in the journey to completion, that is, mediation. This is the essence of what is popularly called Hegelian dialectics.

However Hegel later suggested over-application of the formula impeded open-minded comprehension.

To describe overcoming the negative, Hegel often used the term "sublation" or "overcoming," to conceive of the working of the dialectic. Roughly, the term indicates preserving the useful portion of an idea, thing, society, etc., while moving beyond its limitations. (Jacques Derrida calls it *relieving*, in French *relève*.)

Hegel describes a dialectic of existence: it must be posited as pure Being (Sein); but pure Being, upon examination, is found to be indistinguishable from Nothing (Nichts). When it is realized that what is coming into being is, at the same time, also returning to nothing (in life, for example, one's living is also a dying), both Being and Nothing are united as Becoming.

As in the Socratic dialectic, Hegel claimed to proceed by making implicit contradictions explicit: each stage of the process is the product of contradictions inherent or implicit in the preceding stage. For Hegel, the whole of history is one tremendous dialectic, major stages of which chart a progression from self-alienation as slavery to self-unification and realization as the rational constitutional state of free and equal citizens.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic>