

On the Watch-Tower

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Convergence

I have a clear memory from my early days at the university that occurred during a class session. The school was notable for the number of its Nobel Prize-winning professors. In addition to this stellar group there was also another tier of professors who were highly recognized in their various fields. In the normal university setting, at least at that time, these were people one would hear about, but never encounter unless one was pursuing a specific advanced graduate degree. What was different about the school I was attending was that all these professors were required to teach some undergraduate courses, often prerequisites for an undergraduate degree. This was a brilliant approach because at an early stage in the students' university life it made it possible for them to come in contact with people whose thinking, research, and ideas were shaping society.

The moment I remember so clearly took place in a class on astrophysics. In spite of my initial aversion to the subject, I was quickly fascinated with the methods and ways of thinking applied to the attempt to comprehend the physical universe. Part of my excitement about the subject was the animated and interactive presence of

the professor. He was involved in some cutting-edge research around the Big-Bang idea. During one class session I asked our professor a question. I do not remember exactly what that question was. What I do remember is that in the question I used the word 'why'. I suppose that our professor saw this as an opportunity to convey a message to the entire class, this fresh and impressionable group of young minds. He made no attempt to answer the question, but he did speak directly to my use of the 'why' word. What he said was that the question 'why' was not the concern of science, and if that was the sort of question that interested me, I would be better served speaking to someone in philosophy or the divinity school.

A few days later I ran into a friend who was pursuing a doctorate in the divinity school. I shared with him my recent experience in the astrophysics class, and asked him how such a question was approached in his discipline. Although now his response would not have affected me so deeply, at that time I was sufficiently young and naive to be surprised. He told me that 'why' was also not the concern in the divinity school. The study of divinity at the school examined 'how' and 'when' such 'why' questions arose in history; the

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movements and thinking that formed around them; the social and institutional consequences, but any attempt at either an intellectual or experiential response to the question was not their concern. The Divinity School was a 'graduate professional school for the academic study of religion'.

In recent times, the last four to five hundred years, a shift has taken place in the way human society values and processes knowledge. In earlier days the people who were instrumental in shaping the affairs of the heart and mind were those who were deemed wise. Always these were people whose vision and experience was broad — people who had thought about, experimented with, and arrived at conclusions about the variety of life's processes. Many of these individuals could be described by the term polymath — people whose expertise spans a significant number of different subject areas. In the culture of the Western world such names as Leonardo da Vinci, Michaelangelo, Galileo, Nicolaus Copernicus, Francis Bacon, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and Omar Khayyam are examples of people with this synthesizing approach to knowledge. The expectation for the wise was that they be possessed of an expansive vision. A profound awareness of science, the arts, mathematics, poetry, philosophy, medicine, and spirituality was the norm for such people.

One of the hallmarks of our current time is the high degree of specialization that has taken place in virtually all fields of knowledge. Before the coining of the

term 'scientist' in the late 1800's, people who engaged in the study of nature and the physical universe were called 'natural philosophers'. Natural philosophy was the attempt to describe and understand the workings of Nature and the universe. As a philosophical endeavor, it was not focused on practical results. However, applications did arise out of the ferment of observation and analysis. During the 19th century, science became a profession accompanied by the necessary institutions to support it.

Today the time of the polymath has passed. Due to the high degree of specialization, particularly in the sciences, it has become virtually impossible for one person to be an expert in more than one field of study. Even the process of scientific discovery requires the effort of teams of people. This state of affairs has been the source of phenomenal discoveries and an ongoing exponential growth in our overall knowledge base. It has also been the source of significant problems. Mahatma Gandhi foresaw some of the consequences of this trend in human behaviour and values. He famously said: 'The expert knows more and more about less and less until he knows everything about nothing.' This thought was differently expressed by the Zen philosopher Shunryu Suzuki: 'In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities. In the expert's mind there are few.' In the Maha Chohan's letter (1880) the two poles that were dominating the direction of human thinking were described as 'brutal materialism and superstition'. At that time science was leading the charge

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for the materialistic worldview. The prevailing trend that has dominated scientific thinking for the past three to four hundred years has been named 'reductionist materialism'. It is called reductionist for a couple of reasons: 1) it reduces the universe and the allowed thinking about the universe to the physical realm only; and 2) it bases its analysis of that universe on an understanding of the smallest particles of physical matter as the building blocks of everything else. These smallest particles were once thought of as atoms, but now are recognized as sub-atomic. This line of thinking and the necessary dead end to which it was leading humanity was clearly recognized at the time of the founding of the Theosophical Society. It was one of the reasons that the TS came into being.

In our time, science has become the voice of authority in virtually all things. The gulf between the religious and scientific views has widened. This dominance has been achieved because, unlike most religious claims, the claims of science can and must be demonstrated. Although the range of scientific discovery and the development of far-reaching technologies is impressive, it still deals only with the physical realm. It can make no comment on the world of values, insight, love, intuition, or consciousness. It deals with a world of knowledge, not wisdom; of how, not why.

In the Maha Chohan's letter the predictable result of a continuation in the ever-increasing trend of science-led materialism was discussed. He asks the question: 'How is the combative *natural* instinct of man to be restrained from inflicting hitherto

unheard of cruelty and enormities, tyranny, injustice, and so on, if not through the soothing influence of a brotherhood, and the practical application of Buddha's esoteric doctrines?' The clear message was the need for the spiritualizing influence of the message of Theosophy to 'practically react upon the . . . moral code.' Theosophy and the movement that followed its reintroduction was not viewed as merely a better system of information, but as an active agent capable of shaping values, of influencing 'the ideas of truthfulness, purity, self denial, charity, etc.' Today the concepts of Theosophy have entered into the mainstream of thought in ways that few could have foreseen. The core ideas of brotherhood, oneness of all life, the multidimensional nature of reality, karma, reincarnation, are familiar ideas to most people worldwide. Traditionally, these were seen as purely metaphysical or philosophical ideas.

In the Mahatma Letters, Master KH makes the statement that 'modern science is our best ally'. Particularly in the field of quantum physics, scientific language and thinking are aligning with some of Theosophy's core teachings. The ageless wisdom is finding new terms, this time scientific, to express its profound ideas. In the language of quantum physics, non-locality, or entanglement, the central quantum observation that two objects separated in space react upon each other, is a scientific indication of the fact of Oneness, or brotherhood. Nothing is separate. Wave/particle duality as an aspect of the central quantum concept of complement-

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arity describes the 'collapse' of waves of possibilities into particles. From the perspective of consciousness, these particles are perceived as things, events, people, or vehicles of consciousness. In theosophical terminology we could speak of the 'possibilities' of Atma collapsing into expression in Buddhi, and likewise with Manas to Kama, and so on. Discontinuity, which is observed in the phenomenon of an electron's 'quantum leap' to a higher or lower energy level, repeats the inner experience of creative insight, or illumination.

We find ourselves in a period of convergence, where the formerly radical ideas embodied in Theosophy are finding a widening acceptance. Although the deeper significance of these ideas is largely unappreciated, a common language is developing to move into the previously forbidden territory of consciousness. The necessary work of spreading ideas, of preparing the soil, is not over, but has been done sufficiently well for these concepts not merely to take root, but to begin to flower. ✧

NOTICE

Ms Marja Artamaa has been appointed as International Secretary of the Theosophical Society effective 24 August 2014.

Mr Tim Boyd
President