

Transcript ~ Gandhi On Theosophy and the Global Civilization of Tomorrow

A Lecture by Dr. James E Tepfer
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Invocation

"Common be your prayer;
Common be your goal;
Common be your purpose;
Common be your deliberation.

Common be your wishes,
Your hearts in concord,
Your intentions in concord,
Perfect be the union amongst you."
*Rig Veda*¹

Let me begin this evening by honoring the ancient and noble practice of saluting those who have made this talk possible. I have drawn inspiration for Gandhi's connection with Theosophy principally from Gandhi's own writings and from Louis Fischer's sparkling and insightful biography, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*. I have also immensely benefitted from the brilliant and profound elucidation of Gandhian thought by Raghavan Iyer in his book, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*. Lastly, I have drawn from a variety of contemporary sources for meaningful pointers toward the emerging global civilization of the future. However, the richer, wider prospects and possibilities of the dawning Aquarian Age have been nurtured by many seminal articles penned by H.P. Blavatsky as well as by that most insightful of all books on the prospects of a "universal civilization", *Parapolitics: Toward the City of Man*, also by Raghavan Iyer.

Before turning to the substance of my talk, I would like to add that it is especially a privilege to present this talk on the sacred soil of *Aryavarta*, on the very site which was consecrated by the dynamic presence of that great and compassionate initiate, H.P. Blavatsky. It was H.P. Blavatsky, as we know, who made Adyar holy as she dedicated it to the global Work of the spiritually wise and magnanimous Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas. And, to its immense credit, the Theosophical Society, Adyar has nobly

weathered all the trials and tribulations of its past and might yet fulfill the prophetic declaration from *The Great Master's Letter* that the Theosophical Society is to be the cornerstone of the religions of the future. Considering these profound facts, what more auspicious place to discuss Gandhi, Theosophy and global civilization than here in Adyar, at this gathering of students of *Theosophia* from across the globe?

About Gandhi

M.K. Gandhi was the most eminent social revolutionary of the Twentieth Century and perhaps one of the many paradigms of the Aquarian man or woman of the coming centuries. No doubt, Albert Einstein spoke for peoples across the globe when he said:

"Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this, ever, in flesh and blood, walked upon this earth." ²

Gandhi's benign influence has been global, spanning geography and generations alike. He was the forerunner and inspiration to a Nelson Mandela in South Africa, a Martin Luther and Coretta Scott King in America, a Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia and, of course, the intrepid Malala of Pakistan. Each of these exemplary individuals has, in turn, become an inspirational prototype in our own time and will undoubtedly continue to affect generations to come.

As a thinker and a committed social reformer, Gandhi held that truth, non-violence and creative suffering are equally vital to universal human uplift. Truth, to Gandhi, is at the core of our being and of all existence. Truth involves the whole person and encompasses thought, word and deed. Truth, to be truth, is also relevant to every sphere of human life – public as well as private. Finally, and most significantly for man, Truth is embodied in the world as the Law of Interdependence. This is the scientific basis of morality – sacred and secular.

Non-violence is action free of the urge or impulse to do harm, to act out of malice. It is rooted in the mind and heart of the actor. It is the deliberate negation of self-assertion, of pushiness, of arrogance and of the desire to exploit others. Non-violence ultimately releases some degree of unconditional love towards one's friends and one's enemies

alike. It involves the conscious ability to reduce one's ego to a zero. It is, as one contemporary thinker put it, the science of "un-selfing the mind". From a theosophical perspective, we might say that non-violence is the conscious negation of the asuric will, of atavistic Atlantean pride and of the willful misuse of higher creative powers. If this is so, then non-violent, egoless action is that moral conduct that honors perceived truths by negating the personalizing will and releasing the latent, Gangetic waters of pure love.

Intrinsic to Gandhi's theory and practice of non-violence is that of "creative suffering". Voluntary suffering is a necessary ingredient of all non-violent truth-acts and especially so when it comes to dealing with seemingly intractable social and institutional injustices. Self-suffering is really the alchemical hyphen that connects truth and non-violence. Suffering ignites the moral chemistry that releases the light within truth and the energy within unconditional love. This is intrinsic to the life of the undaunted and benevolent social reformer.

Gandhi, as we know, was an unusual individual with many admirable qualities. As an earnest thinker, he was principled, lucid and insightful. As a *karma yogin*, his actions were purposeful and discriminating. As a *bhakti yogin*, he was a lover of God and man and, most especially, a lover of God-in-man. He was also honest to a fault, full of love for friends and strangers alike and was blessed with abundant good humor. With respect to the latter quality, Gandhi was once asked by a British journalist if he had not felt scantily dressed when meeting King George at Buckingham Palace. After all, persisted the journalist, Gandhi had only worn a *dhoti* and a shawl to the occasion. Gandhi smiled and retorted that he did not feel awkward at all since his majesty had on enough clothes for both of them. Gandhi could also take a joke at his own expense. Louis Fischer, his best biographer, visited Gandhi in 1942 and again in 1946. On his second visit, Gandhi humorously remarked that Fischer must find him as unhandsome now as he had four years ago. Fischer, with a twinkle in his eye, immediately said that he would never dare to disagree with a great man. Gandhi laughed loudly and walked arm and arm with Fischer to his simple dwelling in the ashram.

Beyond all his admirable traits there was a deeper more profound quality in Gandhi that is often over-looked – his desire to heal. Gandhi's fervent wish as a young man was not to be a lawyer or a social reformer or a national leader. His heart's wish was to be a doctor – a healer. However, he wasn't allowed to study medicine because of the practice of vivisection. Nonetheless, his compassionate, healing impulse still found moments of spontaneous expression throughout his life. It motivated him to enter into forbidden areas of plague on at least two occasions in order to tend to the desperate and the dying. He also voluntarily took into his home lepers and people with various maladies. He formed an ambulance corps during two wars in South Africa and together with his ambulance crew risked his life to relieve the miseries of wounded soldiers on both sides of the battle. All in all, Gandhi's supple mind was obedient to his compassionate, oceanic heart. The latter was, in fact, the source of his moral genius.

Gandhi and Theosophy

There was a golden current of Theosophical influence that continually sustained the spiritual arc of Gandhi's life. That fertile current entered his life in November of 1889 at the age of twenty in London and continued as a vibrant, tempering influence until the very day of his assassination in 1948. The seminal "Theosophical moment" that occurred in London was when Gandhi met two Theosophists who introduced him to the *Bhagavad Gita* and, most significantly, took him to a meeting of the Blavatsky Lodge. There he met H.P. Blavatsky and Annie Besant. (He had, by the way, read Annie Besant's book on why she became a Theosophist and he was very impressed by the reasons she gave for her conversion.) As a result of Gandhi's personal encounter with H.P.B. as well as the encouragement of Theosophical friends, Gandhi studied *The Key to Theosophy*. Among other things, his study of the *Key* made him keenly aware of the philosophical richness and spiritual potency of Hinduism. It helped him to see through the many criticisms of Christian missionaries and eventually led him to declare that philosophical Hinduism was the religion that spoke to him the most deeply.

We are told more about young Gandhi and his first encounter with Theosophy in London from P. Nayyar, Gandhi's personal secretary in his later years. Nayyar tells us in his biography on Gandhi that:

"He (Gandhi) read Mme. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*, and on March 26, 1891, was enrolled as an associate member of the Blavatsky Lodge." ³

The cumulative effect of Gandhi's fortuitous encounter with H.P. Blavatsky and his subsequent study of Theosophical teachings, is that it helped him to spiritually self-ignite; it kindled and fed what became an all-consuming fire of spiritual aspiration, an ardent search to experience God-consciousness.

Later, in South Africa, Gandhi continued his study of the *Gita* and of selected Theosophical writings. In his private library in Durban could be found the works of H.B. Blavatsky, Leo Tolstoy and other eminent writers on spiritual ideas. Gandhi also had a deep interest in Esoteric Christianity as well as in *Raja Yoga*. In addition, he contributed to the activities of the Theosophical Society of Southern Africa -- Johannesburg Lodge. While he apparently never became an official member of the Johannesburg Lodge, he did give a series of talks there on the major religions of India.

Gandhi's personal association with Theosophists continued in India from 1915 until his death in 1948. He interacted frequently with Theosophists in the pursuit of Indian Independence and often collaborated with Shri B. P. Wadia, an eminent Theosophist, an original co-worker of Annie Besant and the founder of the first Labor Union in India. Furthermore, Gandhi freely acknowledged the historical fact that one of the co-founders of the Indian National Congress was a Theosophist. He later repeated his recognition of Theosophy's seminal contribution to the Indian Independence Movement when he said:

"In the beginning, the top Indian National Congress leaders were Theosophists." ⁴

In a wider sense, we might say that Gandhi implicitly embraced the "Three Objects" of the Theosophical Movement (but with specific reservations about the Third Object). As we know, the First Object of the Theosophical Movement is to form the nucleus of a universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or

color. Gandhi's whole adult life could be seen as an attempt to embody the living spirit of this aim. It was the root inspiration of his fertile spiritual life and of his numerous "experiments with truth". Brotherhood was also the universal constant in his solution to the complex algebra of the religious communal issues that plagued India -- and which the British government so cleverly exploited. As Indian independence neared in the late 1940s, and violent disagreements intensified between Muslim and Hindu Congressmen, Gandhi saw his hopes for a politically unified India wane. In an interview in June of 1946 with Louis Fischer, Gandhi lamented the patent smugness of many Hindus toward Muslim members of the Indian National Congress. He equally lamented the devolution of the Muslim belief in the brotherhood of man into the brotherhood of Muslims only. In light of this sad, dual realization, Gandhi made the following unequivocal declaration to Fischer:

"Theosophy is the teaching of Madame Blavatsky... Theosophy is the brotherhood of man." ⁵

Gandhi was, in effect, making it clear that H.P. Blavatsky was the true teacher of Theosophy and that its essential message of brotherhood was what both Hindu and Muslim proponents were sorely lacking in practice. In the end, the lack of brotherhood in the Indian National Congress led to the devastating division of a unified *Aryavarta* into the separate nation states of Pakistan and India.

The Second Object of the Theosophical Movement is to encourage the comparative study of ancient religions, philosophies and sciences. Gandhi was a Hindu – initially by birth but ultimately by choice. He was also an ardent student of the world's major religions. Since he came to recognize that each religious tradition embodies a profound set of spiritual truths, he declared that "Truth alone is God." This statement parallels the Theosophical motto taken from the Maharaja of Benares: "There is no religion higher than Truth." It is not surprising then that since Truth alone is God, Gandhi believed fundamentally in the following:

"... (I believe in) the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which continually purifies.

It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself..."

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This notion of an in-born "transcendent-religion" – rooted in Nature and man -- was dialectically compatible with, and supportive of, a diversity of religious teachings. Like the full moon simultaneously mirrored in many different lakes, each authentic religious teaching reflects some portion of Absolute Truth. This calls for more than mere tolerance. It calls for an abiding reverence for the world's multiple religious teachings and a willingness to search for underlying truths beneath constricting dogmas and rituals. It is not surprising then, that Gandhi admired the universal and universalizing spirit of Theosophy. This appreciation was aptly and simply expressed in his "Foreword" to the book, *The Brotherhood of Religions*, penned by the Theosophist Sophia Wadia. In Gandhi's "Foreword" to that book, he says:

"An understanding of and respect for the great faiths of the world is the (very) foundation of true Theosophy."⁷

In this respect, Gandhi also noted that true religion not only transcends all formal religions – including Hinduism -- but also unifies them without destroying their fundamental, discrete integrity. This dialectical outlook is compatible with true *Theosophia*, is it not?

The Third Object of the modern Theosophical Movement is to investigate the hidden laws of Nature and the creative powers latent in man. Gandhi recognized these subtler dimensions of Nature and humanity. To quote from his autobiography:

"...(W)e are children of one and the same Creator, and as such the divine powers within us are infinite."⁸

Gandhi also deeply believed in *karma* and reincarnation. Furthermore, he recognized that the moral law was impersonal, subtle and many-layered. In the human kingdom, this meant that *karma* works principally through the agency of the mind. To Gandhi, the highest creative faculty in man was pure thought and that faculty was regulated by the

impersonal, subtle and multi-layered law of *karma*. His belief in the karma-generating power of thought sometimes created peculiar problems for him. Take, for example, his reaction to the Bihar earthquake of 1934. After the earthquake, Gandhi publicly commented that, in his view, the earthquake was caused by the sin of untouchability practiced by most caste Hindus. Well, as you might expect, many rationalists, scientists and friends were thunder-struck and dismayed by this statement. So was Gandhi's close friend, Rabindranath Tagore. In fact, Tagore publicly chastised Gandhi and stated,

"... physical catastrophes have their inevitable and exclusive origin in certain combinations of physical facts."⁹

Gandhi's retort to Tagore and his critics alike was:

"To me, the earthquake was no caprice of God nor a result of the meeting of mere blind forces. We do not know all the laws of God (*karma*) nor their workings."¹⁰

While Gandhi recognized the reality of occult powers, he felt that it was often an unhealthy diversion for mystics, Hindus and Theosophists to focus on hidden and as yet undeveloped psychic powers. Like Saint Paul, Gandhi believed that boundless charity was a far greater possession than the development of psychic powers. Gandhi's concern, as we know, echoes a serious point made in *The Great Master's Letter* in which the aim of universal brotherhood is fervently upheld and the fascination with occult powers strongly criticized. As the Great Master unequivocally states:

"... perish rather the Theosophical Society with both its hapless Founders, than that we should permit it to become no better than an academy of magic, and a hall of Occultism!"¹¹

In the last issue of Gandhi's journal, "Harijan", ironically published on the very day of his assassination (January 30th, 1948), Gandhi wrote the following:

"There are many admirable works in Theosophical literature which one may read with the greatest profit; but it appears to me that too much stress has been laid upon ...intellectual studies, upon the development of occult powers, and that the central idea

of Theosophy -- the brotherhood of man and the moral growth of man --has been lost sight of." ¹²

In the final analysis, Gandhi believed that the identity of all life with God and the derivative principle of brotherhood were the keys to the fullest possible life for all. This is certainly compatible with the presiding and moving spirit of *Theosophia*, Divine Wisdom.

But, a final word before turning to the global civilization of tomorrow. What about Gandhi's "inner voice"? Like the Greek philosopher and revolutionary, Socrates, Gandhi seems to have had an "inner voice" which guided him at certain critical points in his life. Unlike Socrates, whose inner voice *prevented* him from doing a particular thing, Gandhi's inner voice *commanded* him to do a particular thing. Gandhi claimed to have always followed the positive guidance he received. Take for instance, Gandhi's meeting with a select group of eminent dons at Oxford in 1931. The friendly gathering soon became an intense intellectual interrogation of Gandhi's views on independence. Professor Johnson, who attended the meeting, describes "the battle of wits" in the following way:

"For three hours he (Gandhi) was sifted and cross-examined.... It was a reasonably exacting ordeal, yet not for a moment was he rattled or at a loss. The conviction came to me, that not since Socrates has the world seen his equal for absolute self-control and composure; and once or twice, putting myself in the place of men who had to confront that invincible calm and imperturbability, I thought I understood why the Athenians made the 'martyr-sophist' drink the hemlock. Like Socrates, he has a 'daemon'. And when the "daemon' has spoken, he is as unmoved by argument as by danger."¹³

Now, how do we look at Gandhi's "daemon" or inner voice? What framework of understanding do we adopt here? I think that it is perfectly reasonable to regard Gandhi's inner voice as a higher *Bodhisattvic* influence. If so, that further places him within the vast, nourishing current of the Theosophical Movement, of the Army of the Voice.

Gandhi and the Global Civilization of Tomorrow

"East and West are no more than names. Human beings are the same everywhere. He who wants to will conduct himself with decency.... If we look into the future, is it not a heritage that we have to leave to posterity, that all the different races commingle and produce a civilization that perhaps the world has not yet seen."¹⁴

M.K. Gandhi

[The above quote from Gandhi could not only prove to be true of India – which I revere – but true of my beloved America as well. It is my belief that America will in time grow into its noble vision and join hands across the "great divide" with Mother India. In so doing, they will bring together science and spirituality in such a unique way that it will give birth to a spiritual, intellectual and social renaissance that the world has yet to witness. However, I digress.]

Let us now turn toward the uncharted future, toward a possible global civilization of tomorrow. In doing so, we will humbly embrace Rainer Rilke's intriguing observation that:

"The future enters into us, in order to transform itself in us, long before it happens."¹⁵

In this sense, the "global civilization of tomorrow" is here now-- in embryonic form.

Our age is often characterized as one of *avidya*; of spiritual ignorance, of intuitive obtuseness, of moral confusion and of the supremacy of material values over spiritual ideals. There is a keen awareness by many of the cancer of greed, the pervasive fear of suffering and death, the debilitating epidemic of loneliness and the unhealthy alienation of many from their cultures and communities. In short, the spiritual has spiraled down and crystalized into a materialistic mentality. But is this the whole story of our tilting "age of transition"? Isn't it possible that there is more incubating beneath the surface that is as yet unborn – or perhaps even partially pushing itself up through the soil?

Fortunately, there are subtle signs of a dawning Aquarian awareness in which the valorous, creative spirit of man is shown to be as yet undaunted and resilient. The most significant indicator of man's "solar possibilities" is rooted in the irreversible recognition that human and global interconnectedness are established facts; culturally, economically, ecologically, intellectually and in a thousand other ways we are bound together in a common destiny. No

man, no woman, no country, no religion is "an island unto itself". We are painfully inching our way toward a new kind of inclusive mentality, a new kind of cross-cultural compassion. For instance, there are now a plethora of NGOs across the globe rendering various forms of timely assistance to the needy and dispossessed. On virtually every continent, spontaneous initiatives to alleviate poverty and ignorance are taking place. What is more, ecological awareness of the fragile web of interdependence that bind together man and nature has made us more conscientious trustees of our natural resources. Even empirical science, with its built-in materialistic assumptions and narrow methodologies, shows signs of becoming more philosophically open if not exactly socially responsible. For example, most theoretical physicists now acknowledge that they cannot empirically prove either "string theory" or the "multi-verse hypothesis" without contemporary philosophers helping them conceive of new, non-empirical criteria of validity. Furthermore, ground-breaking brain research has discovered the power of meditation to create new neuron pathways, to awaken empathy and even compassion. Beyond this, heretical researchers at the University of Virginia's School of Medicine have compiled over 2,500 case studies of children across the globe who have credibly recalled past lives. These intrepid researchers have concluded that the only rational explanation that fits all the facts is that consciousness, in some sense, survives death and is reborn. Finally, there is the deep feeling amongst the young and the young at heart that the spiritual is open-ended and that it is up to each one to engage in acts of self-definition, self-determination and self-transcendence.

If all of this constitutes an "indicating vector" toward a more hopeful, humane and regenerated humanity, then let us raise an over-arching question: "Could there emerge in the decades and centuries ahead a *Novus Ordo Seclorum*, a "New Order of the Ages" for the whole of the human family? Yes, there could – if we are only courageous enough to think big, to think comprehensively, to dream and to dare.

Well, if a "New Order of the Ages" (or a "City of Man") is genuinely possible, then it is only appropriate that we turn to Gandhi for pointers toward a more hopeful future. In fact, Gandhi is vitally relevant to the present and to the zig-zag unfoldment of the ensuing epochs. If this is true, then what role might Gandhi's guiding principles of Truth and non-violence, innovative social and economic reforms and *ashram* experiments play in helping to bring about, if not a global civilization, then at least a multitude of "civilizing centers"; civilizing centers in which the initiative is on the side of inclusiveness, universality, generosity, cooperation and trusteeship

rather than of on the side of suffocating tribalism, insatiable greed, self-destructive competition and cowardly coercion?

In answer to that question, let us first recognize that Gandhi has already left his indelible imprint on generations yet to come. Look at what took place on the world stage in the years and decades immediately after his death. First, there was the pivotal incident that took place in India, itself, on April 18, 1951 – almost 100 years to the day of the birth of that great Theosophist, William Quan Judge. On that day in 1951, Vinoba Bhave, (one of Gandhi's truest disciples) began the revolutionary *Bhoodan* land reform movement. This reform movement – in my view -- saved India from decades of violence and ideological conflict. This nation-altering movement originated in the following way. For some time, Bhave had been mulling over the problem of what to do about the millions of landless peasants in India. The antiquated and unjust Zamindari feudal system was suffocating the landless. Furthermore, and most significantly, the communists were fomenting violent revolution among the desperate peasants. There was chaos and mayhem throughout the major provinces of Telangana (then called Hyderabad State). To make matters worse, the new, national government of India was struggling with a host of problems and had not yet found a solution to dismantling the Zamindari system or for coping with fiery communist insurgents. Fortunately, Bhave stepped into the epicenter of this dangerous situation and appealed to the wealthy landowners to voluntarily redistribute a small percentage of their land to the starving poor. At first Bhave's appeal fell on deaf, unsympathetic ears. But at the village of Pochampalli, a landlord spontaneously stood up and offered 100 acres of his land to be allocated to forty families in his village. Bhave was delighted and intuitively saw this generous act as providential. This wealthy Zamindari had spontaneously brought together in his concrete gesture the Gandhian principles of trusteeship and non-coercive, social transformation. The Land gift Movement called *Bhoodan* had begun and would, in time, slowly spread across India.

A few months after the start of the Bhoodan Movement, Prime Minister Nehru stood before the Indian Parliament and made the following comment about Vinoba Bhave and his burgeoning land reform efforts:

"This frail man has just accomplished, solely by the force of non-violence, what all the military power of the (Indian) Government would be unable to do."¹⁶

In the end, Bhave collected and re-distributed over four and one-half million acres of arable land to the landless. And, just as importantly, Bhave -- and the gifts of the wealthy -- halted a teeming communist revolution.

Turning to America, we have the prophetic observation made by Gandhi during a meeting with an American Negro Delegation in 1936:

"...It may be through the (American) Negroes that the unadulterated message of non-violence will be delivered to the world."¹⁷

This of course brings us to the sterling example of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Christian exponent of non-violent social and racial reform. At a critical turning point in King's early life, he was encouraged by a remarkable mentor to read the writings of Gandhi, which he did. It was only then, he admitted, that he understood that it was possible to take the Christian principle of unconditional love and apply it to the social, economic and racial problems of America. By the mid-1950s, King emerged as the leader of the American civil rights movement and was responsible for initiating economic boycotts and civil disobedience campaigns across the racist South. His activities became a fundamental challenge to the conscience of America. During these creative and tumultuous times, King conceived the wish to travel to India. That wish finally came to fruition in 1959 when he made what he termed a "pilgrimage" to visit the land of his revolutionary mentor, Mahatma Gandhi.

King's five-week pilgrimage to India had a profound influence on his understanding of nonviolent resistance and his commitment to America's struggle for civil rights. During his stay in India, King met with Prime Minister Nehru, with the reformed communist and socialist leader, J.P. Narayan, with Vinoba Bhave and, most importantly, with hundreds of local Gandhians, social workers and untouchables across the sub-continent.

On his final evening in India, King made a moving radio address to the Indian people. In that eloquent address, he said:

"Since being in India, I am more convinced than ever before that the method of nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for justice and human dignity. In a real sense, Mahatma Gandhi embodied in his life certain universal principles that are inherent in the moral structure of the universe, and these principles are as inescapable as the law of gravitation."¹⁸

King returned to America with a deeper understanding of the dynamics of non-violent resistance and a tremendous appreciation for the Indian peoples and their ancient culture. Four years later, on July 2nd, 1964, the United States Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act which legally ended racial discrimination across America. This act, and the collective sacrifice that inspired it, continues to sustain all concerted efforts toward American racial justice and equality.

Turning now to Gandhi's influence on Europe, we have the non-violent revolution that took place in former Czechoslovakia in 1989. This revolution of the Czech masses was called the "Velvet Revolution". It spontaneously began on November 17, 1989, exactly one hundred and fourteen years to the day of the founding of the Theosophical Society in New York City. It ended a mere six weeks later. The intrepid non-violent demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience by the oppressed Czech peoples resulted in the peaceful abdication of the ruling Communist Party and the establishment of a Parliamentary Czech Republic. Four years later, in January of 1993, Czechoslovakia separated into two independent countries: the Czech and Slovak Republics. It was a bloodless, non-violent act of political division called "the velvet divorce". It was no less amazing than the non-violent overthrow of Communist rule four years earlier.

There is now world-wide recognition that non-violent, non-cooperation is a constructive form of social, political and economic protest to correct perceived injustices. In fact, the word "non-violence" has entered into our common social and political vocabulary. This global fact is Gandhi's gift to our grandchildren's grandchildren.

But the world still has much to learn from Gandhi if it is to give birth to a "universal civilization". The world's seminal thinkers and dedicated revolutionaries have yet to understand the signal importance of Gandhi's philosophical distinction between Absolute and relative truth. Nor have many New Age thinkers and ecumenical devotees quite understood Gandhi's rich conception of the sacred. Nor have social historians ever intuited the broader significance of Gandhi's ashram experiments. Nevertheless, all three are critical to the human family if it is to pass through its current "dark night of the soul", its *nitya pralaya*— the very painful, inevitable process of consciously "dying into a new life".

As pointed out in *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* by Raghavan Iyer, Gandhi made a crucial distinction between Absolute and relative truth – a distinction which is the heartbeat of the First Fundamental principle of the Theosophical philosophy. Gandhi noted that Absolute truth is ever beyond us while relative truth functions as our immediate guide through

the labyrinth of daily life. Sadly, Gandhi recognized that the failure of sincere religionists, ideologues, reformers and rebels to clearly distinguish between Absolute and relative truth in their own minds and hearts had created many of the world's tragedies. By unconsciously lending a narrow sense of self to our perceptions of truth we create intense attachments to them and a subsequent narrow – heartedness toward the beliefs and practices of others. So many activists, observed Gandhi, fall prey to the tenacious tendency to "absolutize the relative", to take an idea, an insight or a revered truth and to treat it as final, as ultimate, as the only possible interpretation, as the only viable practical application. This mulish perversity spawns the world's political and religious "isms" and increases violence and divisiveness.

Despite the clash of political ideologies and religious sects in the present, the men and women of coming decades will need to freely acknowledge the relative truths imbedded in the perspectives, beliefs and practices of themselves and others. They will need to gradually transmute their "absolutizing tendencies" and move closer to the synthesizing power of *buddhic* intuition. It could well be, that out of collective pain, disillusionment and suffering the men and women of tomorrow will gradually learn to honor the Absolute in the relative by becoming humbler in the realm of self-assertion and claim-making. And, because of this, the best minds will grow in their understanding that universalization does not mean homogenization but rather the recognition of "unity within diversity". This flexible attitude will no doubt be aided by the progressive deglamorization of all forms of political and religious power.

Speaking of truth, it is important to note that Gandhi saw Truth as the foundation of all forms of beauty – especially moral beauty. Moral beauty involves the harmonic relationship between theory and practice, belief and behavior, knowledge and application. The more one can creatively and courageously integrate truth and non-violence the more one's actions will radiate an intelligent and uplifting influence. From this perspective then, disharmony or "moral ugliness" is not poor practice or weakness of will but hypocrisy or disingenuousness – a lack of inner integrity which leads to soul blindness and a disfigured personality.

Theosophical speaking, spiritual beauty seems to involve the rational integration of the macro and the micro, the global and the local, the parapolitical and the political. This is elusive but will become perhaps the primary focus of the best academies of the future. But more importantly for students of Theosophy in the present, it is important to recognize that beauty is double-edged. It can beguile, seduce, intoxicate and divert us as well as exhilarate and inspire us to persist in

our arduous journey to the summits of impersonal truth. Unthinking fascination with beauty, *per se*, can easily mislead and blind us such that we forget the suffering of the world around us. The intoxicating spiritual beauty experienced at times by the student of Theosophy can unconsciously transform his Bodhisattvic commitment to rescue humanity from its ignorance and suffering into a desire for the ecstatic experience, for spiritual self-absorption, for *nirvana*. This Calypso-like enticement must be resisted. The pursuit of universal fellowship with its trials and tribulations must trump all— even the desire for beauty.

Let us turn now to Gandhi's conception and exemplification of the sacred. This is perhaps one of the signposts of the future. While rational knowledge rather than religious belief seems to be a defining difference between the Piscean and Aquarian Ages respectively, reverence is vital for the awakening of spiritual insight. This is because the rational can be infused with reverence, and reverence can be rational; truth is sacred. To Gandhi, the vivifying sacred gives birth to the pervasive feeling of "reverence" for the divine in all its marvelous manifestations: reverence for spiritual teachers, for knowledge, for sacrifice, for moral courage, and, of course, increasing reverence and respect for the bounty of Nature. In this sense, Gandhi saw that not only is God sacred, and Nature too, but humanity is likewise sacred. We, as human beings, are neither hopeless sinners, random cosmic accidents, bundles of instincts nor sophisticated machines. No, we are essentially god-like and worthy of admiration when we act up to our moral, intellectual and spiritual potential. Thus, in the not-so-distant future, the notion of the sacred will cease to be confined to conventional religions only, nor will it be limited to certain holy activities housed in enclosed spaces called temples, pagodas, churches, synagogues or mosques. Nor will the sacred be viewed as something forever somber or grim but as something joyous and elevating. On the whole, there will be such a pervasive feeling of the sanctity of life that men and women will learn to honor the hidden potency of the unblemished divine as it manifests itself in everyday life. The most mature individuals in the centuries ahead will inwardly salute the presence of the divine and the divinely human whenever and wherever they witness acts of authentic selflessness, of moral and spiritual courage, of spontaneous generosity and of voluntary renunciation.

Amidst the complex political challenges in South Africa and later in India, Gandhi realized that it was necessary to initiate a new kind of *ashram*; namely a micro-community of committed individuals that deliberately brought together the spiritual and the social through the transfiguring power of vows. Spiritual vows were solemnly taken to honor certain eternal,

guiding principles: truth, non-violence, non-possessiveness, non-stealing and the like. As a result of taking such comprehensive resolves, there was an active recognition and place for diverse religious teachings within the *ashram*. But Gandhi felt that spiritual vows and religious teachings are impotent unless they are creatively related to concrete social needs. Therefore, in addition to preparing for various forms of social and political protest in British India, Gandhi and his *ashram* co-leaders agreed to radically reconfigure Indian society within the parameters of their own miniature community. Over many years, they organically evolved a communal structure which eliminated inappropriate caste differences, purged it of untouchability, re-established the nobility of womanhood, honored the innate dignity of bread labor and integrated the head, the heart and the hand in the education of children and young adults alike.

Gandhi's conception and exemplification of leadership in his *ashrams* was as much modern as it was traditional. His ashrams were structured but not static, egalitarian but not anarchic. While Gandhi was the visionary, the one who took the initiative and assumed primary responsibility for *ashram* activities, he was really the "leader" by virtue of his moral example. As a leader Gandhi was rational, responsible, transparent and totally committed to the importance of public self-correction when called for. And, when important communal issues arose, Gandhi observed the primary rule of the Pythagorean Community of classical Greece; namely, he consulted and deliberated with others before acting. In this sense, Gandhi's *panchayat* council of elders was the living embodiment of the legendary King Arthur's "round table" in which King Arthur was simply "the first among equals."

In the end, Gandhi's *ashram* experiments embodied a new kind of thinking, an original way of bringing together the seemingly separate worlds of religion and social reform by transforming both. His deliberate communal centers became the transformational levers that helped to realign God within man, the sacred within the social, the citizen within the political community. Members of Gandhi's *ashrams* in South Africa and India sought not *moksha* or *nirvana*, but *dharma*, skill in rendering intelligent service to the larger society and to humankind as a whole. Not surprisingly, these pioneering *ashram* experiments generated several internal challenges and problems, all of which were examined and thought out in ways deemed compatible with the vows of truth, non-violence, non-possession and service

Now, it is rarely brought to the public's attention that there are at this moment thousands of eco-villages and intentional communities busily at work on every continent. These innovative

communal experiments have become quiet centers of social, political, religious and even intellectual pioneering. They are visionary, knowledge-based as well as value-bound and are refreshingly unostentatious. They are to be found in inner cities, suburbs, the country side and villages. Their historical roots are many, but they are, in some sense, subtly indebted to Gandhi's own bold *ashram* experiments of the last century.

All that we have discussed so far points to the fact that the global civilization of tomorrow will continue to call for a seismic shift in consciousness – an inner transformation sparked and supported by innovative social and political arrangements at the micro-level. As we have seen, this is already occurring in some fashion. But more is needed -- especially at the psychological level. What is most needed in our own time, is not so much the yearning for a lost Golden Age or the determination to recover some paradise lost, but, more to the point, we need to recover a lost self-confidence – individually and collectively. We need to arouse a deeper confidence in the potential of man to rise from the hell of self-will into the heaven of cooperative fellowship.

How, then, do we ascend step-by-step toward an unshakable confidence in ourselves, in others and in the uncircumscribed future? Gandhi's solution is simple, seemingly paradoxical and very challenging. He says that the fundamental cure for lack of self-confidence is moral and spiritual courage. Most of us, he suggests, are not as morally weak, intellectually confused or as uncertain as we believe we are. Somewhere in our searching minds, we *know* what we ought to do. We *know* what is the decent thing to do. But we lack the courage or the verve to do it. In moments of quiet solitude, when we honestly scan our lives, we can clearly see that so many of our mistakes and tragedies could have been avoided with a little courage, a little daring, a little caring, a little self-honesty, a little detachment from ourselves. If this is true, then what we need to do is to arouse our moral and spiritual courage by making a Promethean resolve to reduce our personalities to a zero in specific moral situations. This unconditional resolve summons the heroic element in us and awakens our altruistic will to act rightly and honorably -- without concern for consequences or for self-image. Albert Einstein put this more metaphysically -- but just as compellingly -- when he commented that the responsibility of true religion is to help men and women remove the "optical delusion of separative consciousness" from the mind¹⁹.

However, while timely self-renunciation in daily life is the ideal, Gandhi was no romantic idealist nor a foolish optimist. He was, instead, an objective idealist. He understood that man and society are necessarily full of imperfections. It is part of the human condition that error, sin

and injustice shadow all human activities. So, when our actions toward others fail to measure up to our ideals of truth and love, we must have the courage not to lie, temporize or rationalize our mistakes -- either to ourselves or to others. We must correct ourselves before life does it for us. Through unwavering resolve, Gandhi became a master of self-correction in every aspect of his life – from the personal to the political.

On one occasion in South Africa, Gandhi and his wife, Kasturba, engaged in a heated argument over her doing scavenger work in the *ashram*. Eventually, Gandhi realized that he had lost his temper badly and was trying to force Kasturba to do something that was, as yet, completely unnatural to her. Gandhi felt badly and, over-coming his righteousness, said those magical words: "I was wrong." He immediately followed this up with the potent mantram: "I apologize." These acts of self-correction restored harmony between him and his noble companion and increased their mutual understanding and respect for each other.

Gandhi carried over the principle of self-correction into that most difficult of all realms of social encounter, the political. In 1919, Gandhi initiated a mass *Satyagraha* campaign throughout India in response to the British government's oppressive Rowlatt Act. The British army responded to the non-violent *Satyagraha* campaign by brutally repressing protestors. Eventually, some protestors were unable to measure up to the high standards of non-violent action and turned to violence and mayhem. Gandhi soon realized his mistake and publicly declared that he had made a "Himalayan miscalculation" in thinking that India was ready for non-violence on a mass scale. He took personal responsibility for his error and called off the national campaign despite the heated disagreement of almost all his associates.

In both cases of deliberate self-correction, we can see that Gandhi had the courage to set aside his ego. He was forced by the moral logic of his own vows to swallow his pride, his hurt feelings, his righteous anger, his high expectations, his deep disappointment and perhaps even his self-image. He consciously chose to follow the morally and psychologically demanding path of truth and non-violence. In doing so, he purified his consciousness and, paradoxically, increased his confidence in his own capacity to learn and to grow morally and spiritually. Clearly, the Gandhian template of selfless action and timely self-correction is vital if we wish to progress toward a better, more harmonious world.

Now it is important to note that self-renunciation is aided by two factors. According to Theosophy, Eastern philosophy and modern cutting-edge science, those factors are daily

meditation on high themes and the conscious cultivation of universal responsibility. These inner activities are the keys to positively transfiguring the mind. Meditation is alchemical and is ultimately about Self-gestation. It's about calmly negating the subtle tyranny of the lesser self and gradually ascending the ladder of consciousness into the empyrean of the transcendent, all-compassionate One. Persistence in meditation, self-study and service helps us to progressively "un-self" the mind. In time, it becomes natural for us to generate an expanding series of inclusive circles of responsibility for others –from one's family to one's community and, ultimately, to the family of humankind. In light of this inner dynamic, we can understand why Gandhi was said by many to "breathe compassion". After all, one of his self-confessed disciplines was daily meditation on the plight of the starving and distraught millions. This golden thread of recurrent meditation was the heart-beat of his rich and fruitful quest for God-realization -- gained through rendering timely help to others.

Broadly speaking, as a spacious sense of Self dawns upon human consciousness in the decades ahead, the king faculty of creative imagination will become a willing co-partner with impersonal reason. This happy alliance will make the personality of man more plastic, more capable of being self-shaped. If this is true, there will come about a change in the valence of the mind. It will become more noetic, more suffused with luminous insights. In a word, the mind will become more multi-dimensional and capable of inhabiting diverse perspectives and entertaining opposing points of view. Furthermore, man's empathic I.Q. will increase such that he will suffer and celebrate with others more easily. This new, hospitable mentality is what is really at the heart of "becoming more global". In this sense, one can live in a village and be global or reside in a thriving metropolis and be parochial. It all depends on the quality of the individual's state of consciousness or mental purity.

In summary then, we might say that within the intentional micro-communities of the future there could well take place the creative integration of the spiritual, the intellectual and the social. If so, this could give birth to what we might call the "magnanimous mind" -- the dynamic fusion of the alpha intellect and the alpha heart. The magnanimous mind points to a sublime ethical intelligence. Its unfoldment would re-integrate our mental, moral and spiritual lives. It would be truthful and compassionate, morally upright and tolerant, rationally exacting yet flexible and intuitive. At its best, the magnanimous mind of tomorrow would be permeated with a felt sense of the sacred that expresses itself in boundless generosity and consummate grace. Such a spiritual mentality would evince a marvelous *buddhic* mobility. It would excel at shifting its

focus from the theoretical to the practical, from the moral to the psychological, from prose to poetry, from the local to the global and back again. And, what is more, this new kind of mentality would be as much at home in the spacious unknown as it would be in the formulated known.

Because of the emergence of the magnanimous mind, the man and woman of the future will find it natural to be many things at once: a seeker of Truth, a mystic, a lover of science, a viable contributor to the moral uplift of society and a conscientious trustee of Nature's resources. In essence, the man and woman of generations to come will, like Gandhi, learn to be spiritually independent, intellectually open and socially responsible. They will withdraw excessive allegiance to church and state, to sect and party, and, by holding firmly to universal principles, regenerate civil communities within a multi-layered global civilization.

Finally, the magnanimous mind, when nurtured within the numerous micro-communities of coming centuries, could well give birth to authentic "islands of brotherhood" that would grace the globe. Such iridescent centers of culture would summon to our rejuvenated earth *jnanis* from celestial spheres. These magus-Teachers would take birth once again and freely walk among men and women without threat of being "hunted as devils or worshipped as gods." Such wise magicians of the heart would open wide the windows of perception so that the receptive and the distressed might equally catch a glimpse of the Divine. They would reorient human consciousness toward a vibrant idealism and offer fresh hope to the ritualists, the materialists and the spiritually downtrodden. If such exalted sages, if such magnanimous teachers, were to incarnate and restore some form of *Rama Rajya* on earth, then we could all join in chorus with sweet, innocent Miranda in Shakespeare's *Tempest* when she joyously declares:

O' wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is.

O' brave new world, that has such people in't. ²⁰

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