

# A (Pathless) Truth Beyond All Religions?

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**P**UBLISHED on 30 October 1875, the byelaws of the Theosophical Society (TS) declared in their Preamble:

Whatever may be the private opinions of its members, the society has no dogmas to enforce, no creed to disseminate. It is formed neither as a Spiritualistic schism, nor to serve as the foe or friend of any sectarian or philosophic body. Its only axiom is the omnipotence of truth, its only creed a profession of unqualified devotion to its discovery and propagation. In considering the qualifications of applicants for membership, it knows neither race, sex, color, country, nor creed.<sup>1</sup>

The Founders of the TS thus established for the organization a concern with truth instead of involvement with creeds or dogmas. They conceived it not as belief-based body but as an enquiry-based one. Such a concern would receive an exalted “upgrade” when the Founders visited Benares, India, in 1880 and were given the motto of the family of the Maharajahs of Benares which would be adopted by them as the Society’s motto:

*satyāt nāsti paro dharmah*, “There is no religion higher than Truth.” It first appeared in *The Theosophist*, the official organ of the TS, in its January 1881 issue:

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सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

THERE IS NO RELIGION HIGHER THAN TRUTH.  
[Family motto of the Maharajahs of Benares.]

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The history of the TS is punctuated by three major crises: the Judge case (1893–1895), the Leadbeater case (1906–1908) and the speech by J. Krishnamurti on 3 August 1929, in Ommen, the Netherlands, in which he dissolved the Order of the Star in the East. In that speech he said:

I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. That is my point of view, and I adhere to that absolutely and unconditionally. Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized; nor should any organization be formed to

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lead or to coerce people along any particular path.<sup>2</sup>

Although several elements of this passage are expressed in the spirit of the preamble of the bylaws of the Society, the reaction to his speech by some members of the TS was both strong and lasting. Some called it a betrayal of the TS and of Dr Annie Besant. Others maintained that in so acting Krishnamurti was demonstrating a spiritual failure. After more than ninety years of the original event one finds that, for some people, that sentiment has not abated. On the other hand, there are some students of Madame H. P. Blavastky that dismiss Krishnamurti as an “invention” of Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, and accuse him of having “never studied Theosophy”.

In view of this, are there any indications in the teachings of the Wisdom Tradition that may support the notion of “Truth as a pathless land”? The author is very much aware that such an investigation would be considered as anathema to students of Krishnaji’s teachings as they consider “comparison” a worthless activity. However, Krishnaji is on record as having had in-depth discussions and dialogues with scientists, psychologists, Buddhists, Hindus, and even a Roman Catholic priest. In such conversations, Krishnaji had his views challenged sometimes, he had to interact with the views of others and was also exposed to central teachings from the Eastern traditions.

The First Fundamental Proposition of the Proem of *The Secret Doctrine* affirms:

(a) An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable Principle on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. It is beyond the range and reach of thought — in the words of Mandukya, “unthinkable and unspeakable”.<sup>3</sup>

Although there are similar statements in other traditions of Esoteric Wisdom, the above-mentioned principle is referred to as “beyond the range and reach of thought”, which also means beyond language, characterization, description, and definition. As Meister Eckhart once remarked, “anything you can say about God is not true”. N. Sri Ram, fifth President of the TS, wrote: “God is something about which we know nothing, but can form such notions as we will.” Such statements help us to understand that the essential Truth of existence cannot be reached by thought, reasoning, imagination, nor through the powers of philosophical logic.

In *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* we find the following passage:

Believe me, there comes a moment in the life of an adept, when the hardships he has passed through are a thousandfold rewarded. In order to acquire further knowledge, he has no more to go through a minute and slow process of investigation and comparison of various objects, but is accorded an instantaneous, implicit insight into every first truth.<sup>4</sup>

The expression “instantaneous, implicit insight into every first truth” does

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not seem to be a realization mediated by the intellect but an unmediated realization in the depths of the Adepts' consciousness. And such a realization is a realization of "every first truth"; it is not, therefore, a category of understanding, as Immanuel Kant taught, but an unmediated experience. In *The Secret Doctrine*, Madame Blavatsky referred to "the seers of the essence of things", who were able to see the "soul of things". William Blake expressed such possibility in his poem *Auguries of Innocence*:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour

In the *Māndukya Upanishad* we find mention about what is called the fourth state of consciousness and its completely transcendental nature:

*Turiya* is not that which cognises the internal (subjective) world, nor that which is conscious of the external (objective) world, nor that which is conscious of both, nor that which is a mass all sentiency, nor that which is simple consciousness, nor that which is insentient. (It is) unseen (by any sense organ), not related to anything, incomprehensible (by the mind), uninferable, unthinkable, indescribable, essentially of the nature of Consciousness constituting the Self alone, negation of all phenomena, the Peaceful, all Bliss and the Non-dual. This is what is known as the fourth (*Turiya*). This is the *Ātman* and it has to be realized.<sup>5</sup>

It has been said that to know the truth about oneself involves a relentless pur-

suit of what is unreal and untrue in our psychological makeup. The accumulation of experiences through many lifetimes, the hard anchoring of our sense of self on images, likes and dislikes, and a strong sense of identity radically based on the shaky premise of separateness, has buried that most glorious sense of undivided existence under layers of superficiality, self-importance and indelible pride. *Turiya* or our true Self is completely free from the archaeology of our personal history and remains untouched by it.

Referring to the Truth of existence, Śrī Śankarāchārya, in his book *Viveka-Chudāmani*, sings the praises of its immeasurability:

Brahman is the infinite, eternal, all-pervading light, it can be neither taken hold of, not abandoned, inconceivable by the mind and inexpressible by speech, immeasurable, without beginning, without end. (242)<sup>6</sup>

The verb "to measure" means "to discover the exact size or amount of something", "the dimensions, capacity, or amount of something ascertained by measuring". It also means to establish "the quality, value, or effect of something". Many attempts to define, conclusively, Truth or the Ultimate Reality, not only ended up in failure but also created a dogmatic, unyielding world view and virulent ideology that wreaked havoc in many parts of the world. As Śrī Śankarāchārya says, the Truth or the Eternal is "inconceivable by the mind".

The writings of Madame Blavatsky

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also bear testimony of the ineffability of Truth:

*Aham eva Parabrahman* — “I am verily the Supreme Brahman” — has ever been the one living truth in the heart and mind of the Adepts, and it is this which helps the Mystic to become one.<sup>7</sup>

In the following passage she quotes from the famous communication from a great Adept, the Mahachohan, from 1881, who attempted to help A. P. Sinnett and A. O. Hume to see the essential nature of the work before the Theosophical Society:

“To be true, religion and philosophy must offer the solution of every problem. That the world is in such a bad condition morally is a conclusive evidence that none of its religions and philosophies — those of the civilized races less than any other — have ever possessed the TRUTH.”<sup>8</sup>

While philosophy became, mostly, an intellectual pastime in which experts delight themselves in the subtleties of technical discourse and linguistic acrobatics, religion, in certain quarters, has become a tool for warfare, division, and geographic domination. In certain countries, religion is a powerful influence in formulating state policies, which are mostly addressed against those who do not wish to conform to a dark, brutal, and domineering religious view, so called. In this scenario Truth becomes, for all practical purposes, non-existent, a casualty of cultural wars. This seems to be the mechanical heartbeat of Kali-Yuga.

HPB, in the quote below, reaffirms the

view about the complete transcendency of Truth and also points out how self-interest makes it impossible for people in general, including the savants, to see it in its true nature:

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, everyone 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, as remarked by Richter, 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, adds the German thinker, “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.”<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps it was Nagarjuna, the illustrious Buddhist philosopher and reformer of the second century CE, that threw a flood of light on the nature of truth as experienced by human perception, with his teaching about the two levels of Truth. For him, *paramārtha satya* or Absolute Truth is the knowledge of the

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real as it is without any distortion.<sup>10</sup> It is the highest or whole truth; the real and entire truth,<sup>11</sup> while *samvṛtti satya* is Truth so called; truth as conventionally believed in common parlance.<sup>12</sup>

It is not difficult to see how truth conventionally believed becomes a source of distortion, conditioning, and domination. In a number of countries in the world the Bible is presented as, literally, “the word of God”, and therefore cannot be questioned or elucidated. The only possible attitude of the believer is to accept it as such. But it becomes self-evident that no text, however lofty it may be, can be the Absolute Truth. Some teachers, perhaps Krishnaji included, would maintain that if the least amount of conditioning remains in the mind it cannot perceive that intangible Reality.

Nagarjuna seems to suggest that the perception of *paramārtha satya* amounts to Enlightenment, which for him is *śūnyatā*, the fundamental emptiness of all existence. Radhaji, in a conversation, suggested that such emptiness is emptiness of everything we know. Our knowledge, because it is anchored in a self-referential “me” can never reach that abiding emptiness.

When Krishnaji mentioned the expression “Truth is a pathless land” he was not contradicting the Wisdom-Teachings but perhaps reminding TS members of the importance of unconditioned knowing. There was at that time in TS history a rather unadvised public discourse about initiations, which both the Mahatmas in their letters as well as Krishnaji refrained

from. In 1925, in Ommen, there was a talk that revealed to an audience of thousands, plus the international press, that some theosophists had achieved three Initiations in one night and had thus become Adepts!

One problem in the attitude of Krishnaji towards the Wisdom-Teachings and religions in general is that, according to him, they were “put together by thought”. In other words, they remained at the level of conditioning. If one accepts his statement as absolute he becomes imbued with an extraordinary authority as it would place him, for example, above the Buddha himself. But it is possible that another meaning to his provocative statement is that the moment the teachings became clothed in words they became subjected to corruption through self-interest, pride, power-seeking, and delusion, however lofty they were originally.

At the end of 1928 the TS counted in its ranks 45,000 members. After Krishnaji’s historical speech and in a period of two years, the Society lost 15,000. It never regained that numerical strength. Successive Presidents, after Dr Besant’s demise, led the Society through years of world turmoil and, with certain difficulties, the organization reinvented itself for the contemporary age and is now attracting a new generation of enthusiastic young theosophists.

It is very unlikely that the criticism of Krishnaji by some members in the TS will stop. Such criticism received support from a few eminent theosophists over the years. But one would risk to say

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that there is a groundswell of support for him within the TS for he reminded us of what is really important — awareness of one's conditioning and of the sacredness of all life. He was educated by theosophists, lived at Adyar, became known through the TS worldwide and died on Adyar Day (17 February 1986). And in

spite of all the critics there was one person who never wavered in her confidence in his mission: Dr Annie Besant. In his last visit to the Headquarters of the Indian Section of the TS in Varanasi, in November 1985, he asked to spend a few moments alone in Dr Besant's room in Shanti Kunj, her home in Varanasi. ✧

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  10. T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, Unwin Paperbacks, London, 1987, p. 244.
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**When you are attached to property, to your wife or husband, to a belief, a conclusion, or whatever it is — don't be attached. Finished! You can't practice this. The whole question of practising is an abomination.**

J. Krishnamurti  
From an Interview by Renée Weber,  
Ojai, 22 March 1978