

# Grow as the Flower Grows

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**H**ave you ever watched a flower grow? We can see that it has grown. We can see the differences in it as it turns its face to the sun throughout the day, and closes up at night, but we can't actually see it doing so. We can see the change in its height or the length of a vine in a day or a week or a season, but we never actually see the stem growing or the vine moving. I have often marvelled about this process and our inability to watch it. Sometimes photographers have used film that is speeded up to show us the action of the flower or the vine. Many of us have probably seen this on TV or in a documentary. Then we can see the flower bursting into bloom and the strength and aggressiveness with which the vine works its way out of the soil or even pushes its way through concrete to reach the sunlight. It's amazing! A seed is planted, watered and placed in the sunlight. Somehow it knows to split open under the ground, from that a little stem is formed that reaches down to form roots and up, forming leaves and continuing to grow to a full sized plant or even a 100-foot-tall tree. All of this is happening all around us all of the time, but we can't see it as it happens, not with our physical eyes, because our brains cannot comprehend this extremely slow movement. Does this mean it isn't happening? Of course not, we see the results so we know that the plant is growing. We just can't see the process while it is taking place. Conversely, I remember going to a seminar where we were to "get in touch with" trees. Several of the participants reported that they got the impression that the trees were aware of us only as extremely fast moving objects that were perhaps a little bothersome, like gnats might be to us. Otherwise our worlds did not interact from their point of view.

How does a plant know to grow? How does it know the process by which it will come to maturity? Is there a school for seeds? Is there some form of education they go through, a K – 12 for sprouting, making leaves, flowers, fruits, decaying and using stored up nutrients for next year's flowers? No, all of this knowledge is inherent in each and every seed. Somehow there is a form of consciousness that connects them all and of which they are entirely unaware. I am not a botanist, but I'm sure there is no botanist who knows the impetus that makes a flower grow and bloom. They know the components of the plant, its life cycle, what we can do to help it to grow, how to clone it or

hybridize it, but no one knows exactly why or how it knows to grow, what causes the process, or what ties all of the many kinds of plants together in their knowledge of how to mature and continue their life cycle year after year.

This simple example gives a good argument for the existence of a universal consciousness that oversees all, not just plants but minerals, animals and human beings as well. Now, as you undoubtedly realize the processes I've spoken about take place on the physical level of our existence. Therefore, it's just the start of a discussion of consciousness. Human beings, as our theosophical studies tell us, have a seven-fold constitution: physical, etheric, astral, lower and higher mental, buddhic and atmic. Therefore, human beings who exist on emotional, mental and spiritual levels as well as the physical, share a Universal Consciousness, often called Unity or Oneness, that is at once our source of being and our ultimate goal as we progress through life and our various incarnations.

Is the flower conscious of the physical process it goes through? No, no more than we are conscious of our hearts beating, our lungs inhaling and exhaling the air we breathe, the blood coursing through our veins or the foetus developing in its mother's womb. These processes go on without our conscious direction or intervention. Of course medical science has learned much of these processes and has found ways to alter them - often to our benefit - but that is not the topic of our conversation. For our purposes suffice it to say that we are unconscious of these processes as they are happening.

As we mature and grow we **can** become conscious of our emotional and mental processes. We can learn to control our emotions, to raise them to a level that is more acceptable to whatever society we live in than the base instincts that we share with other animals. We can learn to control our desires and our ways of reacting to stressful circumstances and are encouraged to do so by civilized society. We can replace base desires with higher aspects of emotions, replacing lust with love for example, and we can learn to understand certain situations without becoming angered by them or by finding more acceptable outlets for our anger than acting on it.

Of course it is at the mental level that human beings are really separated from lower animals. And it is here that we really hit our stride. From childhood we are taught many facts about how **this** works and how **that** came to be. We learn reading, writing, mathematics and science, all the basics of the physical universe, how it began and how it operates. This is the realm of the lower mental that helps us to reason and think logically. All the while many of us are striving to know more. Our intellect, our higher mind, looks for concepts beyond mere logic and reason. We see our lives and ourselves from a physical perspective, but somehow we know there is more. This very fact is what drew many of us to Theosophy in the first place. We begin to question what we have been taught, to see its limitations. We begin to explore more abstract concepts, including religions and philosophies. We question everything. Why are we here? Where are we going? What is the purpose and meaning of life? What lies beyond? Does anything lie beyond this life? What form might it take? What is love? Justice? Freedom? Are we each unique, or are we interconnected? How? Why? Does something or someone direct us? Is there a God?

For theosophists many of these questions are answered through patient and detailed study. In *Isis Unveiled, The Secret Doctrine* and *Key to Theosophy* H. P. Blavatsky delves into cosmogenesis, explaining in great detail the origin of all from an occult (or esoteric) perspective, based on Ancient Wisdom she gathered during her lifetime. Because Blavatsky herself yearned to know more, to have her questions answered, she travelled extensively in search of that which pointed to the true meanings behind what we have learned through physical science. In the book *Madam Blavatsky Occultist* by Josephine Ransom (pp.4,5), she says of Blavatsky, “She desired vehemently to understand, and went both openly and secretly after any clue that would lead her to the knowledge she longed for. Gradually, as her insight became clearer, her classification of the occult became more definite. She discovered that one must go through almost unbearable patient discipline, supported by unwavering aspiration, to gain the exalted goal of Self-realisation, to that freedom of the Self which is the crown of all human existence.” Through her discourses on anthropogenesis and the three fundamental propositions, we learn of the oneness of all life, periodicity and cyclicity and the pilgrim’s path that all of us tread, carrying us from life to life as we gain insight and understanding. The study of Theosophy can be a lifelong endeavour, many lifetimes actually, and it touches all aspects of life, death and that which lies beyond.

Like Blavatsky herself, at some point, the true student of Theosophy, of the Ancient Wisdom, realizes that its study leads to more than just intellectual learning. Our study must touch every facet of our lives. It must touch the very essence of our being. We must sink our roots deep into the study outlined by Blavatsky, Olcott, Judge, Besant and others as we strive toward Universal Consciousness, “to gain the exalted goal of Self-realisation” and “freedom of the Self.” In the little book, *The Doctrine of the Heart: Extracts of letters from Indian friends to Annie Besant* (pp. 48-49), it says, “For the disciple little is gained from teaching on the intellectual plane. The knowledge that infiltrates from the soul down in the intellect is the only knowledge worth having, and surely as the days roll by, the disciple’s store of such knowledge increases. And with the increase of such knowledge comes about the elimination of all that hinders him on the path.”

What of that path? In her famous quote Blavatsky tells us, “There is a road, steep and thorny, beset with perils of every kind, but yet a road, and it leads to the very heart of the Universe: I can tell you how to find those who will show you the secret gateway that opens inward only, and closes fast behind the neophyte for evermore. There is no danger that dauntless courage cannot conquer; there is no trial that spotless purity cannot pass through; there is no difficulty that strong intellect cannot surmount. For those who win onwards there is reward past all telling – the power to bless and save humanity; for those who fail, there are other lives in which success may come.”

And *The Voice of the Silence* tells us, “Search for the Paths. But, O Lanoo, be of clean heart before thou startest on thy journey. Before thou takest thy first step learn to discern the real from the false, the ever-fleeting from the everlasting. Learn above all to separate head-learning from Soul-Wisdom, the ‘Eye’ from the ‘Heart’ Doctrine.” (Stanza 111) The Voice goes on to say, “But even ignorance is better than head-learning with no Soul-Wisdom to illuminate and guide it.” (Stanza 113)

This path is not for everyone. It is a strenuous journey to undertake. It requires dauntless courage, spotless purity, a strong intellect, a clean heart, the ability to discern the real from the false and the ability to separate head-learning from Soul-wisdom. This is a tall order that requires much preparation and a complete and total commitment to our goal, Self-realization, freedom of the Self, Universal Consciousness.

We can begin consciously on the emotional and mental levels of our being to gain the Soul-wisdom of which *The Voice of the Silence* speaks. As to head-learning, study is the first of the three pillars of Theosophy which are: study, meditation and service. We **do** need head learning. We **do** need our intellect, a strong intellect, but it is just a beginning, a base for what lies beyond. Our hearts must be clean and our aspirations pure before we begin. To get to that point takes courage and hard work. We must develop these qualities by working on them every day through our interactions with others. I once heard Radha say that the purpose of theosophical lodges is for us to rub the rough edges off of each other. In our lodges we organize. We plan. We sometimes disagree. We should expect to disagree and even argue at times. Our job is to learn from all that. To take a step back, ideally every day, and look at what has transpired and our part in it. We must examine our thoughts, our words and our actions paying attention to **our** part in the daily interactions of life. Then try again the next day to act and react in ways that reflect the highest within us. We must learn to be patient with others and with ourselves, allowing them and us to make mistakes. We must see these mistakes as just that, mistakes or missteps, and not assign any greater significance to them. We must not point fingers. We must learn to forgive others, and ourselves as well, for any mistakes we might make, and to move on to a new day. It does no good to dwell on such things. All of this is true with the rest of our lives as well, not just within theosophical lodges, or the Theosophical Society, but at home and at work and in each and every situation we find ourselves, even interactions with strangers. We learn the lessons of a clean heart from everyone and everything. If we are diligent we will have gained some semblance of understanding. We will progress with courage. We will have gained love for each other. *The Voice of the Silence* implies that from here we can enter the Path with our eyes open. That we are ready to learn to discern the real from the unreal, the everlasting from the ever-fleeting.

The second pillar of Theosophy, meditation, can also help us to develop the qualities we need to enter the Path. Through meditation we can gain the sense of calmness and serenity we need to deal with the adverse situations that life brings to us. We can learn how to deal with and maybe even understand difficult people. It has been my experience that if I enter meditation holding a person with whom I'm having difficulties in my mind, while wishing for them their highest good, remarkable things can happen. The first time I tried this a beneficial thing happened for the person

with whom I was having difficulties that also took them out of my life. I was delighted for myself and happy for them as well. That had worked so well that I tried it again when another difficult situation presented itself, and the thought of how to resolve the situation came to mind. The third time I tried this method I saw that it was my own behaviour that had caused the problem, and I changed it.

There are many methods of meditation. Through some we concentrate on gaining insight into ourselves. Through others such as loving-kindness, or Metta meditation, we attempt to open our hearts and develop compassion for ourselves and others. Silent meditation on the breath, some object or a teacher or other who inspires us leads us toward “no thought”, or emptiness or universal consciousness. In the *Diamond Heart, Book II* by A. H. Almaas, (p. 19) it says, “To see consciousness in its purity is to experience what is called universal consciousness, to experience the mind as pure consciousness. When you experience the mind as consciousness, it is also **knowingness**, the very element of knowing... It is difficult to describe what universal consciousness or what the mind as consciousness means, because there are no thoughts in it. The moment there are thoughts, the content separates you from the consciousness.” Because of this we must **experience** universal consciousness to know what it is. In universal consciousness, the *Diamond Heart, Book II*, (p. 20) goes on to say, “There is no experience, no experiencer, **no self** ... the elimination of separateness, the elimination of **discrimination**. There is complete non-differentiation. There is no separation, no two, and no thought that there is one.”

Is this the Soul-Wisdom of which *The Voice of the Silence* speaks? It is quite likely its source. Where do we find it? How do we develop it? We have already said that we must go beyond the intellect. That we must have the courage to consciously change ourselves on the emotional and mental levels of our being, and that meditation can help us to reach the next level, the buddhic level of our human constitution. Once one aspires to attain Soul-wisdom he or she realizes that as it says in *The Doctrine of the Heart*, “The interest that we have in all the affairs of this elusive sphere belongs only to the emotions and the intellect, and cannot touch the soul. So long as we identify ourselves with the body and the mind, the vicissitudes which overcome the Theosophical Society, the dangers which threaten its life or solidarity, must have a depressing, nay sometimes almost a frenzied, influence upon our spirits. But as soon as we come to live in the Spirit, to realize

the illusory nature of all external existence, the changeful character of every human organization, and the immutability of the Life within, we must, whether the brain consciousness reflects the knowledge or not, feel an inward calm, an unconcernedness, as it were, with this world of shadows, and remain unaffected by the revolutions and eruptions of the world. Once the Higher Ego is reached, the knowledge that the Laws and Powers which govern the universe are infinitely wise becomes instinctive, and peace in the midst of outward throes is inevitable.” (pp. 58-59) So it is the feeling of an inward calm, an unconcernedness that lets us know we are moving toward Soul-wisdom, that we have touched upon universal consciousness. We feel a peace that outward events seem not to touch. As with the unconsciousness of activity inherent on the physical level of our being, the spiritual level moves and grows unconsciously as well. It is our job to work ceaselessly toward Soul-wisdom by consciously addressing our inward nature thereby altering and improving what we think, say and do in our lives, but the spiritual growth itself happens whether we are aware of it or not, usually not. Wholehearted devotion to this process is required of those on the Path as well as trust that our efforts will bear fruit. That we will gain that to which Blavatsky herself aspired, “the exalted goal of Self-realisation, that freedom of the Self which is the crown of all human existence.”

How can the Self be freed? One of my teachers once said that “Love is the realization of Unity.” The terms Unity, Universal Consciousness and Oneness seem, to me, to be interchangeable. So we might say, as the Beatles said, that “Love is all there is.”

Universal Consciousness, as Universal Love, is an expression of the harmony of all that is. There is no conflict because it contains no parts, no divisions, no separateness. It is pure consciousness devoid of any thought or anything to rub up against. There is nothing to judge, nothing to weigh or measure, nothing to be prejudiced against nor biased toward, nothing to fear. It is pure love, a love that accepts and encompasses everything and everyone impartially as a totality. If we are fortunate enough to touch this consciousness, even for a brief moment, we know that nothing else exists. There is no I, no ego, no personality, only pure consciousness, only pure love.

We have spoken about the benefits of using the first two pillars of Theosophy, study and meditation, to help us develop the Soul-wisdom that carries us along the path to universal

consciousness. We have said that meditation can take us to the buddhic level of our being where we go beyond thought. Through our buddhic nature we also experience the generation of universal compassion which helps us to identify with those who suffer and instils in us a desire to help. According to Buddhist teaching compassion is the very essence of a spiritual life, and the main practice of those who have devoted their lives to attaining enlightenment. We have talked about watching our thoughts, words and actions in relation to others and the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We must be ever vigilant if we are to tread the path to universal consciousness. We must not limit our self-improvement to those people or circumstances that are pleasing to us. In the words of N. Sri Ram, “When we think of helping the world, of being brothers to all, we should remember that the world means also the unwanted who knock at our door at an inopportune moment, the people whom we may dislike for some reason, physical or mental, those whose appearance or ways may be disagreeable to our tastes, and those whom we might be ashamed of, if we were of that company.”

Service, the third pillar of Theosophy, can be seen as the point of balance between study and meditation through which we can give energy to Blavatsky’s concepts of self-responsibility, ethics and altruism. Service is that part of the triad which allows us to demonstrate the divine in the world. Through selfless service we help to heal suffering humanity. We draw attention to the woes of the world, and lead by example in the effort to ease suffering and right wrongs. In the process, we help ourselves. We grow spiritually as we become more and more open to seeing the unity of life wherever we look. Service can manifest itself as simple acts of kindness performed by an individual or a group, or as larger and more organized efforts. It can be aimed at family members, a neighbourhood, a community, a country, a gender or other class of people, or at animals and even the planet.

I recently attended a talk given by a TS member. She spoke of living a spiritual life. She talked about self-responsibility, ethics and altruism, themes that ran through Blavatsky’s works. In fact, Blavatsky said that these qualities are necessary for spiritual unfoldment, which she said is our goal, and that “Theosophy is altruism.” In fact, Blavatsky said that, “He who does not practice altruism: he who is not prepared to share his last morsel with a weaker or poorer than himself; he who neglects to help his brother man, of whatever race, nation, or creed, whenever and wherever he meets suffering, and who turns a deaf ear to the cry of human misery; he who hears an innocent

person slandered, whether a brother Theosophist or not, and does not undertake his defence as he would undertake his own – is no Theosophist.” (*Lucifer*, Vol. I, p 169)

Later these words, from Annie Besant, tied together Blavatsky’s altruism, already a high ideal, with the sense of Oneness alluded to in the Society’s First Object by saying, “The spiritual man must lead a higher life than the life of altruism. He must lead the life of self-identification with all that lives and moves. There is no ‘other’ in this world; we are all one. Each is a separate form, but one Spirit moves and lives in all.”

Acts of altruism and compassion ran through Blavatsky’s and Besant’s lives. The story of Blavatsky feeling compassion for a young woman with children who could not afford a ticket to board the ship Blavatsky was sailing on is well known. HPB exchanged her first class ticket for steerage class tickets for herself, the woman and her children so that they might travel too. Besant was a social activist long before she was even a member of the Theosophical Society. She worked for many social causes, toward better working conditions and wages for laborers and against child labor. She was even jailed for doing so.

The First Object of the Theosophical Society speaks of universal brotherhood, and in February 1908 Annie Besant founded the Theosophical Order of Service in response to members who wanted to put this concept into action in their daily lives. The TOS fosters a practical living application of theosophical principles, and is a way to demonstrate and practice the oneness of all life. The giving of our time, talents, energy, money, advocacy and moral support to those in need is based on compassion and on the acceptance of our responsibility toward those with whom we are One. Our TOS motto, “A union of those who love in the service of all that suffers”, reminds us of our commitment to the Oneness of All Life.

Even before the TOS was formed, the Theosophical Society was no stranger to altruistic action, to working for the benefit of others, to leading the way toward improvements in people’s lives. In a talk given in 2014 Diana Dunningham Chapotin reminded us, “What is interesting, though, is that in those days the collective action of the members and their leaders actually caused the public to associate the Society **primarily** with social reform. Early *Theosophist* magazines contain scathing

commentaries on all kinds of social, educational, political and religious abuses of the time... When Colonel Olcott appeared on theosophical platforms all over the world, he didn't lecture principally on metaphysics; he dealt mostly with such subjects as religious freedom, education for girls, cremation and agricultural reform. These may seem innocuous to us now but at the time they were very controversial." For Mrs Besant and her fellow pioneers, such as Col. Olcott, William Quan Judge, Isabel Cooper-Oakley and Countess Wachtmeister, TS life and social responsibility were part of an indivisible whole.

Some say that when Mrs Besant created the TOS in 1908 it was to give an independent organisational focus for community involvement, but, if this was the case, in practice little distinction was made between the work of the TS and the TOS. Not much has changed today in that regard. Many of our members whether individually, through the TS or as members of the TOS give selfless, compassionate service to those in need. Within the TOS such service is given not just from a humanitarian perspective, as it is in many other service organizations, but from the conscious perspective of the theosophical world view knowing that those we aid are part of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, the Unity, the Oneness, Universal Consciousness. As Annie Besant said, the spiritual person "must lead the life of self-identification with all that lives and moves. There is no 'other' in this world; we are all one."

Clearly Blavatsky, Besant and others understood universal consciousness, universal love. Their lives prove it as they were shining examples of selflessness, generosity and knowledge gained through such experience. They trod the "steep and thorny" road, telling us over and over again what to do and how to do it, verbally, in their writings and by the way they lived their lives. It is up to us to listen, to pick up on the nuances, to emulate their examples. It is up to us to see and understand that Theosophy is not just head-learning, not solely study for the sake of learning facts and concepts. Can we really **learn** concepts, know and understand them, without putting them to use? We must live what we have learned. We must meditate on difficult concepts and ideas until we understand them, not just with our heads but with our hearts and souls too. We must put into action that which we have learned. We must develop Soul-wisdom if we are truly to tread the Path that leads to Universal Consciousness.

For us as theosophists the Path to Universal Consciousness is a blend of conscious study, meditation and service that requires courage, a purity of life, constant effort and devotion to the 'work', to gain unconscious spiritual growth. We must grow as the flower grows. As it says in the little book, *Doctrine of the Heart*, "Keeping serene and passionless, there is no doubt that, as the days pass by, one is coming more and more within that influence which is the essence of life, and someday the disciple will be surprised to find he has grown wonderfully without knowing and perceiving the process of growth. For truly the soul, in its true blooming 'grows like the flower, unconsciously', but gaining in sweetness and beauty by imbibing the sunshine of Spirit." (*Doctrine of the Heart*: Extract from letters of Indian friends to Annie Besant (pp. 73-74).