

"O HIDDEN LIFE . . ."

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Sometime in early 1923, Dr. Annie Besant, then president of the Theosophical Society, penned some lines that have since become familiar to members throughout the world. They have been translated into several languages, and have, indeed, become a nearly indispensable part of every Theosophist's vocabulary. The words have been set to music. They have been chanted and sung. Few gatherings of the Society have been held since that year that have not been opened with the recitation of these words. At every International Convention, successive presidents of the Society have inaugurated the proceedings with the antiphonal recitation of what has come to be known as the "Universal Prayer" or "Universal Invocation." Simple in the extreme, the words possess the magical power of a *mantra*:

O Hidden Life, vibrant in every atom;
O Hidden Light, shining in every creature;
O Hidden Love, embracing all in Oneness;
May each who feels himself as one with Thee,
Know he is therefore one with every other.

So familiar have these words become that it may be their significance and depth of inner meaningfulness have escaped us. When

we become habituated to anything, be it a person, a situation, or an idea clothed in the fabric of language, there is always the danger that we come to take it for granted. In times of stress, we may even mouth words we learned in our childhood, as in the simple prayers of our faith. People have been known to do this automatically at times of crisis. Even avowed atheists have been heard to utter prayers they deny knowing or remembering. But words are precious and often fragile vehicles not only for thought, but also for the aspirations of the heart. They can convey not only mundane meanings that get us about in the world and relate us to each other, but also the hunger of the soul and the beauty of the spirit in their reaching out to that "more-ness" which remains forever indefinable and therefore unspeakable.

Can we pause, then, to examine the lines which Dr. Besant gave the Society and the world? What inner meanings, what deeper realities lay behind the words themselves? To what new insights may we be led, even as we pronounce the words and speak the separate phrases? Have we become attached to these words simply because they came from that heroic soul, Annie Besant? Would it matter if some other individual had served as a channel for their impartation to the world? Undoubtedly, constant repetition has endowed the verse with a certain inner significance, a sacredness if we may call it that, but repetition can also dull the spirit and memorized phrases can be mouthed with little attention of either mind or heart.

Before we examine some, at least, of the inner meaning of the verse, it may be of interest to note its specific origin. In her Watch-Tower notes from *The Theosophist* of June 1923, Dr. Besant wrote that the lines were prompted by a request from a number of members who were helping to organize a "Brotherhood Campaign" in South India. This "campaign" had been inaugurated some time

earlier in Great Britain and was just then being taken up in India. Her comment continues:

I wrote . . . a few lines for daily repetition, morning and evening, as I did not feel that I could write a meditation, as they had asked me to do. Meditation seems to me to be a very individual thing, the working of one's own mind on some special theme; the most I could do was suggest a theme. Here it is, as it chanted itself. (Besant 1923, 243)

Then follows the verse already given above. Further, she adds,

It sends forth successive waves of color, pulsing outwards from the speaker, if rhythmically intoned or chanted, whether by the outer or the inner voice, and if some thousands would send these out over successive areas, we might create a very powerful atmosphere . . . (ibid.)

The fact that Dr. Besant tells us that the verse “chanted itself” to her may indeed indicate that its true source lay in a deeper or higher realm beyond her own conscious mind, perhaps even from that Source to which she herself always gave the deepest and most profound reverence and obeisance. Surely, we must concur that the words, as she gave them, are of such beauty and majestic sweep that any alteration or modification would be improper. The effect on the surrounding environment or community, and on the individual who may be reciting the words as the verse is spoken, can only be guessed at, although many testify to its efficacy in producing an inner peace and even actual healing.

Turning now to the verse itself, we may consider it phrase by phrase, suggesting some of the meanings latent within it. First, “O Hidden Life, vibrant in every atom.” The immediate question that

arises is: Why hidden? Is not life in evidence all about us? Life surely is not hidden! But what is referred to here, what is invoked, must be beyond or above the obvious. Dr. I. K. Taimni, in his work, *Glimpses into the Psychology of Yoga*, reminds us that: "The Ultimate Reality exists only in the Ever-Unmanifest and is the source of all relative realities which can be within the realm of human experience." The highest principle, then, is present everywhere, and yet, is beyond all existence. It is truly the "hidden life" that underlies all of manifestation.

Inherent within that Reality is its own dynamism, as it were, making possible the production of all things, all existence, for there, at the heart of Reality, is the throbbing pulse of creation. Without that pulse, nothing can exist. It is ubiquitous, and contains within itself the power of resonating throughout all that ever was or will be. That potency is locked up in every atom and every element of the manifested universe. Truly, it is "vibrant in every atom." So all of nature pulsates with the rhythm of the Eternal One, hidden forever, but known by its countless manifestations, as the One becomes the many, and yet remains forever One. This initial phrase is a call to that eternal, Unmanifest Principle: the Supreme Reality which is beyond the cycles of manifestation and yet forever vibrating through the manifested universe. In terms of human consciousness, it is an invocation to that Atman which is hidden in our very nature, as present here in the physical as at its own level because its resonance vibrates through all the atoms of all our vehicles—carriers of that Atman—from Buddhi to the physical.

"O Hidden Light, shining in every creature . . ." Again, we may ask: Why hidden? If there were a light shining in every creature, surely that light would be observable. The very nature of light is that it glows and therefore it can be seen. Light radiates outwards, but we are called on to invoke a *hidden* light, a light that shines within but is not radiating outwards in a visible manner. So, a deeper meaning must be implicit in the words.

The One Reality, when it manifests, may be said to become Light. It is this interior light of the Supreme Reality, of *Ishvara*, the manifest Deity that is present in every creature. Life has now become light; its very vibrancy is now shining with an inner dynamism. In humanity, Buddhi—the “light of the soul”—is now united with Atma, ready to turn outwards into activity. It is this light which must illumine our entire nature. This light makes consciousness possible, and it is “hidden” because it is not objective to consciousness but is of the very nature of pure consciousness itself. And that light is present, shining through every atom in space.

“O Hidden Love, embracing all in Oneness . . .” From the polarity of Life and Light there now springs creative activity, Love. Wherever there is polarity, relationship between the poles comes into existence. The purest of all relationships, the one relationship that is not sullied in any manner by any object of either attachment or repulsion, is the relationship of Love. This we may call the underlying “glue” which holds together all manifested things, all parts of the universe, all elements that appear with manifestation. Therefore it is Love that “embraces all in Oneness.” The One has become the many; out of unity has come multiplicity. Yet however great the multiplicity, all is held in the one embrace of that pure relationship which arises when Life and Light come into existence, that relationship of Love.

Love lies at the very heart of the creative process. It is therefore the principle of universal lawfulness, which underlies evolution. Hidden, then, at the heart of the manifold is Love, which binds the many into the unity of the One. This is the law and the fulfillment of the law, bringing everything into perfect equilibrium, for whatever happens anywhere in the universe has its repercussions everywhere. There is no external authority, no extra-cosmic deity, weighing the scales of justice. Love is at the heart of the universe

and brings about balance because all that is in the universe is held in its embrace.

Here, too, is the creative principle: Atma-Buddhi joined with Manas, turned outwards now on the great involutionary-evolutionary journey. Manas, or creative activity, is truly love in action. The mind, when infused with intuition, embraces the universe, perceiving all things as they truly are. The mind that can fragment the Real in order to grasp or realize its manifold nature can also be brought into a condition of stillness, in which the modifications of the thinking principle have ceased. In that condition, perception, or awareness, is undivided. The undivided state of consciousness embraces "all in oneness."

The first three phrases of the mantram remind us of the great triplicity of the Supreme Reality—Life, Light and Love. But this triplicity is "hidden," because it is not known objectively, but rather underlies the entire process of manifestation. It is "hidden" because the mind alone cannot grasp its essentialness, nor can it be experienced through the instrumentality of the senses. As Dr. Taimni points out, in the above quoted work, "According to the Occult philosophy there is a method of knowing the Reality . . . and this method consists in suppressing the modifications of the mind completely." That method, of course, is yoga. "Then," continues Dr. Taimni, "the individual consciousness becomes freed from the veil which separates the individual consciousness from the universal consciousness and knows this Reality directly by becoming one with it."

In the first three lines of our verse, we invoke the triple nature of the One Reality. In that invocation, we may perform a supreme yoga of Self-Realization. Our attention is drawn to the sublime fact that underlying each individual and the universe is the One Reality in its triple aspect of Life, Light, and Love. Its realization lies in a realm beyond the mind, but by invoking it, we bring that Reality into direct awareness, into our consciousness attuned and

harmonized with the One. The final two lines of the verse affirm this realization, “May each who feels himself as one with Thee”. Here the use of the word *Thee* indicates that the triplicity of Life, Light, and Love is indeed One—the One Supreme Reality. Note, however, that the emphasis first is on the word *feels*. What is it to feel oneself as one with the Supreme? Feeling is acute awareness—awareness without any distracting thought, without any disturbing influence. It is an awareness that is total, which overwhelms us and takes hold of us wholly and utterly. Perhaps it may be compared to the moment of pain when one stubs one’s toe against a stone abutment. At such a moment, there is no other awareness than the awareness of pain. No thought even intrudes at the sharp moment of impact. Only later may we say, “I stubbed my toe” or “I felt pain in my toe.”

The feeling that must come, and must be affirmed in the realization of oneness, is such a feeling: total, entire, complete, without analysis or reason or logical deduction. Only in such a condition can true *knowing* arise. In one sense, this ability to “feel . . . as one with Thee” may be described as the pain of oneness, the burden of oneness, that we all must bear, if we would know the reality of life itself. It is not, in other words, a selective feeling: “I will feel one with you, but not with that person; I will feel one with a tree, but not with a snake.” When we say, “May each” or “May all,” we are invoking in ourselves a consciousness that has no divisions, no barriers. It is a consciousness infused only with Life, Light and Love, and therefore it is pure and whole.

Out of that acute awareness of feeling must follow a knowing: “Know he is therefore one with every other.” So the mantram concludes with an affirmation of the certainty of knowledge. Humanity is not only meant to *feel*; it must *know*. This is the full burden of *self*-consciousness. It is a knowing that is not simply a surmise, an opinion, an idea, or a belief that may be altered when some other

notion comes along. It is rather a conscious act that arises because we have been immersed in a consciousness that was uncompounded, undivided, whole, and pristine in its nature. As a result of the contact with that consciousness, of that non-verbal awareness that we are one with the Universal Reality, that we are truly Atma-Buddhi-Manas, we have to know, to be fully conscious of our oneness with all other units of Life who are equally infused with that Reality, vibrating with it, shining with it, embraced by it.

In some versions of the mantram, the word *also* has been substituted for the word *therefore*, but it may be noted that in Dr. Besant's original version, the latter word is used. There is a subtle, but very definite, difference between the two words. "Also" is an additive word; it means "in addition to," "this plus that". "Therefore" has the connotation of "subsequent upon," or "as a result of"; it is not augmentative. What is intended in the mantram is the realization that when the feeling of unity is present, there is recognition of the oneness with the Supreme Reality that is Light, Life, and Love. There follows upon that recognition the realization that one is inevitably united with all other creatures. For how can we be one with the Supreme and remain separate from, distinct from, all others who are equally rooted in the One Reality?

Many more meanings may be discovered in this magnificent verse that Dr. Besant bequeathed to us. It is truly a reaffirmation of the entire creative process in which we—and all life—are immersed; a reaffirmation that we hold within our power, as self-conscious units of life, the ability to perceive life, whole and splendid. This is the vision we can send shining out over the entire world, the vision to which we can give wings and voice and form. This is the vision that can recreate ourselves every time we chant the mantram, and so recreate and transform our world. Such a vision alone can bring about a new consciousness in the world, a consciousness of unity, of brotherhood, of peace and harmony, of wholeness and holiness.

OUR HIDDEN POTENTIAL

When we repeat these few simple lines, either alone or in a group, we invoke the One Reality to manifest itself anew, and this is to make whole and make holy all that is in the universe about us. A more wonderful act we could not perform.