

The Book of Dzyan in the Third Millennium.

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A summary of a talk presented at the Ripon Summer School of The Theosophical Society on the 31st of July 2000.

"And these teachings, often imperfectly interpreted, would form the basis of the belief systems of the Fifth Race" (O Lanoo! ~ Stanza XII, Verse 49)

Introduction

A long time ago I heard a talk given by an old Tibetan monk. I can't remember the occasion, or even the subject of the talk, but one statement stayed with me: "The world doesn't need more of anything. What it needs is less ignorance." We have enough food and natural resources; we simply need to make better and fairer use of them, which will only come about by reducing greed nurtured by ignorance. Over the years I have come to believe that wherever possible we should try to reduce the world's ignorance. Wisdom is not easy to come by, but if we have a little bit it is our duty to share it. Which is something I want to come back to later.

First, I should explain where I am coming from. I found The Secret Doctrine at a fairly early age (in my teens) and although I could understand very little at the time it seemed a book which would provide all the answers. I read quite widely until I got married, had a family and had to concentrate on earning a living. But throughout my business career the concepts of The SD remained with me, and the basic philosophy of re-incarnation and karma made more and more sense.

When, at the age of 42, I had the opportunity to leave the rat-race, I decided to ignore the monk's advice and give the world one more thing ~ a book, which turned out to be O Lanoo! I felt if only more people read and understood The SD the world would be a happier place. However, The SD is dense, long, and old-fashioned, and it will never be read by many people. With OL! I wanted to make the message of The SD more accessible, by simplifying it and reducing it to its essence.

Summer schools are a great opportunity to get down to some real in-depth study, with no distractions. If anyone ever works out how many angels can balance on a pin-head, it will probably be at a summer school somewhere in the world. But I don't want to go into great detail about theosophical conundrums, or the seven of this or the seven of that. I want to stay with the bigger picture.

O Lanoo!



If I were to invite single word suggestions, I wonder how many different words we would come up with to describe the essence of The SD? There might be words like 'truth' and 'wisdom', but they are abstract words with many interpretations. For me, the essence of The SD can be summed up in the word 'unity'. The unity of a single family, of a race of people, of a continent, of the human race, of the eco-system of planet Earth, of the Universe.

OL! follows the stanzas of Dzyan in rich poetical language, but without using difficult Sanskrit words and long explanations, without following the many side issues of Madame HP Blavatsky. And I have tried to bring out the concept of unity wherever possible. Lanoo, the one Sanskrit word I have retained, means student, or seeker after truth. I, of course, am a lanoo myself, but I have followed the tradition of Dzyan in addressing the reader as 'O Lanoo'.

For those of you who remember 'Doctor Who' from the days of black and white television, I would suggest that The SD is a bit like a time machine, like the Tardis. There is more inside than could be imagined from the outside, and in opening the pages we step back into the mists of time. But can this Victorian book move forward in time? Can we bring it into the Third Millennium? Does it have any relevance today?

Patterns

In searching for relevance, the starting point should not be with the detail, but with the patterns. Information is just information, and knowledge needs understanding to be transformed into wisdom. Too many facts can actually prevent understanding. When I was an ambitious young executive director there were three older non-executive directors on the board to keep us youngsters in check. One of them had a favourite expression to deflate us. "Gee wizz!" He would use it whenever we presented him with a fact or a statistic which was designed to impress him with our cleverness but which he could not apply in any useful way. "Gee wizz statistics." I can illustrate it with a reading from OL!

Reading (page 25) Stanza II

*And where was silence?
Where were the ears to sense it?
Nay, there was neither silence
Nor sound;
Naught save unconscious,
Ceaseless,
Eternal motion.*

*It was the eternal
Momentary pause
In the breathing of Brahma,
Following the inhalation
Which had ended the last great cycle,
And before the exhalation
Which was to be your expanding universe.*

*The moment had not come;
The Ray of Light in the Darkness
Had not yet flashed into the essence of Matter;
Matter and energy had not yet produced
The heat and moisture of Life.*

*Still latent was the Ether
Which was to receive the spark
Of immaculate conception,
Thence to give rise
To the virgin birth
Of the finite Universe.*

*The three higher Elements
Had not yet combined
With Fire, Air, Water and Earth,
The four lower Elements
That would mark the boundaries
Of your world of illusion,
O Lanoo.*

*The Universe had yet to become
A Divine Thought;
The Universe,
Son of God,
Had yet to be conceived.
Your God,
O Lanoo,
Had not yet said:
"Let there be Light!"*

There is an old Hermetic saying "As above, so below", and that is how we can apply patterns. This reading is from Stanza II, and nothing has happened yet. Seven stanzas to describe the entire evolution of the universe, and yet two of them are devoted to 'setting the scene'. So we see the importance of periods of inactivity in our lives, perhaps it is the reason for a two-day weekend. But, we need to be active in some way for the other five days, we need to make a contribution. We shouldn't become moribund as we contemplate our navels.

Unity



Let me return to the concept of unity. HPB tells us that we are all connected. Accept that fact and then look at the patterns rippling out. Wars and violence just don't make sense. Harm to others actually harms ourselves. Abuse is always self-abuse. 400 years ago John Donne wrote words that are often quoted today:

"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of a continent, a part of the main. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

This message is repeated by HPB, and by me in OL!

Reading (page 33) Stanza III

*Your Sun moves from East to West,
Obscuring the reality above
And illuminating your world of illusion
Where you see
Many differentiated aspects
And transformations
Which you do not recognise
As manifestations of the Divine Essence,
Of the One Universal Element,
Which is unborn
Undying
Infinite.*

*How can you say
That the Light in you
Is not the same Light
That shines in all sentient beings,
Transformed from the Darkness
At the beginning of Time?
From where else
Would come your Spirit?*

Once we have accepted the concept of unity, and the wisdom of striving for harmony, we still have to live in the modern world with all its pressures and conflicting demands. After my period of 'inactivity' (reading philosophical books in my teenage years) I spent 25 years in the business world. Even there, unity and harmony make sense. There is no fundamental conflict between running a successful business and believing in unity. It might be helpful to draw on the philosophy of respect practised by the Native American people: respect for others, for the environment, even for the animal being hunted for food. In the business world respect for customers and employees can add value to the product or service. Lack of respect, even for suppliers or competitors, can prove to be very short-sighted.

The computer company I worked for had a simple motto: "make as much profit as we can today, providing that doesn't stop us making even more profit tomorrow." It might sound mercenary, but making too much profit out of employees and customers today might result in lost business in the future. It is a philosophy that can be applied to most situations: "be as happy as you can today, providing that it doesn't stop us being even happier tomorrow." "Help as many people today . . ." "Acquire as much wisdom and understanding today . . ." etc. etc. In other words, live in the moment but always be aware of the moment to come.

Story of Man

The essence of The SD might be unity, but above all the book tells the story of Mankind. HPB claims that Dzian is a remnant of the oldest records on earth, handed down from the ruins of Atlantis. "Gee wizz!" So what? How is that relevant today? Are there patterns that will help us live our modern lives?

Reading (page 78) ~ Stanza II

*Spirit descends gradually,
Eventually accepting the constraints
And distortions
Of the awful prison of Matter,
But when the Creative Spirits
Saw the Earth-made man-creatures
They recoiled in horror,
For these bodies
Were too gross for spiritual growth;
Man could not be created
By Nature unaided.*

We have to bring spirit into our lives. As Dzian tells us, nature alone is not enough. But it is very easy on a spiritual path to forget about nature, and on this plane of existence spirit needs matter. We have to provide the harmony in which the two can co-exist. To return to the business analogy, the most difficult aspect of management is at the edges, managing frontiers, boundaries and change. The department has procedures and runs like clockwork, but communication between two departments, or between the business and the outside world, needs constant management attention. If you are the Managing Director of your life, you need to pay attention to your frontiers, especially to the ways in which spirit and matter can function in harmony.

Summary

I would suggest that we are concerned with bringing the concept of unity into the modern world: between peoples and communities; between man and the environment; between spirit and matter.

Aside



At the risk of following HPB down a side issue, I would just like to touch on two aspects of traditional teachings that might actually get in the way of applying the 'essence' of The SD to modern life: reincarnation, and the concept of illusion.

It has been said that the Chinese Empire fell into decay through a lethargy stemming from a belief in reincarnation. Too many people started to think that they would take it easy this life and make up for it next time. A belief in countless incarnations can result in the misconception that progress in any single incarnation is unimportant. To overcome that, try living as though the fate of humankind is in the balance. We have generated exactly the same amount of good karma as bad karma, and somewhere in the world the next act is going to tip the scales one way or another. So forget the long term, just make sure your next action is a good one.

It is a fundamental aspect of Buddhism to refer to this world of illusion. I have even listened to debates as to whether a table continues to exist if we all leave a room. But if we extend the argument, then what about pain and suffering? Are they illusions? Why should we bother trying to achieve harmony and reduce suffering in the world if it is all an illusion? I would like to state, quite strongly, that the world is not an illusion.

Reading (page 37) ~ Stanza IV sloka 1 (from para 2)

*Listen, son of Earth,
Learn that no manifestation,
Not even Time,
Can be understood
Except as part of a larger whole.*

*It is not that what you see
And feel
And touch
And hear
Does not exist;
But that which you see
Or feel
Or touch
Or hear
Is but the tip of an iceberg:
One aspect revealed;
Six aspects concealed.*

This world 'matters'. Our lives 'matter'. (Funny word, 'matter') We might be caught up in something that is too big and complex to understand, but we can at least feel the movement. And if we listen to the motion we will detect the direction. It is our responsibility to use our small store of wisdom to add to the forward momentum of the Cosmos.

This might sound grand, but is it just another Gee wizz statement? Is there a more specific message to be discovered in the story of mankind?

Reading (page 113) ~ Stanza X

*As yet Man still communed with the Gods,
Not realising
That his slow fall into Matter
Rendered him less than the Gods.
And when the Gods
Faded from his field of vision
Man saw himself as King of Earth,
And believed he was a God;
The ego eclipsed the Divine Spark
And Spiritual Man
Became the Man of Self.*

*The Golden Age
Became a distant memory,
For although the Gods
Were still with Man
Man could no longer perceive the Gods*

*And felt abandoned
In an Age of Darkness.*

*And with the loss of his third eye
Man lost sight of the perfect harmony
Of the Universe,
Balanced by the law of Karma and Rebirth
Which decrees that every action has a reaction;
Every cause has an effect.
Man forgot that his Soul
Is subject to no Fate,
Random or predetermined,
Save that which every Being
Creates for himself.*

*And as his higher senses faded
Man became imprisoned
In a physical body
Constrained by Time and Space.*

Physical Man is losing touch with his soul. Does that sound familiar? I think HPB intended us to learn a specific lesson from Atlantis.

Reading (page 119) ~ Stanza XI

*The Atlanteans were no wiser
Than their ancestors;
Self was their only god
And again Man built statues
In his own likeness
To worship.*

*O Lanoo,
As Men of your own Fifth Race
Made their first appearance
The destruction of Atlantis loomed;
Not, this time, by fire,
But by the deluge
Remembered in all your cultures.*

Summary

I am passing by large parts of The SD, so it might be helpful to sum up:

1. There is a concept of unity.
2. There is a natural cycle in which spirit moves through matter gaining self-knowledge and wisdom from experience.

3. Wisdom thus gained should be used to assist the forward motion of the universe towards harmony.

4. Up to the Age of Atlantis spirit became ever-more enmeshed with matter.

5. Now it is time for us to move beyond Atlantis and start to regain our spiritual heritage.

Atlantis



HPB hints at what Atlantis was like: a complex civilisation, based on a sophisticated society with advanced scientific achievements. Perhaps Atlantean scientific knowledge was comparable to our own, perhaps even better, but it is not important to know the details. It is enough that we know that we cannot progress by science alone, science without wisdom and compassion does not give us the answers.

I believe that this is The SD's most valuable lesson of all. To avoid the fate of Atlantis we have to add spiritual values to scientific achievements.

Science today

We can split the atom;

We have learnt the secrets of DNA;

We can modify genes;

We can clone living cells.

Gee wizz!

BUT we have the legacy of Hiroshima, we have nuclear waste we can't de-activate, and perhaps our wonderful science is responsible for AIDs and Mad Cow disease.

Martin Luther King Junior said: "Our scientific powers have outrun our spiritual powers; we have guided missiles and mis-guided men." My Buddhist monk was wrong. We don't simply need 'less ignorance'; we need more than mere knowledge, we need wisdom.

As science grows in strength the influence of traditional religion is declining. Perhaps we are in danger, like Nature before us, of creating 'soul-less and spirit-less beings'.

Here is another pattern, all part of the bigger picture. Suppose we liken the development of this current age of Mankind to the psychological development of the human individual. We have gone through our childhood, dependent on the king, the feudal lord of the manor, a paternalistic god. Now we are adolescents ~ unruly, powerful, clever, flexing our scientific muscles and pushing back boundaries regardless of consequences. Like most teenagers, we think we know it all but we lack wisdom and responsibility. The world's adolescent scientists and politicians need guiding through this awkward stage to responsible adulthood.

Final lesson



We each have a code of ethics, probably based on a recognised spiritual teaching. We live by certain standards, the Ten Commandments or the Buddhist Precepts of right thought, right speech, right action etc. But whilst living the right kind of life we need to identify with a purpose. I believe that our prime purpose is to help spread the Wisdom of the Ancients to balance the Scientific Knowledge of the Moderns.

We should ask ourselves how we can do this. Is it enough to talk with our family and friends? To meet in our comfortable lodges and summer schools? To reinforce our own knowledge ~ and perhaps our feelings of superiority? I know that we meditate and pray, that we send out positive thoughts for the well-being of mankind, but are we not in a similar position to that of the Tibetan monks before the Chinese invasion? They possessed wisdom that could have helped the world, but they erected barriers making it more difficult for outsiders to discover their secrets. Only when the Chinese scattered the Tibetan monks to the four corners of the world did their spiritual teachings become accessible.

If we have some little wisdom, should we hide it behind obscure texts and theosophical hierarchies, or should we be looking for ways to share it, to help the world move forwards? HPB dedicated a large part of her life to making the ancient teachings more accessible. Did that process end with her death, or do we have a duty to continue? Not by pushing the truth on people who are not ready for it, but by making the truth easier to find for those who are ready. Not by converting others to our way of thinking, but by example.

Before we leave Ripon we should ask ourselves what contribution can we make? How can we spread the concept of unity? As individuals? As lodges? As a Society?

I chose to make the SD more accessible by writing OL! ~ to reach out beyond The Theosophical Society. Then I read the Dalai Lama's 'Ancient Wisdom, Modern World', and I realised that OL! itself is too obscure. Perhaps one day it will be read by many people, but meanwhile I need to do something else. I am writing articles on current social issues and publishing them on my web-site Bigger-Picture without making too many references to God and the Universe. And I have joined the board of a wind farm co-operative, a practical example of respectful unity. I am not suggesting that what I am doing is right for other people. We all have to find the right way for ourselves. And no doubt my search will go on, as will yours, fellow lanoos!

HPB never finished The SD; there were to be two more volumes. And The Book of Dzyan ends in mid-sentence. As a modern author I didn't think I would get away with that, and so in OL! I added an epilogue. I would like to finish by reading part of it.

Reading (page 125)

*You have become today
That which you were becoming yesterday,
So cling not
To that which was*

*But look at what is to be,
At what you are becoming,
For to resist this forward motion
Is to resist the very nature of the Universe.*

*And as you move towards
A spiritual destiny
Glorious beyond your imagination
Know that we are all Pilgrim-Souls
At different stages
Of the same journey.*

*And be not deluded into saying
"Thy Soul" and "my Soul"
For at the end of the journey
We will be as one.*

*The path is long
But be not overawed,
Nor feel insignificant or alone,
For whatever stage you have reached,
Like all Pilgrim-Souls,
You can do no more
Than take the next step.*

*And with every step
Know that you are truly sacred,
And that all sentient Beings are your kin,
For you are part of God
And God is all of you.*