



Excerpts: The Human Condition
THE ONE TRUE ADVENTURE
Theosophy and the Quest for Meaning
By Joy Mills with a foreword by John Algeo

Our Faith in Ourselves

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It has been said that the tragedy of the twentieth-century was man's inability to believe in man. This is a tragedy that seems to continue to haunt us. Certainly it is true that while the ideal of brotherhood has been advanced significantly on many fronts, and numerous examples could be cited in support of its widespread acceptance as an article of faith, we still live in a time of distrust and fear, even, in fact, of suspicion, one person of another.

Our inability to believe in either God or our fellow man, the fruit of scientific materialism, was met in the nineteenth-century by the clear and precise restatement of the Ancient Wisdom by Madame H. P. Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine* and the exposition of Theosophy by the many students who have succeeded her. Today, science is no longer defending an absolutism that would deny reality to an Inner Architect, perceivable in the heart of the atom as in the distant galaxies. Nor is religion, at least as interpreted by its greatest leaders, creating an artificial dichotomy between faith and reason. The position of Theosophy in meeting and continuing to meet the challenges in these fields has often been discussed.

But let us consider briefly the challenge stated to be for this time: our inability to believe in our fellow human beings. What does this involve and how

may Theosophy cast light on this problem? For we live today not only in a world of atoms and electrons, of electromagnetic waves, of wandering comets and slow-wheeling galaxies, but also, and perhaps at times more importantly, a world of human beings, of people whose hopes and dreams, aspirations, ideas, joys and sorrows impinge upon every single one of us. The peoples of the world are no longer remote from one another; barriers of distance, culture, ideologies, language, etc., are being daily resolved by the interchange of ideas through mass communication and vast programs of technical and educational import. Not that cultures or ideologies are becoming similar in aim or outlook, but that the barriers separating them are becoming less opaque and divisive.

Let me cite but one example. Not too many years ago a remarkable conference was held at Bandung, in Indonesia, the Asia-Africa Conference. The late General Carlos P. Romulo of the Philippines keyed the spirit of the meeting when he said:

Fellow-delegates, our strength flows not out of our numbers, though the numbers we represent are great. It flows out of our perception of history and out of the vital purpose we put into the making of tomorrow . . . The success of this Conference will be measured not by what we do for ourselves but by what we do for the entire human community. Large as is the cause of Asia and Africa, there is a cause even larger. It is the cause of the human community in a world struggling to liberate itself from the chaos of international anarchy. In short, our cause is the cause of man.

What then is Theosophy's position in this world of ideological conflict, of socio-economic change, in which the main current of human hope over much of the world's surface is directed towards the realization of freedom, as that freedom is reflected in the desire for political autonomy? Writing on "The Case for Hope," the distinguished Nobel Prize winner in Physics, and Professor of Natural Philosophy at Washington University, Dr. Arthur Compton, after

surveying the advances of science and technology within the last two generations, states in part:

What the scientist finds gives us reason to suppose that man in his physical structure is in no essential way different from the rest of the world of Nature: he is composed of the same atoms, obeys the same laws of conservation of energy, of thermodynamics, and so on . . . Nevertheless, men and women have this remarkable characteristic: we are aware of what happens to us . . . There is also another significant realm in which man's actions go beyond the province of science. This is our experience of freedom. With the advent of quantum mechanics, modern scientific theory does not dispute the possibility of the type of human freedom that implies human responsibility.

It is precisely here, perhaps, in this vast area of social, economic, and political science that Theosophy may contribute new understandings, and in which we may bring to bear certain universal principles that can be applied in utter simplicity to assist in the solution of our fundamental human problem, the search for freedom. This search is allied both to our needs as individuals and to our needs as social beings. That is, we seek individual freedom at the same time that we realize our greatest fulfillment, in terms of general welfare and permanent happiness, in our relationships with other human beings.

However, by suggesting that these are areas in which Theosophy's position may be explored and expanded, I am by no means suggesting alliance with particular political or economic creeds. I am rather suggesting that in a world in which political ideologies are in such conflict that the lives and potential freedoms of millions of human beings are at stake, in a world in which automation is vitally affecting the industrial and economic structures of Western society, in a world in which sociological patterns are being changed by the advocacy of bills of human rights and by the introduction of technological changes into primitive cultures—in such a world it is imperative that we bring to bear upon the thought of the world's people the principles, the moral and ethical

standards derived from the principles of an underlying reality and order in Nature. To quote again from Dr. Compton:

This brings us to the question as to what are the goals towards which man should aspire. When one raises this question, he thinks at once of the old Greek ideals of the understanding of truth, the appreciation of beauty, the striving for perfection. These goals are as significant today as they were 2,500 years ago. What is new is that in our effort to attain the true, the beautiful, and the good, we find that now to a greater degree this can best be done when we endeavor to attain these same objectives for others as well as for ourselves. Is not this, then, the distinctive feature of man's aspiration that is characteristic of the age of science? His approach to the great values of life shall be a co-operative effort, an effort in which every man and every woman may do their share toward enabling all to live more fully, an effort in which every person will be respected for the way in which he plays his part. We see ourselves living increasingly in the lives of each other.

These are the words of a scientist of eminent stature; they were not spoken by a philosopher or religious visionary. It is not possible here to discuss all the implications of this remarkable statement, so clearly implying a brotherhood that is indeed not a sentimental emotion, but a fact inherent in the very structure of universal things.

This linking of the concept of a co-operative effort—brotherhood as part of the natural order—to freedom brings us close to the heart of Theosophy in terms of its application to the moral basis for a political and economic philosophy. Dr. Krishna P. Mukerji, Professor of Civics and Politics at the University of Bombay, in a series of lectures to the School of the Wisdom at the Theosophical Society's world headquarters, speaking on "The Basis of Political Philosophy," said:

It has been well said that the message of Political Philosophy is a plea for freedom. Indeed that one concept—of freedom—when properly understood, can supply the most rational and legitimate foundation of our philosophy . . . *To be free is to live according to the later [sic] of our being . . . To be free is to live according to this Master Plan or Evolution.* How to make the Good available to society is the task of the social philosopher. This

obviously can be done by fitting our social, economic, and political schemes of reform to the universal scheme of evolution, which is guided by the same law of or urge towards goodness as the law of our being. We have, in other words, to re-discover our Maker's plan in the context of our social life. This voyage of re-discovering Goodness or Justice or Freedom or Dharma is the lifelong adventure of the political philosopher. He is the Rishi of dharma, the prophet of freedom and justice . . .

Dr. Mukerji's book *The State* is a magnificent contribution to the position of Theosophy in this aspect of our modern world, and supplements well the earlier statements and research of Dr. Bhagavan Das in his studies on the social order. These are areas in which we of the Western world must come to make our contributions. The key, I believe, is in the concept of *dharma*, as yet so little understood and explored in its context of social and political implications. It was Dr. Radhakrishnan, eminent philosopher and Vice-President of India, who said that next to the category of Reality the most important idea of Eastern philosophy is the idea of dharma. We have yet to envisage what it could mean to unite the concept of dharma, as the great idea of the East, with the concept of freedom, the great idea of the West. This is a special task for us in these days, and one which, when accomplished, will restore our faith in our fellow human beings and ourselves.

From an historical perspective, it may be argued that these two ideas of dharma and freedom may be the most significant contributions of their respective cultures in relation to man's individual achievement and to his achievements in the group. So dharma, or the law of one's best being, as it has been defined, can best be expressed in our relation to others, and freedom, though initially achieved as an individual, attains its full meaning only in a context in which others also enjoy freedom. The dharma of freedom, then—to link these two concepts—implies the responsibility which arises from an inner moral conviction, conscience, or sense of rightness; the flowering of freedom

arises in the recognition of a brotherhood based upon the perception of the unity of life and sustained by the principle of the harmonic orderliness of the universe.

A Chinese proverb says that there are five points to the compass: North, East, South, West, and the point where you are; unless you know the point where you are, you will not know the direction in which to go. It is necessary always to determine that fifth point, and so determine the direction in which we may move in a united effort on all fronts to meet the challenge of the "cause of man." For this, we may draw out the best in ourselves and in others, making it a co-operative effort, in which we experiment with brotherhood in very practical ways. No longer is this an age of singular leaders of great stature, but an age of group awareness, group development, that *all* may move forward. We discover, not so much excellent persons, but excellence in all persons. For that, we need to have faith in the extraordinary powers of ordinary people. Our ability to believe in ourselves and all people may be in this way restored and a new meaning be given to freedom, as each individual finds in the relationship of brotherhood the completion of their own individual unique self.

New Frontiers for an Ageless Wisdom

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The concept of a "frontier" has long influenced the thought of the Western world, and in the United States particularly this concept has always had a rich meaning as a part of our historical heritage. In fact, the word itself was given a new and unique meaning by the experience of the American people in exploring a continent composed largely of wilderness areas. As one raised in the tradition of that experience, and committed to the Theosophical Society as a unique

pioneer movement given physical birth in a land whose peoples, drawn together from every world culture, have focused their vision less on the achievements of yesterday than on the promises of tomorrow, I should like to attempt here a leap of the imagination. Such a leap has its physical counterpart in the historical tradition of which I speak, when entire families set forth in covered wagons and other primitive conveyances to traverse the Great Plains and noble upthrusts of mountains to reach a land of promise. In the history of the Theosophical Society, there is a similar counterpart in the journey undertaken by those intrepid pioneers of our movement, the Co-Founders of the Society, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott, when they set forth from the known beginnings of the organization in New York City to establish a home in the land where its spiritual heritage had its roots. The leap represented by those physical journeys was not without risk or hazard, but thought was given less to the numerous obstacles on the way than to the goal that might be achieved.

So we here in this time and in this place, attempting a new leap of the imagination, we may be less concerned with the difficulties that confront us, and more with the course we may chart by the stars whose light leads ever towards a distant horizon. For we stand today, I believe, on the threshold of new frontiers whose exploration demands the same courage and fortitude, the same patience and forbearance called for in the Founders of this Movement.

What is demanded in our time is a certain willingness of heart, a readiness to risk all for the sake of the journey. If we expect others to carry us over the rugged terrain of the present, if we look to the Theosophical Society as an organization external to ourselves—with which we have some tenuous kind of affiliation but no identification—and expect the Society to construct for us a comfortable home into which we can move the antique furniture of our prejudices, the bric-a-brac of our personal desires, we shall be doomed to disappointment, and the Society

will lack that vigor and strength with which its Founders infused it. We have been given a vision not of a predestined end but of the greatness of a journey. We shall be untrue to that vision if we do not accept the individual responsibility for our commitment to investigate the frontiers of truth that lie before us.

Let us move forward, then, across whatever boundaries separate yesterday from tomorrow, accepting the challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities of today. Let us explore some of the paths into the interior of that new continent of thought, which lies all about us.

In venturing into the unknown, one must begin in the known. To take a step forward, one must move from the point where one is. Even a cursory examination of our present position reveals our desperate need to understand ourselves. It has become fashionable in our modern world to adopt a 3-D vision of Despair, Doubt, and Dissent. Young people in more than one nation have turned from the traditional 3 R's of education to the primitive R's of Rebellion, Riot, and Revolution. The Theosophical Society can and must, I believe, restore to the world a vision of our essential unity, of our immortal destiny, our potential divinity.

The First Object of the Society implies that human need is color-blind and that human aspiration knows neither class nor creed. The despair that results when artificial barriers are erected between individuals, groups, and nations is transformed into hope as individuals learn the meaning of brotherhood.

The Second Object of our Society removes uncertainty by the encouragement to study the universals of knowledge in their philosophical, scientific, and religious permutations. Doubt is thus replaced by confidence.

The Third Object leads us, through investigation of Nature's immutable laws and of human potential, from the dissent of rebellion against all that fragments us in the phenomenal world to that willing assent to the law of our own being

which is the affirmation of our divinity. For the Third Object calls us to fall in love with human possibility.

In such a perspective, the Three Objects of the Theosophical Society are not boundaries to limit action or to circumscribe thought; they are direction signs pointing the way into new and unexplored territory, into a future with infinite prolongations.

As we accept the challenge of these direction signs, and as we move to explore the frontiers that they so clearly indicate, we may pause to note that the concept of frontier has a dual meaning. It is, in one of its aspects, a boundary, which divides one known land from another, a demarcation between settled areas. In the other aspect, a frontier marks the edge of the known, the point at which the settlement ends and the wilderness begins. I am less concerned here with the first meaning, which I should like to suggest may be related in a most meaningful manner to the Second Object of the Society, for it invites us to explore religion, philosophy, and science that we may come, as already pointed out, to the universals of knowledge. The frontiers of study are clearly indicated, although distinctions separating one discipline from another—religion from philosophy or philosophy from science—may at times become blurred. However, it is more directly to the second meaning of the concept of frontier that I should like to invite attention, and probe in some measure the wilderness area of human possibility. This is the area hinted at in our Third Object, and a study in depth of that Object may lead us into the new continent of our humanness.

The crisis of alienation, so apparent in our time, is a divorce not only of one individual from another, but of each person from himself. We have classified ourselves, along with all the objects and events in the universe, as something to be observed, tested, measured, and standardized. The fundamental fear that grips us is the fear of being dehumanized, and perhaps to a large extent this is

responsible for the explosion of disquietude which we are experiencing. Something in us resists the attempt to view ourselves as a *what*, to be probed in the simple objectivity of external observation. We want to believe we are a *who*, to be realized in all the complex subjectivity of experience. Even as we rocket ourselves to the moon and the stars, we feel we may have misfired somewhere along the line, or that the jet propulsion should have been expended in inner dimensions to discover the orbit of our own natures. In the drama of human life, we seem to be reaching the point of a sell-out performance, with standing room only available on our globe, and we debate the expendability of human units with as little concern as we would decide the number of mosquitoes a swamp might accommodate. In such a plight it is no wonder that we are daring to say "no" to God, for we have already said "no" to ourselves when we identify ourselves solely with our objective and external nature. But there are those who seek to learn and long to know, who need a faith to illuminate the ill-lighted world stage, who demand an authentic identity, not an authoritarian creed, who will be satisfied with nothing less than to walk freely with dignity and hope and honor.

The Theosophical Society has an unparalleled opportunity in these closing years of the twentieth-century, to speak to our present human condition, clearly and unequivocally calling us to know ourselves in our true identity and so to say "yes" to all that is possible for and within us. The frontiers of human possibility: these are the frontiers now to be explored, not the external frontiers of outer space, but the inner realms of the spirit. The Theosophical Society may become the conscience of humanity, pricking the minds of peoples everywhere to an awareness of their unitary source in an immortal continuum of Reality, stirring their hearts to a recognition that brotherhood is something more than a fact in nature, for it is a way of life and a way of walking and a way of constant being.

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And the Theosophical Society may do this by virtue of the sacred trust reposed in it by those Adept Brothers who ever constitute the guardian wall of humanity, holding back the flood tides of divisiveness, fear and ignorance that would plunge the world into darkness. But the Theosophical Society is you and I; it is all of us together, stewards of that sacred trust who, whether we be few or many, have it in our charge to transmit to the world the knowledge that there is an Ageless Wisdom by which man may truly know himself, transform himself, heal himself, become wholly himself, and therefore more than himself, one with all others, humanly divine and divinely human.

In the early days of the Society, one of its prominent members, Mohini Chatterjee, pointed out that the esoteric doctrine

teaches with special emphasis that there must exist at every moment of the history of human evolution a class of men in whom consciousness attains such an expansion in both depth and area as to enable them to solve the problems of being by direct perception and therefore with far more completeness than the rest of mankind.

Such direct perception can be attained only in the immediacy of an encounter with first principles—those immortal principles of the Wisdom upon which all secondary truths must be founded. We have that privilege and responsibility to become in our time, and for the present needs, men and women who, having grappled with truth, have won through to that expansion of consciousness which permits of total vision—an expansion induced not by drugs or any external stimulus, but by our own efforts.

Every great voyager and explorer, winning their way across uncharted seas or pathless lands, has marked out their course by the stars. So in the voyage of discovery to which we have been called—that voyage that leads inward to the expanded consciousness of an Immortal Self—we too may lift our eyes to the

stars of wisdom that have ever shone in the firmament of time. And the pole star is the star of unity toward which the compass of our being must ever turn.

Taking our course from the bright star of unity, we may fearlessly set out towards the frontiers of human possibility, the frontiers of consciousness, in an effort to answer the anguished cry of modern man, alienated from his own source, estranged from his brother, fearful of his own inventions, doubtful even of his future.

To know the limits of our humanness, we must define what it is to be human. A popular folk song in the United States today asks:

How many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man?

The Theosophical vision of man encompasses all the roads of experience that have led to this moment and points beyond man's actual self to his possible self. It is a vision that defines the human not in terms of what we have been, not in terms of the animal within us, but always in terms of what we may be. For it is a vision that comprehends the wholeness of the human—the human as rooted in the permanence of spirit, in the enduring realm of universal life which is also consciousness permeated through and through with a supreme bliss. Rooted in such a realm, which may be more metaphysically described in terms familiar to the student of Theosophy as *chidakasham*, whose nature is also *ananda*, each individual turns outwards to gain the experiences of self-consciousness, and in that outward-turning we walk down the impermanent roads of existence, anchoring ourselves again and again to the shadowy end of spirit which we call matter. And in the here-and-now of this anchorage is played out the drama of becoming human, with all the tragedy and comedy, all the pains and struggles and joys and triumphs of learning the roles of humanness in all their diversity, that one day there may stand forth a god.

The remarkable Jesuit paleontologist-philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin spoke of his own fundamental discovery that “we are carried along by an advancing wave of consciousness.” “The study of the past,” he wrote, “has revealed to me the structure of the future.” For the human, emergent from a universal realm of consciousness, possesses all the potentialities of that consciousness—potentialities that may be succinctly summarized in the well-known triplicity of Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence, the powers of the enduring center of our nature as *Atma-Buddhi-Manas*. Our task is to realize those potentialities in the lived-out roles of succeeding existences.

So it was that Teilhard de Chardin wrote of a future peculiar to the human being, the “ultra-human” as he called it. The Scandinavian philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, whose influence on modern Western thought has been so significant, once remarked: “He who fights the future has a dangerous enemy.” But he had the wisdom to add, “Through the eternal, we conquer the future.” There is deep meaningfulness in these words, for the future cannot be fought—at least not successfully; not even tomorrow can be kept at bay for long. But we can meet the future, embrace the future of ourselves and of humanity, only by conceding to the eternal. The Ageless Wisdom, Theosophy, leads us to an encounter with the eternal—with immortal principles that abide through all the changefulness of phenomena. And out of that encounter—the grappling with truth, the search for understanding—we learn to conquer the future by drawing into the present all the possibilities of tomorrow. We can then become that group of men and women who, in our time, have achieved such an expansion of consciousness inward that we may be enabled to solve the problems of being by our own direct perception. For the perception will be of universals—the universals of law, the universals of truth—and all problems will be referable to those abiding principles.

It is to such a journey as this that we are called by our commitment to the Theosophical Society: the journey across the frontiers of our own being, frontiers that are ever new because each individual is unique in their expression, even as each is rooted in an immortal unity. It is the beautiful journey described long ago in one of the Upanishads:

There is a Light that shines beyond all things on earth, beyond us all, beyond the heavens, beyond the highest, the very highest heavens. This is the Light that shines in our hearts. There is a bridge between time and Eternity; and this bridge is the Spirit in man. Neither day nor night crosses that bridge, nor old age, nor death nor sorrow . . . When this bridge has been crossed, the eyes of the blind can see, the wounds of the wounded are healed, and the sick man becomes whole from his sickness. To one who goes over that bridge, the night becomes like unto day; because in the worlds of the Spirit there is a Light which is everlasting.

Exploring fearlessly the frontiers of our own humanness, sighting the stars of immortal wisdom, making out our course by the immutable laws of nature, we may come to discover the precise latitude and longitude of the place whereon we stand at the edge of the frontiers of our own possibilities. For I suggest that we discover the longitude of our being—our own inner stature—as we learn to know what we truly are: an Immortal Spirit clothed in the garments of mortality. In discovering our own height of being, we find too the latitude of human existence, the breadth of our relations with others, for we are truly human only in relationship. Only as the heart is wide may we grow tall; only in the recognition of our kinship with all life, most particularly with those who share the human quest, do we really and finally become human.

Again to quote Teilhard de Chardin, “There is only one contact charged with an irresistible centripetal and unifying force, and that is the contact of the whole of man with the whole of man.” For even as we explore the frontiers implied in our Third Object—the whole of the human and the potentialities, or powers, of

that wholeness of man—we are led directly, in full circle, to the ethical, moral, and humanistic frontiers indicated in our First Object, and so to the very foundation of the Theosophical Movement: the realization of that one true, free, beautiful, and divinely human relationship which is brotherhood.

Our age calls for a new kind of faith and a new kind of courage. At a time when frontiers are all too often defined by walls, barbed wire and the innumerable intangible barriers of hate, jealousy and bitterness that separate one person from another; we are called upon for the countless small braveries of human brotherhood and human love in daily acts of heroism. When we live on the frontiers of the humanly possible, where there are no jungles of fear and anxiety for sentries to patrol, aware of the unitary source of our being because we dare to lift our eyes to the enduring stars, we greet each other no longer as abstractions, as things to be used, exploited and possessed. Then we shall learn to speak to each other in the meaningful syllables of kinship, as authentic persons, unique, important, each one here as divinely as every other. And in our journey across these frontiers, let us not mistake speed for travel; let us not mistake destination for direction and rest in the hostels of comfortable beliefs when we should be out ranging across the mountains of ideas. Above all, let us not mistake numbers, which may be but the signs of settled habitation, for that strength which may be achieved by a few alone testing their spiritual muscles against the toughness of truth itself.

Our age needs the kind of faith that perceives in every individual an undying spirit winning through to its own immortal destiny. We in the Theosophical Society, however few or many we may be, have it in our power to call forth the conscience of every person to a recognition of a concern for all of life. In the days of the American Western frontier, when the American Indian guided the white man across the trackless plains, it is said that the white man

often feared lest he lose his way, and that many a day and night of anxiety passed in search of a familiar landmark, a sign of camp or outpost. But when this happened, the Indian guide, standing quite still and looking upward to the stars, would say very simply: "Wigwam lost; Indian, he never lost." So today, we few committed to the noble dream of brotherhood may stand quite sure in a world grown anxious with fear and insecurity, and proclaim that the loss of outer possessions—even the loss of the wigwam comfort of fixed beliefs—are not losses that matter. For each of us—the essential person, immortal, endowed with the potentials of godhood—can never be lost, so long as we look to the stars of truth which are not only above but also within us.

So if I began by speaking as an American, whose historical tradition is set in the rootless movement of a people toward an ever-receding frontier, let me conclude by speaking as one who shares with all students of this Ageless Wisdom a profound conviction of the infinite possibilities of the human spirit. The new frontiers that are before us lie across the trackless plains of our own inner dimensions of being; beyond the mountain upthrusts of human aspirations; over the winding rivers of compassion that may water the arid soil of human misery—here lies our path. Whether we have the fortitude, the patience, the courage, and the wisdom to chart our way across these frontiers, to establish ourselves on that new continent of thought of which the Elder Brothers of Humanity have spoken—that new continent of thought where all peoples shall one day recognize their essential unity of spirit in a brotherhood of the free—whether we can take this longest of journeys in the service of the world depends upon the individual commitment we bring to the cause of human solidarity. The challenge is there, the privilege of beginning is ours, the responsibility to walk forward has been laid upon us. Truly, there is no other way at all to go.