

Drawing the Larger Circle

There are several assumptions we must make in order to discuss this topic. One assumption is that none of us are here for the first or the last time. Another assumption, that *Mahatmic* beings exist, in and out of human form, and are of countless degrees. They have always existed. All of mankind's great spiritual teachings, in all traditions have been manifestations of various aspects of these beings. They have been called by many names in different times and cultures, sometimes the Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas. Blavatsky called them the Mahatmas, meaning great soul. These are beings for which the actual past of human history is an open-book, and the future of human history, too, is also wide open. Having overcome the illusion of time, they reside in THAT within which past, present, and future appear to exit.

All through history these beings have made attempts to positively influence humanity in whatever way could be done given the complexities of human karma that cannot be interfered with in a law-governed universe. In the 14th century a Tibetan Buddhist monk, Tsong Kha Pa, reformed Buddhism, which had become corrupt in thought and practice. He also initiated the tradition of the Dalai Lama — he said this tradition would last for seven centuries. From among the Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas, he asked for a volunteer to incarnate immediately after each death in the role of the Dalai Lama for seven centuries. In Tibetan tradition the Dalai Lama is the same being with each birth. There is a very precise method for finding the newly born Dalai Lama. Tsong Ka Pa said that there would be seven centuries, and this (the twenty-first century) is the last of the seven centuries. The current Dalai Lama has been repeatedly asked whether he is the last Dalai Lama. To date he has declined to answer the question one way or another. It is nearly impossible for most of us to imagine the degree of continuity of consciousness required to make and carry out a seven hundred-year commitment.

Tsong Kha Pa also began a second tradition in the 14th century. This was to send one or more members of the Brotherhood to the European and English population in the last twenty-five years of each century for seven centuries in order to bring greater spiritual insight to a society permeated with spiritual darkness.

Drawing the Larger Circle

Upon the solid, but largely hidden, foundations put in place by other beings such as: Pico Della Mirandola, Cagliostro, St. Germain, St. Martain, Giordano Bruno, and others, the representative from the Brotherhood during the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century was H.P. Blavatsky.

In 1875, Blavatsky, along with two others, formed the Theosophical Society that quickly spread from America to India and to England. The society had three objectives: the formation of a nucleus of universal brotherhood being the first. The second objective was to translate and make more accessible the spiritual and philosophical writings of older, wiser cultures. The third objective was the study of the hidden powers in Nature and in man. Toward the end of her lifetime, Blavatsky declared the Theosophical Society to be a failure, having failed to live up to its first objective and having become mesmerized by its third. Of the second objective she spoke approvingly. Many scholars have noted the influence of her voluminous writings on the gradually emerging world-view in the West. In saying that the Theosophical Society had failed is, viewed esoterically, to say that it had lost any direct connection with the *Mahatmas* of whom she spoke and so faithfully and bravely served, in spite of calumny and nearly continuous serious illnesses.

In 1963, a man named Raghavan Iyer was invited to teach political science at the University of California Santa Barbara. This he did as the most mysterious and popular professor on campus until his retirement. In addition to his campus activities, Iyer founded a small group named The United Lodge of Theosophists who studied the writings of H.P. Blavatsky, William Quan Judge and Robert Crosbie. In weekly lecture meetings Iyer gave extemporaneous talks, which were later transcribed and edited into articles – one of which is entitled “Drawing the Larger Circle.”

It has been said in different cultures, in different ways, that we live in *kali yuga* — an age of ignorance and darkness, an age of inversions: the ancient Greeks called it the “Iron Age.” In such an age, Light is difficult for most to find, although its surrogates are not. Light is rarely discussed. Most messages involve some form of shadow. These messages might be construed as concentric circles. Within these concentric circles little

Drawing the Larger Circle

circles can be found, the smallest circle of all that which we call *me*. An “Iron Age” is an age in which the center is *I*, and that which is, or said to be, in my best interest. Even acts of giving (altruistic philanthropy) often occur from mixed motives. In such an age where selfishness and creature comforts are emphasized, where most people’s reality ends at their property line, should they have one, the true spiritual Path is difficult to find. Yet, it is never truly absent. It lies, perhaps unseen, within the hearts of each and all.

If one does not believe that there is a Path, a way, it will not be sought and, as Heraclitus wrote: “The unsought for will not be found.” In most cases a Path will not be sought until one’s suffering leaves virtually no other option. There are, of course, those cases that do not require such suffering to begin searching for the Path.

As stated earlier, Socrates taught that *awareness of one’s ignorance is the beginning of wisdom*. Further, he taught: “The cause of nearly all human suffering is double - ignorance, thinking one knows when one, in fact, does not.” To the degree I think I know, I will have no fundamental questions, I will not seek the Path. To the degree that I do not know, but think I do, I will be prone to anger, self-hatred, and violence when my double - ignorance is threatened or exposed. Thus, for those of us who are not spiritual naturals, turning towards the path, confronting our own double - ignorance (illusions, delusions) will be painful. Thus, perhaps, the sign on the archway of the Path — “Abandon hope, all ye who enter here,” hope for one’s ephemeral self-interested plans and goals, hope for one’s *better be quick* spiritual awareness. Upon entering the Path knowing one does not know can be exhilarating and at the same time signal one’s start at overcoming what Iyer refers to as “the Atlas complex.” There is no load to carry if one knows nothing – one is free to be, and most relevantly, free to seek the teachings and the Teachers, wherein true knowledge and true compassion are to be found.

As children, most of us were read and taught various fairytales fraught with “meanies,” whose only joy consisted in preventing the hero arriving at the castle to save the princess. If the hero has not wasted the magic given him at the beginning of his quest (usually by a friendly magician) that magic enables him to get past the “meanies” to

Drawing the Larger Circle

rescue the princess living happily ever after, living as the two who have become one. Though we are no longer children, we still can enjoy the fairytales of the wise — fairytales pointing towards the castle and the princess. We may be given a map to the castle. Knowing nothing but fairytales we must, like the heroes and heroines of old, venture forth toward the castle, which, alas, is said to lie within. Thus, the way to the Path we seek can never be purchased, nor can it be tread vicariously.

We suffer because our circle of self, our circle of time and space are far too small. These circles are the product of genetics and linguistics, of words and images of sights and sounds, with which we have become identified. Inside my circle equals *good*, outside my circle bad thereby polarizing our sense of morality. Rather than questioning the limits of our circles, we tend to rather draw others within them thus, apparently, validating our position. Typically, we recruit more people into our circles than wondering why we ourselves are in them.

In a universe of constant flux circles exist only within the imagination, sometimes used as teaching symbols. In reality there are no circles, except perhaps that circle described by Nicolas of Cusa (a Church Father) as *God*: “God is a circle with circumference nowhere and center everywhere.” This is the only truly selfless spiritual circle. How do we move in thought and, more importantly, in feeling to such a grand concept? How do we escape our own little circles? How do we, to use a phrase of Iyer’s: “re-invert the inversions,” or seek to broaden our circles rather than fill and defend them? How do we become more rather than less inclusive? How do we live these things?

It is said that talk is cheap. So too is belief, if it is not used as a stepping-stone to action. Every great Teacher has spoken ethically, *i.e.*, how we should act? We can all remember times when our belief was strong, yet our action upon our belief was weak. This can be said to be due to obscurations within ourselves, standing between us and acting upon our best intentions. Much of the spiritual life is, in a sense, negative, *i.e.*, slowly and persistently mastering our own obscurations to the Light, to the larger circle. Like the “meanies” in the fairytales, these obscurations can be overcome, but it may involve striking up a friendship with the “meanie,” the last thing he or she expects to

Drawing the Larger Circle

happen. In time the “meanie,” with all that force and will together can become an ally, a helper along the way. This seemingly negative aspect of the Path will be seen in retrospect to have been positive. This is unknown at the time, hence, the battle, the fighting. As one moves along the Path, obstacles will be welcomed as further opportunities for growth, based upon past experience.

Some of the “meanies,” the obscurations are frightening, aspects or things we care not to face. This can, in some cases, lead to a single pointed return to a smaller, safer, better known circle. In order to avoid this sad fate, we are encouraged to develop the virtues, one of which is courage, when it counts, where it counts. The teachings state that this dauntless courage must rest upon an indomitable will coupled with a purified imagination, fed upon the characterizations of great sages and Teachers in spiritual texts. It is further taught in order to master and not be mastered by certain of these obscuring tendencies that one will (at various points) find it necessary to take certain vows to one’s Self, for without vows one will fail upon the Path. We can, for example, say I’ll *try* to be there. We can say I *will* be there. We can say I *promise* to be there. A vow stands beyond all such utterances. Gandhi, for one, emphasized the need for vows referring to a vow as “a right angle.”

The Path is a matter of gradually mastering and transmuting lower forms of energy and matter into higher forms. The Path lies within, and all the great Teachers have said it is difficult to walk the Path, but it can be done. Cultivation of the virtues (found in every tradition) is the marshalling and containing of various forces needed to transmute obscurations into helpers that resist dark forces. This author was once extolling the virtues of a friend close to a Teacher, and received the following response, “A person can be ninety-nine percent reliable. The Teacher has his eye on the other one percent and when it will manifest.” Thus, while we see people and forms, Teachers see ideas and forces. There is (and always will be) resistance.

Regarding the obvious question, why undertake something so difficult, and the answer is no different from undertaking any enterprise requiring overcoming difficult elements, *e.g.*, playing an instrument or learning a trade. One begins at the beginning. If

Drawing the Larger Circle

one thinks one already knows the skill, one will be seen to be un-teachable and will either have to become teachable, give up the enterprise, settle for mediocrity, or, worse case scenario, become an expert at discussing and pronouncing upon an enterprise long since abandoned.

Those fortunate enough, under karma, to come into contact with the true teachings, with true Teachers have a priceless boon to learn to help and to serve the Teachers and the future of all humanity. From the standpoint of our globe, the largest circle is the globe itself. To draw that larger circle begins with the ideation of the highest minds. To draw that circle within a space – time dimension would require radical reformation of currently dominate nations, institutions, distribution of wealth, priorities of the family of man. For most this is not a viable idea. Vested interests, like obscurations, do not give up voluntarily. Yet, it has been said that the emerging global civilization will be as a heaven on earth compared to its nineteenth and twentieth century manifestations. One must, Iyer states, “Believe in spite of the evidence.” He indicated that the first twelve years of the twenty-first century would see many global changes and, to the intuitive, would reveal the beginnings of the civilization of the future. He also warned against “becoming caught up in the death throes of a dying culture.”

H.P. Blavatsky, among others, before and since, taught that the beings taking birth in the present and the future will more quickly see through the smaller, confining circles and gravitate early towards the teachings and the teachers. It is said they will have spiritual knowledge and powers virtually unknown in our time and will initially be regarded as freaks of nature. As the centuries pass, however, they will find themselves in the majority.

If a person is moved by such ideas, by being able through study and work to help improve the lot of humanity — under the guidance of the Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas — one’s heart feeling will be unfailingly noticed and help will come in unexpected manners at unexpected times. One may find, kindled within one’s heart what in Buddhism is referred to as *bodhichitta* – the ardent, unquenchable desire for enlightenment on behalf of all of humanity. It is this flame within the heart, which needs to be protected from the

Drawing the Larger Circle

winds of the unpurified personal mind. Consequently, we find helpful exercises in every tradition to allow that small flame to grow into “an all consuming fire,” consuming in the end even that bundle of “ideas and impressions” that we call *me*, that we call *I*. The sense of separateness, the only *sin* in the true teachings, has been overcome. This overcoming is not, as some suppose, the end – it is rather, the true beginning. Such an achievement, in most cases, requires lives of dedicated effort combined with clarity of vision.

The ancient saying, “As veil after veil lifts there is veil after veil behind,” points to the fact that one has reached the threshold of the Mysteries. It is here, deep within the heart, that one may first feel – but not yet see – one’s Teacher. The existence of such wise compassionate beings gives hope, and encouragement and renders even more humble the true seeker through their very existence. They have drawn the largest circle and are committed to the task of enabling mankind, however painfully and slowly, to widen its illusory, super-imposed circles of confinement.

One teacher advised that “the best course is to exert a steady, gentle pressure” rather than to swing from trying too hard to trying too little. This is reminiscent of the Buddha’s central teaching of The Middle Way. It has also been said that the only failure is the failure to try. One Mahatma wrote: “He who does the best he can and knows how, does enough for us.”

Iyer teaches that the keynote of the future is the brotherhood of humanity and he says that what is needed here is the emergence of truly courageous self-selected pioneers who seek the good of the whole and are willing to train as fortune’s favored soldiers. Indeed, signs of this development are occurring now. Further, Iyer speaks of The Timeless Army of the Voice (Brotherhood of Bodhisattvas) working towards universal human enlightenment. This army has a Chief and various degrees below carrying out those assignments appropriate to particular times and places, including processes and persons. As in most armies the majority of its members are privates. There is no greater privilege. On one occasion when a private expressed a view regarding what should be done, he was told, “Leave the driving to us.” In this article Iyer teaches that the current period of humanity is a period of momentous choices for both individuals and nations.

Drawing the Larger Circle

Elsewhere in the same vein, he teaches that the time has come for the universal relevance of Jesus' question "Whom choose ye this day?" He teaches this critical period for all of humanity commenced in 1963 and will over time witness radical changes in cultures, countries, and institutions. From the ashes of the past the Phoenix will rise — with a lifetime purported to last twenty-five hundred years.

Upon being asked by a skeptic in the nineteenth century to prove the power of *Mahatmas* by performing some sort of miracle, the response received was: "If our Philosophy is wrong, a miracle will not set it right." Iyer says that the broader and deeper becomes our perspective, the more inclusive it becomes relative to the space time continuum, the more choices will become evident, the greater will be the calmness, which can be extended beyond all circles.

One important aspect of the Path involves coming to understand, accept, and trust the karma manifesting in this lifetime. Judgments regarding whether one's karma is good or bad need to be replaced by the ancient teaching that "good karma is that which is pleasing to the *Ishwara* within." All so-called karma, individual or collective, represents, from the standpoint of the teachings, opportunities to learn important lessons. Thus, life comes to be seen as a continuing experience of learning for the sake of being better able to help and teach others. It is said to be often the case that the deeper and more compassionate the motive, the greater will be the precipitation of karma, and of opportunities to overcome and to learn. There are two types of karma, immutable and mutable. In any student's progress in self-study, a key factor to separating *which is which* would be what Gandhi referred to as "making experiments with Truth." In so doing, one will begin to get a sense of what can and cannot be affected within this lifetime. This involves a deep study of the relationship between potentiality and actuality in each student's case. Lacking a Teacher, a seeker might begin by noticing certain tendencies, which are incompatible with the Path one seeks to tread. Such tendencies can be addressed and with continuity, through time, transmuted. Such efforts are probably sufficient to occupy the student for the duration of this lifetime. Should one have the great privilege to have a true Teacher, indications will be given regarding the work to be

Drawing the Larger Circle

done. A true Teacher, however, cannot be either stereotyped or predicted. Students may be put through severe testing that they may or may not perceive as such, *e.g.*, a Teacher may tell the student something about him or herself, which is false. The test, cognized as such, or not, concerns what the student does with the proffered information. It might be well to remember the cliché “When the pupil is ready, the Teacher will appear.”

Karma does not only pertain to the past coming into the present. What appears in the present, are effects of previous causes made. We are, with every thought, word, and deed-making causes that will inevitably produce their corresponding changes upon others and ourselves. It is taught that the strongest causes we make are through our thinking. Thus, in order to make beneficent causes we must slowly master our chattering minds. Buddha taught: “All that we are is the product of what we have thought.” Thus, in so far as a Path can be portrayed as a battlefield, it is in the mind. One way of seeing this is to attempt to move in a direction of being able to choose every thought. This is a very advanced state, but can be moved towards by all. In gradually developing the ability to choose one’s thoughts, one is developing the ability to consciously create beneficent karma, which will (in unknown ways) benefit others.

To the eyes of a sage, karma is seen to be mathematically precise. As science delves deeper into so-called matter and further out into infinite space, they have discovered all activities to be law-governed. The doctrine of karma, whether it be applied to an individual or to an entire globe reflects this mathematical precision. There are no accidents. There are no coincidences. There are no miracles. There are, of course, phenomena that our modern thinkers cannot yet explain. For most of us it is perhaps sufficient to know about and to ponder the vastness of such preciseness. We need not concern ourselves beyond the variables of which we are aware in our own life and times. Only the wise can clearly see and understand the mathematics of karma, the mathematics of the soul. The Dalai Lama has suggested: “If you cannot help another human being, at least try not to harm him.” He has also stated that his religion is not Buddhism, but is Loving Kindness. Such seemingly simple teachings, if attempted in practice, will lead one to see the karma he or she needs to transform.

Drawing the Larger Circle

Raghavan Iyer states that one may have a moment of choice in his or her life that is realized to be a critical moment becoming aware: “I better take a good look at it before I make a choice. I need to draw the largest circle possible in this critical moment.”

Poet Edward Markham says it so eloquently:

*“Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout, he said,
but love and I had the wit to win.
We drew a larger circle and took him in.”*

Barrett Culmback

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