

Book Reviews

How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas, David Bornstein, Penguin Books, India, 2005. Hardcover, 313 pages. US\$30.00.

It was the title that caught my eye: *How to Change the World*. In October 2007, I had the honor of participating in the Berkana Institute's Women's Learning Journey of South Africa. In Johannesburg, we met with an organization called Ashoka. On their display table were copies of this book.

Ashoka was founded in 1980 by Bill Drayton, a former McKinsey & Company consultant and assistant administrator at the Environmental Protection Agency. According to their website, since 1981, Ashoka has funded and supported over 2,000 social entrepreneurs working in 60 countries.¹

David Bornstein, the author of this book is a journalist who specializes in writing about social innovation. He grew up in Montreal, Canada and now lives in New York City with his wife and son. He has travelled extensively in Bangladesh, India, Brazil, North America and Eastern Europe, researching the global rise of social entrepreneurship. His first book, *The Price of a Dream*, traces the history of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Grameen Bank. It describes the emergence of the anti-poverty strategy of micro-finance.² On September 11, 2001, Bornstein was halfway through writing *How To Change the World*. After witnessing the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in New York, he found himself unable to continue with his book because its optimistic tone seemed hopelessly naïve. However, he came to realize that in the face of terrorism and violence it is even more important to publicize the work of those who are creating positive change around the world. He says: "If I learned one thing from writing this book, it is that people who solve problems must somehow first arrive at the belief that they *can* solve problems. ... Those who act on this belief spread it

to others. They are highly contagious. Their stories must be told."³ Here, in brief, are just three of the inspiring stories in this book about social entrepreneurs who have changed the world.

Veronica Khosa worked as a nurse in the AIDS clinic in Pretoria, South Africa. By the early 1990s, it was clear that hospitals and clinics were unable to meet the need for AIDS information and care. In 1995, she left her job and used half of her retirement fund to establish Tateni Home Care Services in Mamelodi, a former "township" 10 miles east of Pretoria. Khosa says, "It was an emotional response to seeing problems and just reacting and saying, 'I can do something. I can help. People cannot just be left to die like dogs.' Something needed to be done."⁴ She also set up a complementary program for the young unemployed people of Mamelodi offering training in all aspects of home care. Between 1995 and 1999, Tateni's staff had made 224,000 home visits, trained 2,100 family members to care for sick people in their homes, and provided home care orientation to 980 nurses, 176 teachers and 66 social workers. Its AIDS workshops had reached thousands of youth in Mamelodi.⁵ Due to Khosa's work, by 2002, 20 million Rand had been allocated to home care and hospice beds by the Gauteng health department.⁶

Erzsébet Szekeres has revolutionized the care of mentally disabled people in Hungary. In 1976, her son Tibor was born with microcephalus and with severe mental retardation. She says, "I knew it was up to me to create a place for my kid to live and work, a place for him in society."⁷ She created Alliance, an assisted living center, on the outskirts of Budapest in a building once used by a farming cooperative. Between 1994 and 1996, Szekeres helped to establish seven new assisted living centers across Hungary.⁸ By 2001, thirteen more centers had been established. In May 2000, Árpád Göncz, Hungary's president, hon-

ored Szekeres for improving the life of disabled people. The Ministry of Health regularly contracts services to Alliance and enlists Szekeres in pre-legislative consultations.⁹

Fabio Rosa has brought inexpensive mono-phase electricity to the poor area of Palmeras in Brazil and has bored artesian wells to enable rice farmers to grow their crops. To do this, he had to convince the state electric company to change their electricity standard and also allow the use of less expensive materials in the construction of the rural electricity network. Due to the success of Rosa's project, displaced farmers returned from the city because their farms had become viable again. Between 1990 and 1993, his company, Pro Luz (Project Light), carried electricity to 25,000 low income rural dwellers.¹⁰ In 1996, São Paulo State launched a \$240 million rural electrification project based on Rosa's system to provide electricity to 800,000 people.¹¹ Rosa then developed solar electricity to provide cattle farmers with cheap electric fencing and within a few years this system was expanded to serve rural districts in ten states.¹²

So why is this of interest to us? Might readers of this journal want to know How to Change the World? It might seem so. The Master Djwhal Khul says the cry of the disciple is: "Aid the work. Forget yourself. The world needs you."¹³ Way back during the crisis of World War II, DK called for "the mobilization of every disciple: This mobilization involves the focusing of the disciple's energies, his time and his resources on behalf of humanity; it requires a new dedication to service, a consecration of the thought-life ... and a forgetfulness of self... On the physical plane, it would mean the conditioning of all active, outer living so that the whole of life becomes one focused active service."¹⁴

In true Seventh Ray fashion, the Master R (through the work of Lucille Cedercrans) is specific about the need to bring spiritual ideals into practical form for the benefit of humanity: "The disciple is needed, is sought after, who will, once he has grasped the Plan, once he has received the Wisdom of his own Soul, formulate his own plan of action, his own service activity and carry it forward."¹⁵

Today, we stand at a point of global economic and environmental crisis and opportunity. We also stand at the cusp of the Aquarian Age. Uranus, the exoteric ruler of Aquarius, "initiates a new order of life and conditions." This fuels "the desire to change the old order and the old orientation into the new".¹⁶ We have only to look at the United Nations Millennium Development Goals to recognize how much has yet to be done.¹⁷

Unless we can act upon our beliefs, our ideals never get further into manifestation than the mental plane. So what inspires people to "measure up by an act of the will to what they know and believe"?¹⁸ What motivates people to purposeful and practical action? What kind of people does it take to change the world?

Drayton developed an intensive interview process, based around some tough criteria, to recognize social entrepreneurs for Ashoka:

1. Creativity: The person must have an idea that is new and potentially pattern-setting, a unique vision. He or she must exhibit problem-solving creativity.
2. Entrepreneurial quality: Drayton describes this as an inner knowing from a young age that you are going to create widespread and significant change in the world. Such a person must be possessed by a vision of change. They do not give up no matter how many times they fail. They are practical and know how to get things done. They are people who are in touch with their environment.
3. Social impact: Social entrepreneurs must have the ability to apply ideas in many situations, circumstances and environments. They must create blueprints for change that can be used by other people. Their actions must deeply affect people's lives for the better.
4. Ethical fiber: The person must be trustworthy and have integrity.¹⁹

But the main key is motivation. Social entrepreneurs have a deep sense of connection with others. And there is often some deeply painful

personal experience or situation that motivates them to want to change the world:

“Usually something has been brewing inside for a long time, and at a particular moment in time – often triggered by an event – personal preparedness, social need, and historical opportunity converge and the person takes decisive action.” There is a moment when they say, “I *had* to do this. There was nothing else I could do.”²⁰

The phenomenon of social entrepreneurship sets a new benchmark for practical discipleship. Not all of us have what it takes to be a social entrepreneur. Yet this book impels us to look anew at our own motivations for making positive and practical change in the world.

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¹ www.ashoka.org, accessed 3 May 2009.

² Biographical information on David Bornstein: <http://davidbornstein.wordpress.com/home/> and

<http://sic.conversationsnetwork.org/shows/detail2701.html>, (accessed 31 May 2009.)

³ Bornstein, *How to Change the World*, 282.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹² *Ibid.*, 33–6.

¹³ Alice A Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, vol. I, (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1944), 737.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 98–9.

¹⁵ Lucille Cedercrans, *Leadership Training*, (Whittier, CA: Wisdom Impressions, 2003), 132.

¹⁶ Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1951), 224.

¹⁷ See www.un.org/millenniumgoals/, accessed 3 May 2009.

¹⁸ Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, vol. I, (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1936), 187.

¹⁹ Bornstein, *How to Change the World*, 118.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 240.

Inside the Occult: The True Story of Madame H.P. Blavatsky, by Henry Steel Olcott, with a preface by Daniel Grotta-Kurska. Philadelphia: Running Press, 1975. 490 pages and index.

I have often wished that I could have been a fly on the wall during the founding of the Theosophical Society in 1875. The energies circulating through that group of people must have been colossal. I happened upon this book by chance and found that it gives as clear a picture as one would wish of those people, circumstances, and early meetings. Although, just as we would imagine, HPB was the fountainhead from which most of the communications and spiritual energies flowed, she insisted from the beginning that Henry Steel Olcott be the president. It was a wise decision, as he was highly trained, multi-talented and as steady as she was unpredictable. He had the fortunate habit of keeping a daily journal, which he later drew on to write this chronicle, aided by

scrapbooks that enabled him to nail down some exact quotes.

The book’s original date of publication, under the rather un-magnetic title, *Old Diary Leaves*, was 1904, but the republication, under the above revised title, was in 1975. It’s actually the first of *six* volumes bearing that title. This republication contains a preface that gives a historical sketch of HPB’s early life, and adds a few facts about both HPB and Olcott, as they finished out their lives (she died in 1891, he in 1907) in India and Europe. One of the more interesting statements offered by Mr. Grotta-Kurska, is that in his last years Olcott developed psychic abilities that were even more startling than HPB’s had been; he became a noted healer using a technique that would now probably be called Reiki, and wherever he went people lined up to receive his healing energies. I discovered in my own research that Olcott became a famous writer on esoteric Buddhism, and his *Buddhist Catechism* is still

used in Sri Lanka, where his memory as an influential spiritual teacher remains fresh.

When we first meet Olcott in this book, he is an almost colorless lawyer and journalist. Still, his writing is excellent. Take, for example, the first words of Chapter One: “Since I am to tell the story of the birth and progress of the Theosophical Society, I must begin at the beginning, and tell how its two founders first met. It was a very prosaic incident: I said, ‘*Permettez moi, Madame,*’ and gave her a light for her cigarette; our acquaintance began in smoke, but it stirred up a great and permanent fire.”

This auspicious encounter took place at the Eddy farmhouse in Chittenden, Vermont, where notorious psychic and mediumistic events had attracted Olcott’s attention. As a journalist, Olcott was primarily interested in debunking the fakes in order to establish whether the phenomena were valid or not. The results were encouraging, and his account of them was published in the *New York Sun* and reprinted in many other newspapers. *The New York Daily Graphic* then hired him to return to Chittenden with a sketch artist to make a thorough investigation. There, on September 17, 1874, he sat down for noontime dinner across from a woman of very unusual appearance and manner, who was accompanied by a female friend. Olcott used the cigarette lighting as a pretext to enter into conversation—a conversation that continued with few breaks for more than 10 years.

HPB’s visit to the Eddy farm, and also her sudden relocation to New York from Paris shortly before, had a very different incentive. She was simply obeying her inner guidance. This brings up one of the truly important issues treated by Olcott. Leaving the identity and the nature of HPB’s inner directives aside for the moment, she was apparently instructed to establish a new spiritual movement on the shoulders of the current spiritualism craze, in order to attract the quantity of attention needed to supply the new movement with the needed energy. This she rather unwillingly cooperated with, almost upstaging the Eddys with phenomena of her own. She publicly identified herself as a medium for the time being, and

also participated in the debunking process as needed.

If Olcott is to be believed, this was truly a different time, when the usual procedures of Hierarchical-human interaction were temporarily suspended. Of course, the Masters had nothing to do with the “madcap personality” (as Olcott describes it) of HPB and her irrepressible tendency to entertain by materializing items large and small out of thin air. One senses that they put up with it because she, with all her personality limitations, was the person in incarnation who was best equipped to carry out the primary purpose the Hierarchy had in mind. This purpose was actually a two-pronged task: the anchoring of the Ageless Wisdom by assembling the right people in New York and later in India, and the writing of *Isis Unveiled*.

This writing task takes up a large portion of this memoir, and it makes for a surprisingly entertaining narrative. Although Olcott was not on hand when HPB wrote *The Secret Doctrine*, apparently *Isis Unveiled* was written in the same way. Just after the Theosophical Society had been established, one day HPB sat down and began writing furiously. When Olcott asked about it, she couldn’t say exactly what she was writing about; only that she had been told to write. Olcott assumed the position of editor for every page she scribbled, correcting her faulty English, reorganizing scattered thoughts, and making further suggestions for improving clarity. HPB was not well read, and had no real talent for writing—indeed, she had never had any literary interests at all. She was evidently *copying* most of what she wrote from some inner source, and in addition—this becomes most interesting—she wasn’t always HPB when she was writing. This is a curiosity for modern spiritual students: HPB apparently gave over her body to one or another Master (one hopes it was a Master!) with some frequency, and the occupant of the body used his own handwriting, and influenced her personal mannerisms and behavior as well. Olcott became somewhat adept (no pun intended) at identifying the writers by the frequently changing handwriting. He doesn’t share their names

for the most part, but he seems to have enjoyed their presence, which of course was more predictable and refined than HPB herself usually was. He comments that when HPB was in one of her frequent rages, the only Master who would work as usual with her was Morya, her personal guru.

HPB had little to say about this process, only occasionally referring obliquely to the “Somebodies” that occupied her body from time to time. This may explain her tendency to contradict herself concerning her age and various occult facts. Olcott theorizes that on the one hand she didn’t know much about the mechanics of her inner work because she was a passive participant, and on the other hand, the person often speaking and writing was not HPB at all, but one of the “Mahatmas,” as she termed them. In these situations, the

Mahatma would refer to HPB in the third person, sometimes using the masculine pronoun. Students of Master DK may remember that He has done the same thing on occasion, when referring to HPB. Since DK has mentioned assisting in the dictation of *The Secret Doctrine*, could He have been one of those “Somebodies” trading off in the writing of *Isis* twelve years earlier?

The book contains many other riches to be savored, including an account of the first cremation in America. (Yes, Henry Steel Olcott founded that practice as well, and the circumstances make a great story.) Having looked through the contents pages of the other volumes, I’m tempted to take on *Old Diary Leaves, Book Two* next!

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