

Inclusive Social Action

SES Board of Directors

This period of transition from the Piscean Age (with its emphasis on materialism, paternalism and hierarchy, and growth through suffering) to the Aquarian Age (with its emphasis on spirituality, egalitarianism and collaboration, and joyous growth) brings with it conflict and deepening separatism. Any change of this magnitude always involves the breakdown of old forms in order to make way for new ways of being. Unfortunately, such upheaval precipitates backlash, accompanied by violence as people resist the changes.

In this growing instability and incivility, right action can be difficult to determine. Those of us committed to a spiritual path recognize that the work we do through meditation is essential in several ways. First, it helps us become centered and grounded so that we are able to hear the “still small voice” of Soul guidance. Second, it trains us to access and channel the energy of the One Life without distortion. Third, it provides us with a methodology for taking action on the inner planes, to focus energy for the common good, to transmute negative thoughtforms and cleanse our shared energy field of glimmers and illusions. This action on the inner planes is absolutely critical, but is it enough?

Action on the inner planes needs to prepare us for, and motivate us towards, action in the outer world. The Tibetan has been highly critical of those who do not engage actively in confronting evil and destructive cleavages. “I tell you that your prayers and your wishes are unavailing when divorced from right and potent action.”¹ He reminds us that “the Spiritual Hierarchy is not neutral. It is one with the right element in every nation and set against all separative, isolationist and materialistic attitudes.”² “Esoteric knowledge is not intended to drive [our] spiritual life into greater and increasing subjectivity; the goal is not a more inward life and a training that will make of [us] a true introspective and consequently a mystic. Exactly the reverse is intended; all that the disciple essentially is upon the inner planes has to become objective; thus spiritual livingness becomes an everyday affair.”³

So how are we to oppose separatism and harmfulness in all its forms without in turn adding to existing divisiveness? Simply thinking kind thoughts and projecting loving energy is not enough and can actually be unhelpful since sending energy that can be transmuted into destructive force usually invites further and more intense conflict. Hence the necessity for being extremely intentional and mindful in the invocation of energy.

What Is Our Spiritual Mandate?

In the broadest sense, our mandate is to remember and live out the reality that we are all part of the One Life, interconnected and interdependent components of the life of the Soul. In other words, we are related to the rest of humanity, whether we agree with the philosophies or actions of others or not. We are called on to evoke goodwill in order to engender right relations and end the heresy of separateness.

The same energetic Life pours through the planetary centers, into and through the three periodical vehicles of the incarnated Monad, and finally into and through the three centers in the human etheric body that correspond to the three major centers of the Planetary Logos. There is, therefore, nowhere to be found any basis for separation or any possible point of separation or of essential division....The essential synthesis exists and the end is sure and inevitable; unity is attainable because unity exists and the sense of separateness is simply the Great Illusion.⁴

In living as part of the Soul that encompasses us all, there are three qualities that we are to express: (a) harmlessness, including the active refraining from those acts and that speech that might hurt or cause any

misunderstanding; (b) a willingness to let others serve as seems best to them; and (c) joyfulness rather than criticism.⁵ Most particularly, we are to be non-partisan and non-divisive so as not to contribute to partisan divides.

But let us be clear. We are also called to “seal the door where evil dwells” rather than to send loving energy to that evil. We face the challenging task of condemning hateful and harmful actions while administering “tough love” to the perpetrators. We cannot distance ourselves from those perpetrators because they are, in a very real sense, a part of us. But we can shield others from the effects of their thoughts and actions, and we can exercise our skill with directing energy in order to contain their disparagement and destruction so that they do no further damage. The harmlessness to which we are called “is not negative, or sweet or kindly activity, as so many believe; it is *a state of mind* and one that in no way negates firm or even drastic action. It concerns motive and involves the determination that the motive behind all activity is goodwill. That motive might lead to positive and sometimes disagreeable action or speech, but as harmlessness and goodwill condition the mental approach, nothing can eventuate but good.”⁶

Noticing: Monitoring Interpersonal and Geopolitical Dynamics

Appropriate action on the outer plane requires us to monitor and pay attention to what is happening around us, both the positive acts of kindness and the negative acts of harm. We must be able to discriminate between actions that affirm interdependence and the dignity of others and actions that are harmful, demeaning, and divisive. Ignorance of harm being perpetrated, particularly “willful blindness” is no excuse.

It is not generally possible to monitor everything that is happening around the world, so it may be helpful to select specific issues to focus on actively. We need to keep in mind the importance of daily interpersonal interactions as well as broader community issues. It does no real good to demonstrate for refugee rights and then yell at our partner in irritation.

There are several dynamics that are particularly important to keep in mind. First, we need to be alert to harm done both by commission and omission. Both are reprehensible, and both demand a response. Second, we need to notice both instances in which we can take action and also those in which all we can do is to bear witness to others’ actions and then work towards longer term change. In other words, we need to pick our battles. Third, we need to be prepared both to react when harm is occurring and also proactively work to prevent future harm. In the Ageless Wisdom, the distinction made is between crises of discrimination (precipitated by points of crisis) and crises of decision (proactive steps taken in line with the Plan).⁷

Evaluating: Exercising Our Moral Compass

Once we are aware of questionable or harmful situations, we need to be able to judge what is right and wrong and act accordingly. We understand this process as applying our moral compass – i.e., our internalized set of values and objectives that guide us with regard to ethical behavior and decision-making. This moral compass is intended to guide our behavior towards the common good, the prevention of harm. It strengthens through practice and weakens when we fail to engage in ethical analysis.

One approach we can take with regard to evaluating verbal actions is to apply Socrates’ Test of Three by asking, “Is it true? Is it good or kind? Is it useful?” To these three, we can add the quote from Mahatma Gandhi, “Speak only if it improves upon the silence.” And we include broader concepts like, “Does it advance the common good? Does it move humanity towards joyfulness?”

Part of that evaluation is examining the intention behind the action. Even if the action itself is relatively benign in effect, is that intention to belittle or dismiss or stereotype or objectify or tear down or diminish? Some forms of harm have become so much a part of our cultural milieu that we no longer notice them. Mindfulness is critical.

Another yardstick that we could apply is whether or not a particular action reinforces the fundamental guarantee found in Article 1 of the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Acting: Behaving Harmlessly to Ensure Right Relations

Turning now to action on the outer plane, our challenge is to address divisiveness and violence in a manner that ends the harm without exacerbating that divisiveness.

These are days when the lines of demarcation between the Forces of Materialism and the Forces of Light must be clearly defined. When the contrast between the way of love and goodwill and the way of cruelty and hate is being clearly defined on Earth...To our group comes the difficult task of standing firmly on the physical plane against that which is destructive and hateful (in the true sense of the word), doing all that can be done to bring the destructive agencies to an end and to final powerlessness and, at the same time, preserving an inner attitude of complete harmlessness and loving understanding. For ... there are principles and ideals in the world at this time worth struggling for, but while the struggle is on it is necessary consciously to preserve and create that field of living, loving energy that will eventually bridge the gap between the two opposing factions and groups and so enable later contact to be made...The dual life of active world participation in opposing that which is seeking to hold back and to destroy humanity and its highest ideals and – at the same time – to preserve a steady attitude of love, is not an easy one.⁸

To be clear, social action *is* required of us if we are to play our part in “sealing the door where evil dwells.” We cannot in good conscience remain neutral and inactive when all around us we see gratuitous harmful acts and attempts to demean and strip others of all dignity.

What should characterize our actions so that they increase inclusivity and the awareness that we are indeed all one, that the pain of the other is my pain as well? There are at least three principles that can guide our choice of actions: detachment, working from a point of tension, and harmlessness.

Detachment is a central tenet of spiritual life. Not detachment from addressing social issues, but detachment from forcing a particular outcome, from insisting that “I am right and you are wrong.” We do not necessarily have the wisdom to know the “best” outcome. Often there is more than one resolution that moves us towards a fuller expression of goodwill and right relations. The Tibetan describes this type of approach as follows: “They say nothing and write no word that could feed the fires of hatred, or tend to separate individual from individual, or nation from nation. Yet these members will be found in every political party and every world religion. They represent an attitude of mind.”⁹ So we may and should advocate for the positions and political parties that we believe will strengthen the common good, but we need to do so without demonizing those who believe in a different strategy to reach that objective.

Working from points of tension is mandated throughout the Ageless Wisdom teachings. “Forget not that all success (both good and bad) is dependent upon the sustaining of the point of tension. This point of tension involves the dynamic focusing of all mental, emotional, and physical energies at a central point of planned activity.”¹⁰ We need to internalize the pain and conflict of the harm we observe to the point that it results in an internal tension that begs for release, for focused action. It is that pressure that provides the impetus for effective action and that ensures that we *must* act. And one of the critical actions we can take is education, ensuring that people have all of the facts so that they can recognize what is happening for themselves. “Focused, determined, enlightened public opinion is the most potent force in the world. It has no equal but has been little used.”¹¹

Fundamental to the heresy of separativeness is a willingness to harm – harm ourselves and harm others. And so we are instructed to “practice that positive harmlessness that works out in right thought (because based on intelligent love), right speech (because governed by self-control), and right action (because founded on an understanding of the Law)...It is not the harmlessness that comes from weakness and sentimental loving disposition, that dislikes trouble because it upsets the settled harmony of life and leads to consequent discomfort.”¹²

As a result of the School’s Subjective Group Conference on “Ashramic Work and Harmlessness” (2015), participants reported that the most challenging aspect of behaving harmlessly was monitoring and modifying

their thoughts so that they removed old thought habits that allow criticism and degradation of others to flourish. Indeed, harm begins in the thoughts that we allow or nurture. What we say is also critical. “The purpose of all speech is to clothe thought and thus make our thoughts available for others. When we speak, we evoke a thought and make it present; and we bring that which is concealed within us into audible expression. Speech reveals, and right speech can create a form of beneficent purpose, just as wrong speech can produce a form that has a malignant objective....Wrong speech separates.”¹³

Conclusion

Action on the outer plane is essential to our expression of the life of the Soul. Alice Bailey has written: “There are esotericists, however, who hold that to be an esotericist means that one holds oneself aloof from mundane affairs and that esoteric students should take no part in the affairs of humanity as a whole; they should be active in spiritual and mental realms. If the physical plane and its affairs lie outside the sphere of influence of spiritual livingness, then there is something basically wrong with our interpretation of truth. If the goal of the spiritual effort is to establish the Kingdom of Souls on Earth, then all physical plane events become the concern of all spiritual people everywhere.”¹⁴

The challenge presented to us today is to act in a manner that enhances the common good, that reduces harm, and that strengthens our shared sense that “we are all us.” In the words of President Barack Obama: “Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we have been waiting for. We are the change we seek.”

To learn more about the School for Esoteric Studies’ series of White Papers or the School’s other activities, go to www.esotericstudies.net. For permission to reprint this paper (with attribution), please contact the School at info@esotericstudies.net.

¹ Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1957), 233.

² Alice A. Bailey, *The Destiny of the Nations* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1949), 65.

³ Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age, Vol. 2* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1955), 185.

⁴ Alice A. Bailey, *Telepathy and the Etheric Vehicle* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1950), 137-138.

⁵ Taken from Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology, Vol. 2* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1942), 131-133.

⁶ Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Healing* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1953), 670.

⁷ Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1960), 639.

⁸ Alice A. Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age, Vol.1* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1944), 771.

⁹ *op.cit.*, *Esoteric Psychology, Vol. 2*, 643.

¹⁰ *op.cit.*, *Externalisation*, 496.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 379.

¹² Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1934), 317-318.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁴ Alice A. Bailey, *Unfinished Autobiography* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1951), 292-293.