

LAND&LIBERTY

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message from the honorary president

In the final chapter of *Progress and Poverty*, Henry George wrote:

Behind the problems of social life lies the problem of individual life. I have found it impossible to think of the one without thinking of the other, and so, I imagine, will it be with those who, reading this book, go with me in thought.

And so it was, and remains, with myself, since first reading this passage as a student of philosophy and economics at the School of Economic Science in London over sixty years ago. George continued:

*What then is the meaning of life — of life absolutely and inevitably bounded by death? To me it seems intelligible only as the avenue and vestibule to another life... its facts seem explainable only upon a theory which cannot be expressed but in myth and symbol, and which, everywhere and at all times, the myths and symbols in which men have tried to portray their deepest perceptions do in some form express. The scriptures of the men who have been and gone — the Bibles, the Zend Avestas, the Vedas, ... have a heart and core in which they agree—a something which seems like the variously distorted apprehensions of a **primary truth**.*

Here George refers to a truth that is 'primary', being not only 'of chief importance' and 'of earliest in time or order' but, essentially as being 'not derived from, caused by or based on anything else i.e. original - that which is, always and everywhere! George continued:

*The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured. But it will find friends — those who will toil for it; suffer for it; if need be, die for it. This is the power of Truth. Will it at length prevail? Ultimately, yes. But in our own times, or in times of which any memory of us remains, who shall say? ...If they are weak forces that are opposed to Truth, how should Error so long prevail? If Justice has but to raise her head to have Injustice flee before her, how should the wail of the oppressed so long go up? But for those who see Truth and would follow her; for those who recognise Justice and would stand for her, success is not the only thing. Success! Why, Falsehood has often that to give; and Injustice often has that to give. Must not Truth and Justice have something to give that is their own by proper right—theirs in **essence**, and not by accident?*

George's reference to the Vedas and use of the word 'essence' chimes with one of my favourite translations of an Upanishadic statement: "the essence of all valid knowledge of the Self in unity with the creation and the creator can arise only by practical and true application of unity in diversity" (Mandukya 7). George cites the 'law of rent and wages' as an example of natural law and it clearly represents a 'practical and true application of unity in diversity' in social life. It provides the key for social justice and freedom but also reflects the yet more fundamental key to individual liberation that Advaita provides. George uncovered and sought the practical application of a fundamental truth: that while individual efforts (diversity) are vital, they are bound to operate upon a common foundation (unity/land). He taught how where the "essence of all valid knowledge" in the realm of political economy prevailed, harmonious and prosperous coexistence would arise, where individual flourishing would be supported by a just collective framework that would manifest "unity in diversity".

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