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WHY HISTORY IS ALIVE TODAY

The study of history is a subject that likely holds scant appeal for the young. Interest in the past is not a high priority at that stage of life, easily being eclipsed by the imposing immediacy of the present and the alluring promise of the future. For example, I grew up during the 1950s and World War II seemed to me something that happened in the distant past; but I'm sure it was very real to my father who served in the Army during the war. When you are only eight years old, an event from the previous decade might as well have taken place in the previous century. You can't properly relate to it or understand how it has anything to do with your life, because the perspective that comes with time has not had time to develop. At that age, viewing historical events is like looking through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars, with all the images appearing much further away than they really are.

In my case, an appreciation for history was something I gained much later. That's probably true for most adults. Yet there are some people who never see the significance of history and fail to see how it matters. I am reminded of the cranky old character in one of Flannery O'Connor's short stories, of whom the author says: "He didn't have any use for history because he never expected to meet it again." But in life, as in short stories, the unexpected often happens, and actions from the past frequently have repercussions in the present.

Theosophy refers to the principle cyclicity as being one of the fundamental truths of existence. Time is seen as unfolding in a cyclical, recurring manner, rather than in a straight, linear fashion. Regarding the importance of history, Sri Madhava Ashish puts it this way: "Why worry about what happened up till now? The answer is that what has happened in the past has made us what we are now. And what we think about ourselves now determines our attitude towards the future" (*Man, Son of Man*). To paraphrase Mark Twain, history may not repeat, but it surely does rhyme.

For the Theosophist, history is alive. In fact, we *are* history. You and I have seen the building of the pyramids along the Nile, the aqueducts of ancient Rome, the great cathedrals of Europe, the shipyards of medieval Venice. We have lived through wars and famine, good times and bad. Our home has been the jungle, the desert, the mountains, and the great plateaus. History is not something apart from us; it has molded us, shaped us, and is very much a part of us.

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