

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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THE PARADOX OF DEATH

THE BHAGAVAD-GITA advises meditation on birth, death, decay, sickness and error. Can we not live the life without meditating on death? Life and death, is one of the pairs of opposites in the manifestation. It is difficult to appreciate or understand “good” without “evil,” “pleasure” without “pain,” and “life” without “death.” We are afraid of death because we are identified with the body and the personality, and physical death implies separation from everything that we depend upon for our sense of “I.” But what would it be like if life were to go on and on without any break? In a Greek mythology, Tithonus was the lover of Eos, the goddess of the dawn. When Eos asked Zeus of a boon for Tithonus to be immortal, she forgot to ask for eternal youth. Tithonus indeed lived forever. The poem *Tithonus*, by Alfred Tennyson, is a dramatic monologue from the point-of-view of Tithonus. He laments his unnatural longevity, which separates him from the mortal world as well as from the immortal, by saying: “The woods decay, the woods decay and fall... Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath, and after many a summer dies the swan. Me only cruel immortality consumes; I wither slowly in thine arms.” This is exactly how we would feel if life were eternal. In Simone de Beauvoir’s novel, *All Men Are Mortal*, the Italian ruler, Raymond Fosca, who was afraid of death, found that time on earth was too short for achieving anything great for the

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glory of his city. He drinks the elixir of life, bought from a Jew, and becomes immortal. In the two centuries that he lived, he waged wars, built new buildings, but did not achieve anything spectacular, nothing which he could not have achieved in few years. He came to the conclusion that those only, who must die, are capable of truly loving life, undertaking great works and running risks. The author suggests that meaningful human existence depends upon the prospect of death and its attendant joys and anguish, without which freedom and action have no value. In fact, even a story or a poem must have a moving and conclusive end. Are we not bored when a television serial drags on endlessly?

Death is only a passage or bridge that takes us to the other side. Death is not dying, it is waking into another life, say the Upanishads. A Master of Wisdom writes that it was observed during famine in China that in places where people recognized that death is not the end, the multitude died with utmost indifference. However, among those who did not believe in rebirth and had greatest dread of death, the mothers devoured their own children, in an attempt to keep the body and soul together.

The *Gita* says, “Death is certain to all beings and rebirth to all mortals.” “All that lives must one day die, passing from Nature to Eternity,” writes Shakespeare. Life is related to form, and form must die. Death of a physical form is a necessity. The permanent spiritual aspect in us—the soul—feels imprisoned during life. For the soul, “Death comes as a deliverer and a friend.” Sleep is called twin brother of death. Sleep is essential for the body to be rested. Our soul is rested in a state after death, called *swarga*, heaven or *devachan*. In fact, it is said that if the average man returned at once to another body without passing through this restful and beneficial state, his soul would be completely tired out and also deprived of the needed opportunity for the development of the higher part of his nature.

During life, we are unable to translate all our thoughts into action. We are unable to realize all our dreams and aspirations. These unfulfilled aspirations and dreams are stored up as energy in *manas*

(mind), and are held latent until death. With the death of the body, the bond or restriction placed on mind is removed so that the unexpended energies, stored up in *manas* find development and expansion. In this understanding lies great solace for those who feel that with death everything comes to an end. In the *Gita*, Arjuna asks shri Krishna that since control of the mind is very difficult, would all his efforts in controlling the mind be wasted if he died before he had achieved perfect control? The answer is in the negative. Sometimes our efforts and achievements are only halfway through when we die. Many have felt dejected at the thought that with death, all their aspirations and achievements would vanish like a torch dipped into water. Sir Thomas Brown said, “I am not so much afraid of death as ashamed of it.” Edmund Wilson expresses it thus:

The knowledge that death is not so far away, that my mind and emotions and vitality will soon disappear like a puff of smoke, has the effect of making earthly affairs seem unimportant and human beings more and more ignoble. It is harder to take human life seriously, including one’s own efforts and achievements.

But death is not an end. What happens if we are in the middle of learning the piano and we die? In the next or in some future life we pick up the thread from where we had left off in the prior life. In fact, in *devachan* there is an assimilation and expansion of all the nobler qualities—sympathy, love of beauty, art, and the abstract things of life—so that the soul comes back enriched.

Meditation on death makes us aware of the changing aspect in us. There is transition and impermanence all around us. Our personality changes continually. Our ideas and emotions undergo change. Buddha taught that all conditioned things are impermanent and subject to change. But there is that unchanging aspect in us, the real “I,” or the Individuality which perceives the changes. The significance of life consists in realizing the relationship between the fleeting and the permanent aspects in us. Only then are we able to

see that there is a meaning to all that happens. Otherwise, life would seem to be a meaningless succession of events, as Shakespeare puts it, “A tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” *The Voice of the Silence* says:

The Lamp burns bright when wick and oil are clean. To make them clean a cleaner is required. The flame feels not the process of the cleaning. “The branches of a tree are shaken by the wind, the trunk remains unmoved.”

The “flame” and the “trunk” in the above imagery, represent the Perceiver—the unchanging and the eternal aspect in man. The “branches,” represent the personality, emotions and the evanescent aspects of life. When we are too elated or too dejected, we are only looking at the “branches.” In both happy and sad times it is good to remember, “This too, shall pass away.” Our attention to people is very superficial. In our interaction with others, we are only aware of the “branches.” We say, “I do not like the way she talks,” or “She is too dark,” or “She is dull and boring,” etc. When we look at our child we must be aware that some day it will lose its innocence and grow into an adolescent and then into an adult. If we try to recall what our friend looked like when we last met, we may remember, at best, his dress, his features, etc. We have to get beyond the personality. Are we aware of that aspect in us which is unaffected by praise or blame, adversity or prosperity?

To become aware of the presence of the permanent aspect in us and to reflect the light of the divine nature, we must burn the dross of the lower consciousness. Our everyday mind is full of impressions of gossip, second-rate novels we read or memories of sensual gratification. We have to so clean the apparatus that light within can shine forth. This process of purification of the personality is going on, life after life. Hence, in a given life, a time comes when death of the personality is ardently desired and wished for, so that the soul can acquire better form that may allow better expression of the potentialities within. Lord Siva is said to dance jubilantly at the time

of destruction (dissolution) of the universe. He is said to destroy things under one form but to recall them to life under another more perfect one. In death there is creation of new life. The cells of the body die and are replaced by new ones and so too, when old leaves fall off, new leaves take their place.

“Man dies and yet, he does not really die,” is a paradox at the lower level. The real paradox of mystical death is, “Give up thy life, if thou would’st live.” We must give up the life of *personality*, to live the life of *spirit*, else we would be tossed like a boat on the stormy ocean, caught in the ceaseless round of birth, death and rebirth. In *Letters That Have Helped Me*, Jasper Niemand mentions “the sheaths of the heart,” which man has to break one by one, so as to come into direct communication with the Divine nature. We have to struggle hard to break that heavy obstacle which resists all change. The seed must die to give birth to a tree; the nonessentials must die for the spiritual regeneration. Thus:

To live as a plant, the seed must die. To live as a conscious entity in the Eternity, the passions and senses of man must first DIE before his body does. “To live is to die and to die is to live,” has been too little understood....Siva, the *destroyer*, is the *creator* and the Saviour of Spiritual man, as he is the good gardener of nature. He weeds out the plants, human and cosmic, and kills the passions of the physical, to call to life the perceptions of the spiritual man. (*S.D.*, I, 459 fn.)

We need to understand death because even if we are not afraid of our own death, we are afraid of losing our near and dear ones. Contemplation on death makes us aware, at least intellectually, that we have not really lost them. The “real person” outlives the body. Thus:

In spite of the fact that you have suffered and grown hopeless because of your recent loss, a new cycle of growth and understanding can be before you. What was it that you loved of this Being who has passed—the body? Or was it

the Life, the Consciousness, the soul that used it? You knew that individual through all its changes of body, of which there were so many. This in itself is proof that it was not the body but something else you loved. And is that Soul which you loved now dead? How can you say so—you who persist through every change of form! That which lives and thinks in you, is the “Eternal Pilgrim,” for him there is no beginning and no end, however many changes of body and of mind you use. Nothing is ever lost. This losing of yours is nothing but loss of physical contact for a little while.

We are promised that those who, love each other and those who are like-minded, will be reincarnated together when the conditions permit.

Children often complain when examination paper is not only difficult but contains questions that were not part of the syllabus. We are completely baffled when we have to face real life situations, which are “out of syllabus.” Death is a mystery to most of us. While we are uncertain as to how and when it will come, we are certain that *it will*. And yet losing a near and dear one, is always an emotionally unsettling experience. If we are mindful of the transitory nature of the existence we would be in a position to score well in our final examination, because then death and its processes will never be out of syllabus, writes Girish Deshpande.

Though death of a *near and dear* one shatters us, we have acquired, more or less, a matter-of-fact attitude towards death. When Buddha saw a dead man, he asked, does death come to all? On learning the inevitability of death, he left home to find out the answer to human suffering, decay, old age and death. At the end of five years of search he reached enlightenment, and emancipation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

MAN was born alone, must stand alone, die alone—so he must needs be strong.

—W. Q. JUDGE

CLAIRVOYANCE AND SEERSHIP

FOR thousands today, the world of psychic forces and experiences is a reality. But most of them hold mistaken views about the significance of these experiences. The larger number believe that the psychic is the spiritual; while some are convinced that the road to the spiritual leads through the psychic. To demonstrate how fallacious are these ideas, is the purpose of this article.

Three types of communication—between the physical and other planes—may be considered. At the lowest level, the will-less medium. At the highest, the Will-full Seer. And in between, the personal psychic.

The history of mediumship clearly stamps this practice as totally undesirable, for it leads to deterioration of reason, of character, and health, while it adds nothing to the sum of human knowledge.

The Impersonal Seer is the type of the true scientist, operating on the highest metaphysical planes. He consults the traditions of his Predecessors for guidance, and then proceeds to check and verify by individual experience. Only those results which stand the test of such research by thousands of generations of Seers are included in the record of Truth, the accumulated Wisdom of the Ages.

The Personal Seer suffers from defects of which he is unaware. Christian sects, such as the Quakers and Mormons, trace their existence to the clairvoyance of men like George Fox and Joseph Smith. These men built their thoughts and impulses on the concept of an outside God. That they possessed clairvoyant power was due, as they believed, to the “miracle” of God, who “chose” them for a special purpose. This was revealed in the vision, in which God instructed them to direct his “children” in a given way.

Each of these seers claimed to have “seen” God, and to have received the mandate of his “truth.” But all of these versions of “truth” differed! If they were all of the nature of truth, how could they differ? How explain this anomaly?

The answer lies in that knowledge which points out the defects

of untrained clairvoyance. Chief among these is ignorance of the fact that subjective thoughts on the physical plane become objective to the sight on the astral plane. As an example: a mother sends her children, by train, to the country for a vacation. As the train departs, she begins to worry about them. In her mind arise scenes of a train derailment, with her children trapped in burning cars. An untrained clairvoyant observing her at the moment will report these scenes as actually occurring. Another instance: a person, at a distance, to whom the clairvoyant eye is directed, may look entirely different from what he looks in reality. He may, in the depths of winter, appear clad in spring clothing, because of his thoughts at the moment about a comfortable suit of this sort, thus throwing a glamour of the clothing before the vision of the seer. Other defects pertain to the partial experience of the inner senses, brought over from past lives; and to the partial penetration of the astral plane, mistaking the limited vision for the whole.

Thus we can understand how the personal psychic projected his own mental picture on to the astral plane, and mistakenly believed he was talking with his God.

That this weakness is well known to the Spiritual Seer is demonstrated in *Isis Unveiled* (II, 591):

When the body is in a state of *dharana*—a total catalepsy of the physical frame—the soul of the clairvoyant may liberate itself, and perceive things subjectively. And yet, as the sentient principle of the brain is alive and active, these pictures of the past, present, and future will be tintured with the terrestrial perceptions of the objective world; the physical *memory* and *fancy* will be in the way of clear vision. But the seer-adept knows how to suspend the mechanical action of the brain. His visions will be as clear as truth itself, uncoloured and undistorted, whereas the clairvoyant, unable to control the vibrations of the astral waves, will perceive but more or less broken images through the medium of the brain. The seer can never take flickering shadows for

realities, for his memory being as completely subjected to his will as the rest of his body, he receives impressions directly from his spirit. Between his subjective and objective selves there are no obstructive mediums. This is the real spiritual seership....this state is as far above modern clairvoyance as the stars above glow-worms.

How does one overcome the defects of the lower clairvoyance? By cultivating “clear seeing” on this plane. This is to be accomplished by clearing the mind of the images of false concepts, and by transforming the selfish, self-centred nature into an altruistic force, a servant of the Higher Self. In the course of this dual process, the power of the Will comes to birth.

“To live to benefit mankind is the first step.”

DEATH then is the dissolution of the body, and the cessation of the bodily sense; and about this we have no cause to be troubled. But there is something else, which demands our anxious thought, though men in general disregard it through ignorance or unbelief...When the soul has quitted the body, there will be held a trial and investigation of its deserts....The everlasting existence of the soul is to its detriment in this respect, that its imperishable faculty of feeling makes it subject to everlasting punishment. Know then that we have good cause for fear and dread, and need to be on our guard, lest we should be involved in such a doom as this. Those who disbelieve will, after they have sinned, be forced to believe; they will be convinced, not by words, but by hard facts, not by threats, but by suffering the punishment in very deed. All things are known to God, and the punishments inflicted will vary in accordance with the character of men's offences.

—HERMES

THE ROAD TO TRUE HAPPINESS

PURSUIT of happiness is universal. Wish to live, struggle to avoid pain and death, and to seek self-satisfaction is common to man and beast alike. Even in mineral kingdom, every atom is instinct with a life of its own. These atoms exhibit unmistakable intelligence and unvarying law, in the way they associate and dissociate to form compounds, indicating universal harmony and eternal order inherent in the universe. Mineral substances, considered inorganic by modern science, have in them the potentiality of higher forms of life, towards which they unconsciously grow and evolve. Plants and animal world exhibit the instinct of self-preservation and are well known to feel pleasure and pain, seek conditions conducive to their growth and well-being and avoid those adverse to them. Humans too, exhibit not only the same instinct of self-fulfilment, but also display a much wider and deeper capacity for feeling than the lower kingdoms because of well-developed mind, which in the animal world is dormant. The mysterious principle of self-consciousness or *Manas* is the bridge that spans the impassable chasm between the animal below and the omniscience and omnipotence of Spirit above, making animal man human. Man has a free will and the inherent capacity to raise himself to the stature of god-hood or sinking lower than the beast.

What is the object of life? The object of life is happiness. We are born in this body and exist in the world because we are in pursuit of happiness. The desire to live and enjoy (*tanha* or *trishna*) is a powerful, resistless creative force that brings us back into life again and again. Happiness is pursued at various levels. Some seek it in gratification of sense pleasures and their physical appetites; some seek it in a secure and comfortable family life and an assured career. Those, not content with mere corporeal satisfaction, seek happiness in intellectual pursuits, artistic and creative works, in ambition to lead and to be loved. Yet others possessed of highly tuned minds, seek happiness at the spiritual level with a purified mind. The subtler

the level of activity the more expansive and the more deeply satisfying is the happiness. In other words, all are seeking lasting happiness, free from all that which mars its uninterrupted enjoyment; all are seeking *freedom* and *self-fulfilment*.

Why? It is “the philosophy of that law in Nature, which implants in man as well as every beast a passionate, inherent and instinctive desire for freedom and self-guidance” (*S.D.*, II, 484). All beings are emanations of, essentially one with, and are diverse expressions of One Life, which the mystics have found in the depths of their own being, to be Compassion Absolute, Eternal Harmony, the Law of Love Eternal and the LAW of all Laws. Having emanated from the One, descended into and clothed with matter, *i.e.*, “having assumed life in this world of conditioned existence,” they lose the memory of their spiritual origin and divine potentiality. Yet, by the inherent law of their being, they are incessantly striving to recover the lost spiritual freedom and bliss, which is the true nature of their essential being. “Separation from the *Primal Source having once occurred, Re-union can only be achieved by Will—Effort*” (*S.D.*, II, 246). This is the law of involution and evolution.

But happiness eludes and reunion is prevented by the power of illusion of Matter (*Prakriti*), in which the being is clothed as embodied self. This illusion proceeds from human nature itself, having its source and sustenance in spiritual ignorance (*Avidya*). Illusion (*Maya*) is the perceptive faculty of every Ego that considers itself a Unit separate from, and independent of, the One infinite and the eternal SAT. It is the feeling of being separate and distinct from all else, giving rise to Egotism, which is selfishness. This is the real curse of man. It renders man blind to the truth of his celestial Immortal Self and the spiritual unity that binds all in Universal Brotherhood. Hence all seek happiness in the fulfilment of personal desires in the objects of the senses. Selfish action necessarily brings in its wake the inevitable reaction in pain and suffering, and a thirst for life in personal sensation and satisfaction. Thus, the Ego is bound in the network of its own desires due to the Law of Retribution (or Karma)

inherent in all beings. “It [Karma] is the power that controls all things, the result of moral action, the metaphysical *Samskara*, or the moral effect of an act committed for the attainment of something which gratifies personal desire.” (*The Theosophical Glossary*, pp. 173-4)

It is said that behind will stands desire. We feel a sense of satisfaction and joy when we obtain the object of our desire. But the happiness so obtained is always temporary. The world of manifestation being pervaded by pairs of opposites (*dvandva*) happiness is unavoidably followed by, and often swallowed up in, its opposite, *i.e.*, sorrow and pain. Pleasure itself ends, after a while, in weariness and satiety, and we seek other avenues for happiness. We ceaselessly oscillate between pleasure and pain, ever failing in our quest to perpetuate possession of uninterrupted happiness. Moreover, our most cherished object of personal happiness invariably ends in death of the body. Even the post-mortem heavenly bliss that the Ego enjoys—being the Karmic reward for our purer aspirations and nobler impulses in our life—has an end, and we are drawn back irresistibly to terrestrial life of weal and woe. So we turn the wheel of life, hugging and kissing its spokes of agony, as the Buddha said, in an interminable cycle of birth and death, through aeons of time.

Thus, happiness that we so ardently strive to obtain eludes us continually. Life itself is teaching us the lesson again and again that to work for one’s own self is to work for disappointment, driving us to seek and search for *true* happiness.

After aeons of experience, the embodied self comes to realize that true happiness is to be found only in that which is beyond time and change, which is our eternal changeless Self, the Self of All. There is a realization that we are inseparable fragments of the whole and that Universal Brotherhood is not a theory but the very truth of our real being. That is the goal towards which all are tending—reunion with the “primal source” from which we, as spiritual beings, emanated. The Ego can never be content, never can secure permanent peace, with anything less than complete reunion, which

is identification with the whole of humanity. It is the death of selfishness and rebirth into Eternal Spirit. This is the lesson we are all learning in the school of life through life’s experiences, and the goal towards which we are moving.

The final goal cannot be reached in any way but through life experiences...the bulk of these consists in pain and suffering. It is only through the latter we can learn. Moreover, our constant failure to obtain any permanent satisfaction in life which would meet the wants of our higher nature, shows us plainly that those wants can be met only on their own plane, to wit—the spiritual. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 225)

Hence true happiness is to be found only in Self-knowledge. Spiritual knowledge is to be obtained and spiritual unity is to be discerned with a purified understanding. “Know that the wisdom which perceives in all nature one single principle, indivisible and incorruptible, not separate in the separate objects seen, that knowledge is of the *sattva* quality” (*Gita*, XVIII). With this higher understanding, we must begin to think and act from the basis of True Self, to live for the highest good of our fellowmen and fellow-creatures, free from thoughts of personal interest. It is renunciation of personality and personal concerns in performance of duties of life. It is a gradual change in our world-view and values, as a result of an expansion of our consciousness from “personal-self” orientation into Impersonal Self which is universal, and which includes all; from thought and action, from the motive of self-benefit to that of Impersonal Love and Altruism.

The man who knoweth the Supreme Spirit, who is not deluded, and who is fixed on him, doth not rejoice at obtaining what is pleasant, nor grieve when meeting what is unpleasant. He whose heart is not attached to objects of sense finds pleasure within himself, and, through devotion, united with the Supreme, enjoys imperishable bliss. (*Gita*, V)

THOUGHTS ON “THROUGH THE GATES OF GOLD”

III

ONE of the author’s main contentions is that a time comes in the life of almost every person when inner development ceases and he seeks to repeat the old excitements of former experience. Life becomes limited to the “known,” and there is holding on to the “familiar.” One begins to live, as in a shell or a cocoon, reluctant to take the next step. In the chapter, “The Initial Effort,” the author says, “He [man] must burst the shell that holds him in darkness, tear the veil that hides him from the eternal, at any point where it is easiest for him to do so; and most often this point will be where he least expects to find it.” Any intellectual, emotional or moral conditioning confines us within a “shell” and prevents our touching the essence of our nature. Each one has a kind of “heart shell” in which he lives in a world of his own, and he often does not know the real outside world till the shell is broken and he can see the real world as it is, without any veils of illusion or delusion. Knowledge often breaks the shell but it is not the real breaker. What breaks the shell is the accumulation of knowledge and the aspiration to use that knowledge for helping suffering humanity. Hence, devotion to the interest of a few individuals or even a single individual is of great help in breaking the “shell.”

The bursting of the shell, that confines and limits us, can happen in more than one way. *Light on the Path* says, “Seek out the way.” Seeking the way means choosing to leave behind sense-life and pursuing soul-life. It means looking for the real in the ever-changing and the evanescent world. But we are also told to “Seek the way by retreating within. Seek the way by advancing boldly without.” By just retreating within, there is the danger of becoming self-centred; and merely advancing without could take one to the other extreme of getting too involved in mundane life. There has to be a balance, so that we participate in all human experiences while remaining detached from our personal predilections, biases and outer

circumstances and at the same time turn within and inspect our motives, thoughts, feelings and actions.

In attempting to live the spiritual life, we are conditioned by our temperament. Left to ourselves, we are inclined to follow any *one* road that suits us the best. A person chooses to follow the Path of knowledge, action or devotion, depending upon his temperament. In the article, “Religion and Temperament,” Aldous Huxley quotes the psychologist Sheldon, who shows that any given individual is a mixture, in varying proportions, of three physical and three psychological components. The three psychological components are viscerotonic, somatotonic, and cerebrotonic. The Path of Devotion is the path followed by the person in whom viscerotonic component is high. Viscerotonic traits are, love for food, comfort, uninhibited expression of emotions, fear of solitude, etc. The Path of Action is preferred by the person of somatotonic temperament, characterized by craving for action, and who always feels the need to “do something.” The person of cerebrotonic temperament having the tendency towards thought, imagination and self-analysis is naturally drawn to the Path of Knowledge.

Light on the Path says that we cannot reach the goal by following any one road. Thus:

To each temperament there is one road which seems the most desirable. But the way is not found by devotion alone, by religious contemplation alone, by ardent progress, by self-sacrificing labour, by studious observation of life. None alone can take the disciple more than one step onwards. All steps are necessary to make up the ladder. (p. 5)

Through the Gates of Gold mentions that people attempt to break the shell and reach the goal in three ways: by religion, by pure intellect or by virtue. Each by itself is not only insufficient, but may even tend to retard the progress. For instance, when one fails to grasp the *spirit* of the scriptures and clings only to their superficial and dead-letter interpretations, he is more likely to be given over to superstition and dogmatism. Religion often makes fetters of the worst kind—by

rituals, ceremonies dogmas and superstition, so that instead of freeing a man, it tends to fetter him. It might take ages to fill up the grooves created by religion. *Through the Gates of Gold* is practical and logical, but now and then, we come across statements which give a rude shock to some of our firmly rooted false beliefs. It is not easy to recover from the shock and it is likely to set us thinking seriously. One such statement is: “Religion holds a man back from the path and prevents him from stepping forward for various plain reasons. First, it makes the vital mistake of distinguishing between good and evil. Nature knows no such distinctions.” In other words, religion teaches *categorical* morality. Good and Evil are only relative terms, because even in what may be described as an out and out evil act, there is an opportunity to turn the corner. It is the motive and the inner state of the person that makes the action good or evil.

The way cannot be found by pure intellect. Great is the debt we owe to philosophers and metaphysicians who have prevented the race from sinking into utter sensuousness. But, pure intellect arises from and is restricted to brain-consciousness. Intuition is the faculty of the soul and soars far higher than the tardy processes of ratiocination. Similarly, incredulity is a form of mental indolence, wherein one refuses to believe in things of spirit. In time, people come to pride themselves on being skeptics and call it reign of reason. The author says that decay follows the condition of inaction, whether it is mental, psychic or physical. H.P.B. points out that our scientists, who refuse to go beyond that which can be experienced using five senses, fall in this category. “The field of scientific investigation is bounded on all sides by physical nature.” Anything that cannot be weighed, reasoned, analyzed or classified, is rejected. The tongue appreciates the sweetness of food, but “the sweetness on the face of a lovely woman, or in the smile of a friend, is recognized by the man whose inner senses have even a little—a mere stirring of—vitality.” Besides the physical senses there are psychic and spiritual senses. The most beautiful things in the world are not to be *seen* but *felt*.

It is not regular performance of *puja* (worship) or reciting of prayers that makes one spiritual. So too, it is not enough to live a virtuous life. The book says, “Spirit is not the gas created by matter.” If we burn or heat the matter, *i.e.*, get rid of our vices and replace them by virtues, it does not make us spiritual. Spirituality is not merely *absence* of vice or abstaining from evil but calls for the presence of the feeling of self-sacrifice, humility, unity, etc., else there will be great spiritual darkness. It is quite possible to be like Mejnour in *Zanoni*, whose wisdom is of no benefit to humanity. Bulwer Lytton describes him by saying, “He asks no charity and gives none—he does no evil and seems to confer no good.” Having attained to wisdom he denies his relationship with humanity. Jesus said that if you love those who love you what merit do you have? To be *spiritual* is to be able to love unconditionally. As one progresses spiritually, he is called upon to cultivate universal, impersonal love. When the heart is full of concern for one’s near and dear ones, what concern will there be for the whole of humanity? Is it easy to surrender our interest for the happiness of others? Therefore, *Light on the Path* says that there is a great gulf between the good man and the sinner, but it is greater between the good man and the spiritual man, and immeasurable between the good man and the one on the threshold of divinity. It is not enough to set an example of a pure and virtuous life. It is essential that we acquire spiritual knowledge so that we are able to support the weak and show them the cause and cure of their suffering.

Cant and hypocrisy are called unpardonable sins. Cant is insincere moral talk. It is easy to *speak* of morality without attempting to practice. Carlyle says, “The end of man is an *action* and not a *thought*, though it were the noblest.” It is easy to speak of duty and virtues but without *practice*, it is useless. There is always the danger of deluding others and ourselves, into believing that we have made great progress, just because we *preach* morality. *Through the Gates of Gold* cautions us of another danger. The author says that by practice of virtue we might fetter ourselves into one groove, one

changeless way of living the life. For instance, there could be over-anxious insistence on the virtues of accuracy or punctuality, so that there is rigid adherence to an immutable time-table. Some people feel lost unless they get up at the same time, eat at exactly the same time, and follow the same daily routine. These are *slaves* rather than *masters* of punctuality—slaves to automatic action of the bodily atoms. A doctor cannot be rigidly punctual like an office employee, because he may be called upon to attend an emergency case, while on his way to his clinic. Unlike the person who practises virtue *mechanically*, the person who has sinned deeply and is steeped in selfish gratification, stands better chance of entering spiritual life because sooner or later, he wakes up, either through satiation in pleasures, or through severe consequences for his evil actions.

Some of us practice our own brand of purity and morality, and look upon it as a ticket to heaven. “It is easy to become a gourmand of pure living and high thinking as in the pleasures of taste or sight or sound. Gratification is the aim of the virtuous man as well as of the drunkard.” (*Through the Gates of Gold*, pp. 33-34)

(*To be continued*)

THE practice of *Samadhi* is like that of shooting. An inexperienced archer will at first practice shooting at a large target, next a small one, and finally hit the bull’s-eye. He will train himself to hit an object by making it smaller and smaller, first a coin, then a stick, then a few hairs, then a single hair, then a tenth, a hundredth and finally a thousandth of a hair. Thus having increased in skill, he will be able, as quick as thought, to hit a thing, no matter how small, so that even if he only heard the voice of a man or an animal sounding in the dark, he would be able at once to locate it and hit it without fail.

— *Ryogon Sutra*

ON HIDDEN TREASURES AND CURSES

THERE are several fascinating accounts of hunting of buried treasures. One of them is Captain Kidd’s mythical treasure. The story goes that William Kidd, the Captain of a British ship and his men buried a chest of pirated gold on Clarke’s Island, which lies in the Connecticut River in Northfield, Massachusetts. One of the team members was killed and buried with the chest, to protect the treasure from the treasure-hunters. Over the years a legend grew up around the treasure—the gold could be dug up only by three people, at midnight, when the full moon was directly overhead. They must form a triangle around the exact spot and work in absolute silence. It is said that after hours of digging, when a team of three treasure-hunters hit the chest, one of them exclaimed, “We have hit it!” To their dismay, the chest immediately began to sink out of reach.

When a person buries or loses a large sum of money, jewels or precious things, his desires are fastened to that which he has lost or hidden. The cause for the hiding and the thoughts of the person determine whether the treasure will remain concealed forever or would be found by others. How do the thoughts and desires of people bring about the concealment of the treasure? Every person has about him a sphere, or fluid or energy in which are found, units of life energy, called elementals or “lives.” They are coloured by or impressed with thoughts, feelings and desires of the person. Anything worn by a person, a ring, watch, bracelet or clothes is soaked with magnetic fluid or magnetism of the person. It is through this magnetic fluid that elementals have a link with anything worn by the person. When one of these objects is suddenly dropped, the elementals are drawn after it by attraction, covering the object. In many cases they completely envelop the object, so that, although it is near at hand, it cannot be seen. Often, when we drop an earring or a ring, it takes a long time to find it again. As the magnetism wears off and the power of the elementals to hide the object weakens, the object becomes

visible. The thoughts and desires also play a role in concealment. The same rule applies to the concealment of buried treasures. When a ship carrying a treasure sinks, the influences are very powerful, because then the elementals concealing the treasure are gathered from all the persons connected with the treasure. Often, these elementals influence the animals. As a result, wild animals and poisonous snakes surround the spot where the treasure is buried, preventing any person from approaching or finding it. Forces of air and water further aid in concealment, through thunderstorms, heavy rains or gale.

In some cases, very strong desires are fastened to the buried treasure and the person or persons burying the treasure may have wished that the treasure must be restored back to them and none other. In the article, "Can Stones Carry a Curse?" (*The Theosophical Movement*, January 1959), mention is made of the 44 1/2-carat blue Hope diamond, which was taken to France, in 1642, by a French Adventurer, Jean Tavernier, from Krishna river mines in India. Some say that it was dislodged from the forehead of an idol. Whatever may be the truth, tragedy or great misfortune has befallen many of its possessors. These disasters have included being torn to pieces by wild dogs (Tavernier's fate), murder, suicide, fatal accident, destitution, and, in the case of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, death on the guillotine. One of the explanations is to be found in the power of human will, which is described as the greatest of all magnets. H.P.B. points out that by a determined concentration of the will, an inert object, such as stone or paper or cloth could be imbued with protective or destructive power. A talisman is a piece of cloth or paper or stone which is imbued with pure magnetism and carries potency for good so as to protect the person carrying it, from every evil influence and calamity. On the other hand, a curse laid on the inert object could bring about disasters on the possessor of the object.

In such things, thoughts of the dying person also play an important role. For instance, it is a well-known fact that Lord

Carnarvon and 14 others, after the opening of the tomb of Tut-Ankh-Amen, met with mysterious deaths. There is also the case of Sir Alexander Seton and his wife, who brought back with them as a souvenir, a bone from a tomb, near the Great Pyramid in Egypt. First Sir Alexander fell ill, then his wife, their child, the nurse and the maid. He was unsuccessful in sending back the bone to Egypt. Finally, the glass case containing the bone and the bone itself were found broken into pieces. Sir Alexander concluded that Egyptians had power of cursing any one who disturbed their earthly remains. The disasters may be ascribed to the elementals that guard the earthly remains of the dead, and act in accordance with the wish of the dying.

Another explanation for the disaster befalling the possessors of precious stones, gold or money is in terms of property of inert objects to retain the impressions of the events. Consider the case of the above-mentioned blue Hope diamond. Every time the person who possessed the diamond met with a calamity, the diamond would retain the impressions of those occurrences. Such impressions or vibrations draw in their turn corresponding powers from the invisible atmosphere, union with which produces good or bad results.

The fact, that not all who came to possess the blue Hope diamond met with disaster, shows that karma as well as character and motive of the person play an important role. The golden rule is, never covet anything that does not belong to you. On the other hand, the loser of the wealth must cultivate detachment for the lost treasure or wealth, and in fact, strongly desire that it may be found and used by another for beneficent purposes. We are told that Masters or Adepts can command these elementals and obtain large sums of money on which no living person or his descendants have slightest claim. But these Adepts make use of such wealth for the good of humanity. There is an instance in history, where Raymond Lully, a Rosicrucian and a Cabalist, supplied six million pounds to King Edward I of England, to carry on war with the Turks.

Mr. Judge points out that there is a curse attendant upon money.

That is because although money could be and has been used by some to benefit humanity, very few have the attitude of “trusteeship” towards their wealth. Often, a wealthy person is tempted to exercise power on the beneficiary or ask for something in return for the monetary favour. Unless a person has developed sufficient detachment, very strong and peculiar feelings get attached with wealth. There is wisdom in the advice, “Neither lender nor borrower be.” More often than not, wealth or money is at the base of family feuds and is also the cause of ruining human relationships. So, next time we see a money-purse, nay, even a rupee coin on the road, let us not pick it up unless, we mean to restore it to the owner or use it for helping the needy.

LONG ago the Egyptians appear to have recognized the very principle of which we are now speaking—that their young citizens must be habituated to forms and strains of virtue. These they fixed, and exhibited the patterns of them in their temples; and no painter and artist is allowed to innovate upon them, or to leave the traditional forms and invent new ones. To this day, no alteration is allowed either in these arts, or in music at all. And you will find that their works of art are painted or moulded in the same forms which they had ten thousand years ago....A lawgiver may institute melodies which have a natural truth and correctness without any fear of failure. To do this, however, must be the work of God, or of a divine person; in Egypt they have a tradition that their ancient chants which have been preserved for so many ages are the composition of the Goddess Isis....The love of novelty which arises out of pleasure in the new and weariness of the old, has not strength enough to corrupt consecrated song and dance, under plea that they have become antiquated.

—PLATO

ON SELF-IMPROVEMENT

THE muscles, by use, training and regular exercise, develop strength and are led to greater power or refinement of control. For example, a great runner, or a talented painter or musician, develops, the first, strength and stamina; the second, accuracy of delicate control in hand or voice, in eye or ear. The physical tools and instruments we use are *will-formed*. A man *creates* his own body by his way of living. The muscles, under training, may feel the strain and the ache, and report this to the “centre of consciousness”—but, the dominant determination, the power of the vow made to achieve a chosen goal, overrides this; and the muscles are forced to work, in spite of the strain on them, until they, in self-defence, change, strengthen, improve, become able to stand up to the increased strain, become indifferent to it.

This enables us, perhaps, to illustrate other things. When we are in emotionally painful or distressing circumstances, when the impact of doubt, fear, worry is acutely felt as an inner sensation, either we become confused, confined, restricted, involved by this feeling-emotion, or we decide, at some point, to take positive, active steps to resist it, to try to understand it, to get detached from its oppression. We might then say that we “step aside” from this interior pain. This enables us to seek the cause of our anxiety, to analyse the circumstances that now limit us, and, perhaps, to start asking how to change them, thus improving our future. The principle seems, then, to be that, while at all points we receive impressions which are restrictive, the only way to change these is to become active and to induce corrective action based on sound considerations. We also begin to suspect that “we” are something other than the discomfort-pain. We sense that it, as “feeling,” will in time pass, but “we” continue.

Just as, to meet the greater demands made on it, muscle fibre, at its level of awareness, seeks sustenance from its environment (the body), in the form of increased intake of fluids, usage of nutrients,

excretion of waste matters, etc., so also the feeling nature in us, the psychic being, seeks increased nourishment. It bathes in the fluids of sensation and of the mind; it seeks to improve its intake of ideas, its usage of the memory of its experiences, and its output of impulse to control its environment, wisely and virtuously. If, for it, the process of strengthening is one of learning, of understanding, of transforming itself into a more efficient being, with a wider base of experience to ensure stability, then the aims of living become attuned to co-operative adjustment, conscious and cautious, with its fellows. It perceives itself as one among a grouping of other “selves,” all with the same potentials, but each currently limited to its own inner attitudes, perception and experience.

The mind can be seen to be closely linked with the emotion-sensation aspect of ourselves; and, receiving the impact of these, it may, for a while, be stunned into inaction—into a passive state. Here, too, the power of our determination, the vow to live, to grow, to improve, works on our attitude of mind. Here, too, the mind is found to start a dialogue with itself, with a Self that is inner, that does not change—the permanent Ego, which some call the “intuitive Self,” or the “Higher Self.” It is curious that all men, when pushed to the necessity for mental investigation either perceive that there has to be some inner, transcendent source of their own perception, their own awareness, their own consciousness, or they set up for themselves a wall, a limit they call “pass-not.” This limit may be defined in terms of discomfort, pain, fear, doubt, ignorance; but, essentially, it is a refusal to act (bodily, emotionally or mentally), a condition of passivity, of inactivity. There is, then, a clinging to straws of argument, or to self-imposed limits of consideration. Such persons are like the one in a vast hall, such as the Egyptian hypostyle, where they stop going forward and root themselves to a spot between the vast pillars where the receding columns serve to hide the fane ahead and the entrance behind. The pillars, in their overlapping vastness, serve, in this illustration, to give them the familiar assurance, when looking back from their present position, that there is a

continuity with the past; and intellectually they try to spare themselves the anxiety of the uncertainties of open ground in the future, of having to explore further. When asked why they do this, they generally say they are satisfied with “things-as-they-are,” and are willing to cope with the future as they are thrust against it by the waves of life and its circumstances. The main point is that they are not preparing for the future, nor truly building up the strength needed to handle it when it comes. Like an unused muscle, atrophy sets in on the inner planes of mind and of sensitive consciousness.

It is a self-imposed, psychological impediment that holds one’s consciousness and perceptions within the limits of past experience, whether physical, emotional or intellectual. But, such barriers, preserved for a while, crumble. The “inner mover,” the *real* man, the experienter and recorder of life’s passage, does not stay immobilized in one place. He determines, he vows, he moves ever forward. In the process, his vehicles—muscles, feelings, mind—are subjected to strain and stress. The collective consciousness of these, focussed in what we call “myself” as an *intelligence in a form*, finds itself, then, under the compulsion to grow, to move on. Even the universal phenomenon of death, or change, does not limit our aspirations, our interests, our will to live, to experience to the full all that our lives may hold for us. It is intuitively sensed that there is a permanent, formless part of “ourselves,” that it continues, that it survives, that in it are the records of all our yesterdays, of all that we have undergone. Are we then going to root ourselves in a corner of the pillared hall and circumscribe our life, or shall we move on to newer vistas, perhaps to meet the ultimate secrets of life, the purposeful cause—somewhere, sometime?

Fear, we are told, “kills the will and stays all action.” The power to determine, the impulse to improve, the will to evolve and to grow—all these are dynamic, are energies of life’s processes. They are aspects of the life-force in action. It is subtle, detectable as an effect, understandable as a necessary force; but it cannot be defined and is not limited by time or space. The impulse to improve is the

force of Life. It is universal, impersonal and *real*. It is reflected, is inherent in every form—since a “form” is of necessity a screen of reflection made up of a type of passive substance (that forms a barrier) on any plane of substance and of perception. To illustrate this, let us say that the muscle senses the limitations of its own material, wherein a portion of the universal energy is focused; its work is to oppose the strain imposed on it from without, and to overcome its own limitations, so as to become a more perfect muscle. The emotions sense that they are representatives only of a subtle strain of feeling, that their impact on us in their more sensitive screen throws up image after image of probable cause and anticipated effects. These many feeling-images seize the attention of the mind’s eye and may confuse it, and effort is needed to stop this bewilderment of uncertainty. Again, the Perceiver within, the *real* man, has to use his will to control his feeling-involved mind, to limit its wandering involvements, to select a subject and to develop understanding of it on the plane of mind-thought now made placid by control.

The Perceiver alone *is*. It uses the instruments, and develops in them, through usage, intelligent replicas of itself. No “form” is ever completely done away with. Its components may be dispersed, but the subtle links of attraction, of common unity, remain. They are ever and eternally a part of Nature as a whole, every being standing as a small image of the grand whole, apparently a unit, yet always conjoined at all points with others. Each being, then, stands midway on the path of its evolution, and this evolution links it to others. It progresses in company with its fellows, high or low, near or distant, equals or not—each an emanation of the ONE, each with the potentials of Life as a unit. The purpose of life, then, is to learn, to experience, to understand, to penetrate into the kernel of matter, to detect the soul-of-things there—the synthesis of the ALL.

HE who would be what he ought to be must stop being what he is.

—ECKHART

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

[In this section we seek to answer frequently asked questions, at U.L.T. meetings or during private conversations and discussions with people who seek the answers in the light of Theosophy. Answers given in this section are by no means final. Only a line of thought is being offered by applying general principles of Theosophy.]

Question: Sometimes we do not wish to or are unable to take revenge, but in the heart of our hearts, we wish that the Law of Karma should punish that person. Are thoughts punishable? Are the consequences for the actual act and thought the same?

Answer: The Law of Karma is the law of action and reaction. Every act has a thought at its base. So we say, thoughts are the seeds of Karma. Not only are our actions based on thoughts, but also thoughts are actions on the mental plane. The Law of Karma works on physical, mental, psychic and moral planes. Many times we think but do not translate our thoughts into action.

The consequences for the actual act and the thought are not the same. After all, if we utter angry words, then the person at the receiving end feels angry and we have started chain reaction. But it is quite different when we control our anger. It is one thing to *think* of killing a person or raping a woman and quite another to *actually* kill or rape.

As soon as a thought leaves the brain, it combines with a unit of life energy called an elemental and forms an entity. This “entity” gets its character from us, depending upon the quality of the thought—good or bad. We create with every thought, a demon or an angel. To think angrily or with hate about another is like sending on an invisible plane a tiny man with a stick to beat that person. The length of the life of this “entity” depends upon the intensity of the thought. These “entities” are our creations and we are responsible for them. These thoughts not only help or hinder their creator, but

also are impressed on an invisible register called astral light, forming a common pool of thoughts. The astral light acts as a photographer's sensitive plate. For every action there are two kinds of pictures impressed on the astral light. One picture is for the action and the other is for the thoughts and feelings associated with the act. These pictures in the astral light throw down upon us the suggestion to repeat the same act or thought. Each one of us attracts from this pool, the thoughts that are consubstantial with our nature.

We are judged even for our *thoughts*. Jesus said that he, who looks at a woman to lust after her, has already committed adultery. It would be excellent if we cultivated the habit of thinking only good thoughts. Our unwholesome or evil thoughts of revenge, hatred, jealousy, etc., do not vanish but get impressed on the astral light, and the same could be attracted by another person having similar thoughts, and give him an added impulse in that direction. Many times the person confesses that the suggestion to crime came from some unknown source. Theosophy teaches that selfish thoughts of millions of men and women get impressed on the "lives" of the earth, till a point of explosion is reached, expressing itself in natural calamities, such as, earthquakes, tidal waves, tornadoes, etc.

However, we must take into account the *quality* of thoughts. At times, these thoughts are not intense and powerful. When H.P.B. was asked whether our thoughts are punishable, she replied that our still-born (weak) thoughts are not punishable, but we are punished for "silent" but potentially strong and intense thoughts. For instance, if a person wishes for death of another and if he has strong Will and Imagination then his thought may bear fruit, bringing harm to another person. This is described as the power of the "evil eye," which is the destructive power of thought. But in case the person lacks strong Will and Imagination, evil thoughts come back to injure him, like the arrow returning back to the shooter, or a ball rebounding back from the wall.

In a way, abstaining from taking revenge, knowing that the Law would punish the wrongdoer, is expressing one's faith in the Law,

because the Law is just and impersonal. But in *wishing* that the Law should punish the person, we are still being uncharitable. When children fight, the weaker child who is not able to give back to the strong fellow says, "I will show you when my big brother comes in the evening." That is how we seem to be doing when we wish Law of Karma to take revenge. If we want to end enmity, from our side at least, we must wish the other person well and be full of goodwill towards him. As Mr. Judge suggests, by being charitable to a person who is inimical to us, we diminish one-third of this enmity.

Question: What is *Buddhi* and how does it unfold?

Answer: Man is sevenfold and *Buddhi* is one of the seven principles. *Buddhi* is the spiritual soul, *Manas* is the human soul and *Kama* (passions and desires), animal soul. *Atman* is described as universally diffused *divine principle*, and is "neither your spirit nor mine, but like sunlight shines on all." Like the lens focuses sunlight, producing a bright spot, so *Buddhi* acts as the vehicle of *Atman*. In conjunction, these two are one, impersonal and without any attributes, on our plane. Also, these two principles, however potent on their own plane are ineffective on this plane, *i.e.*, the potentialities of our divine nature cannot find expression, unless they are assimilated by and reflected in some consciousness, and that is *Manas*. It is *Buddhi-Manas* which forms the Reincarnating Ego in man, which survives death.

Buddhi acts as a register, storing all the experiences in the lower kingdoms—mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms and then human, until the lighting up of *manas*, after which *manas* becomes the storehouse.

At present, *Buddhi* is passive. It must be activated. *Buddhi* is spiritual consciousness, in it are the seeds of wisdom-compassion. Without *manas*, *Buddhi* cannot be activated. Discrimination or making moral choices is the faculty of *manas*, but spiritual discernment, which involves detachment, is the faculty of *Buddhi*.

Buddhi is the source of intuition. Reasoning is a slow, step by

step process, going from premises to conclusions. Reasoning is like feeling one's way in the dark room, while intuition is like switching on the light and lighting up the entire room. We cannot go very far unless the rational knowledge is supplemented by intuition or insight. This is seen in most of the scientific discoveries. A beautiful piece of poem or prose is the result of intuitive flash.

When there is even temporary conjunction of *Buddhi* with *Manas*, we have flashes of intuition. Intuition cannot be awakened by book study alone. The brain must be given larger view of life by allowing the mind to dwell upon such concepts as Reincarnation, Universal Brotherhood, Karma. Also, for the development of intuitive power, one needs to practice altruism in thought, word and deed.

An aspirant becomes a devotee when mind frees itself from feelings and desires and unites with *Buddhi*. It is the awakening of *Buddhi* that is termed as awakening of *Kundalini*. *Kundalini* is one of the mystic "Yogi powers." "It is *Buddhi* considered as an active instead of passive principle. It is an electro-spiritual force, a creative power which when aroused into action can as easily kill as it can create" (*The Voice of the Silence*, p. 10 fn.). *Buddhi* conceals a mystery, which is never given to any one, with the exception of irrevocably pledged *chelas*, or those who can be safely trusted. That mystery is directly concerned with the power of projecting one's astral body, consciously and at will. Since this power could very easily be misused and could prove fatal to others and to the possessor, it is carefully guarded. H.P.B. compares it to the "ring of Gyges." The story of the "ring of gyges," shows how dangerous is the knowledge of certain powers, in the hands of morally impure. According to the tradition, Gyges was a shepherd in the service of the king of Lydia. When he came in possession of the ring, which could make him invisible, he used it to meet the queen and seduce her, and then with her help conspired against the king and slew him, usurping his kingdom. Thus, it is very difficult to resist the temptation of using the powers selfishly.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Paradoxically, an amputee frequently reports a sensation of pain in a missing limb. Working with U.S. combat veterans, Vilayanur Ramachandran, director of Centre for Brain and Cognition, at the University of California, San Diego, conducted a series of experiments to better understand why these feelings of pain arise and how they might be eliminated. Ramachandran has found that an amputee could be "cured" of phantom limb pain by tricking the brain into reacting to the sight of someone else performing soothing, massage-like gestures. When two volunteers with an amputated hand watched a third person's hand being stroked, they also began to feel a similar sensation in their absent limb. One of the subjects reported that when he watched someone rub his hands together, it helped to stop the cramping pain in his amputated hand for 15 minutes. "If you do it often enough perhaps this pain will go away for good. . . . If performed early enough, this type of therapy may also be used to help stroke patients regain movements by watching others perform their lost actions," Ramachandran told *New Scientist*, the British Weekly. He seeks to explain the phenomenon on the basis of "mirror" neurons in the brain. (*The Times of India*, March 21, 2008)

Our physical body is built on a design body called astral body, which is the model for the physical body. The astral body is made up of matter of very fine texture, with great tensile strength and it is electromagnetic in nature. The astral body of the child in the womb is connected with mother's imagination. If the mother vividly imagines that her child would be born without a leg, then her strong imagination would act on the astral leg of the developing baby in her womb, so as to cut off or shrivel it up. As a result, the physical molecules having no model of leg to work on make no physical leg. But when a person feels the presence of a limb, which the surgeon has cut off, it is because its astral counterpart (leg, arm or fingers, as the case may be) have not been interfered with. This is because knife or acid cannot injure the astral model. Thus, it is not surprising

that a man whose physical arm or leg has been cut off still feels pain, because the astral arm or leg is still present, and can be affected by thoughts, because the astral body has a complete system of nerves and arteries of its own.

Our ideas and imagination first affect the astral body and then, through it, the physical. For instance, ecstatic, fanatical women and men, by constant brooding on the picture of wounds of Jesus, imprinted the picture deeply on their own astral body. Then internal impressions and stimulus were projected to the surface, developing similar wounds on their own body. In *Isis Unveiled*, H.P.B. mentions that when a person witnessed deep wounds being inflicted by one soldier on the body of another soldier, he was so dreadfully frightened that when he reached home, the same wounds broke out on his body. The fact that astral limbs, and hence, the phantom limbs could be affected by *imagination*, might explain how pain in the phantom limb could be cured by the sight of a soothing massage being performed on the limb of another person.

Often, we carry with us feelings of pain, shame, guilt and anger, as a result of traumatic experiences in the past. These bottled-up feelings could be released through “talk-therapy,” *i.e.*, sitting face to face with an empathetic therapist and talking and re-living one’s experiences and complex feelings. One can also release these powerful feelings by putting them down on the paper. However, these methods are not found to be effective in letting go of the resentment, anger and the desire to avenge those who caused us damage. Forgiving is the one and only one escape route for chronic anger. We may ask, why forgive? The answer is, it is in *our* self-interest to do so, because holding in hurt and anger keeps us in a negative state, and delays the process of healing. The next question is, how to forgive? We must *wilfully* abandon resentment and anger, and compassionately put ourselves in the offender’s shoes. “No one was ever born a rapist, a sadist or a murderer. Those who have

caused you pain, shame, humiliation and/or anger are themselves coming from a place of great darkness.” We must exercise empathy. “Had I been in their place, might I also not have become what they became?” There are examples of people, who have forgiven the worst of offences. Gladys Staines, whose priest husband and two sons were murdered by youths in Orissa, said that she had forgiven the murderers, because forgiving brings healing, and liberates both the forgiver and the forgiven. Forgiving someone is not a sign of weakness, but that of strength. “And when you forgive, you are the biggest winner of all,” writes Nirmala Wilson, a counselling psychologist. (*Health and Nutrition*, November 2007)

Lord Buddha says that when our mind is tied with the intention of retaliation all our mental energies are taken up by that single emotion, destroying inner peace. On the other hand, when someone shows charity and forgiveness, the relief and lightness experienced on both sides is like coming across a sunny patch while walking in a dark forest. We may condemn the *act* but not the *actor*. Forgive, forgive and largely forget, says H.P.B. Some of us cannot forgive and forget for many years and many months. Gradually, we must discipline ourselves and learn to forgive in a few days, then within few minutes, and so on. There is this suggestive verse in the Lord’s Prayer, which says: “Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us.” Mr. Judge says, “The very fact that the oppressor, the unjust, the wicked, live out their lives is proof of mercy in the great heart of Nature. They are thus given chance after chance to retrieve their errors and climb...to the height of perfection.”

Are animals capable of committing suicide? Is it not true that only intelligent life can have the ability to end itself? However, it has been found that the donkeys in Sudan are so miserable that they end their lives. A donkey, still tethered to the water cart it was pulling, ran towards the Nile and as he approached the banks, he plunged

into the mighty river, and died. Another donkey preferred to be beaten to death by its master than to continue with its wretched life. Shirin Merchant, a behaviour counsellor and canine trainer, points out that she has seen dogs with obsessive compulsive disorders, and dogs going into depression, but she has never encountered suicide case. She insists that suicide is a human concept. Dr. V. N. Appaji Rao, Vice-Chairman, Animal Welfare Board of India, believes that animals cannot come to a judgment that their lives are miserable, since they do not have the ability to store memory of events. On the other hand, Jigeesha Thakore, Secretary of the All India Animal Welfare Association, observes that old dogs have been known to leave their territory and go to a secluded place when they near their end. Probably they are only following their primal instincts to seek out the safety of isolation. Abodh Aras, CEO of Welfare for Stray Dogs, an NGO, says that perfectly healthy dogs stop eating for more than a week after being abandoned, and were later found dead. Whales are known to beach themselves. Chhatrapati Shivaji's dog had jumped into funeral pyre when the remains of Shivaji were being burned. It is widely accepted that animals love, hate, get hurt and even exhibit some sort of personality traits, but it is not clear if animals are aware of the concept of death, writes Priyanko Sarkar. (*Sunday Times of India*, March 23, 2008)

It is not always possible to ascertain and explain animal behaviour. Though now considered to be a myth, many people believed that Lemmings, rodents near the arctic, commit "mass suicide," when they migrate, or when their population grows too large. It is explained that when large migrating groups near the cliff, overlooking the ocean, they jump off the cliff and start swimming, and often die of exhaustion.

In both man and animals there is a strong instinct for self-preservation. Just as human beings are often seen to override that strong instinct and give up their own lives for the sake of another, so too, there are instances of tamed animals instinctively rushing to the protection of their masters, unmindful of their own lives. We are

continually affecting animals through our thoughts and feelings. Hence, Mr. Judge points out that man is responsible for ferocious and noxious animals, for the deadly serpents and scorpions. Unknowingly, some of the human tendencies are passed on to the animals, living in close proximity of humans. Recently, in Kerala, when a person killed a female elephant, her mate hid in the thicket, for several days, and one day when he was returning home alone, this elephant attacked and killed him. Taking revenge in this fashion seems to be a purely human trait. Both in human beings as well as animals there is a fight or flight tendency and hence what appears to be a suicide might only be an act of *instinctive escaping* from the unpleasant environment. Often, dogs pine away after the death of their masters; some species of birds are known to pine away after the death of the mate. Let us be compassionate and caring in our treatment of animals. We are our Brother's Keepers, which includes plants, animals and the whole of creation.

Though, the Oxford dictionary defines "space" as an unused, unfilled gap between two or more objects, today that word has acquired a different connotation, psychologically. "Space" is an area where one nurtures one's inner call, which may not have anything to do with spirituality *per se*. It could be keeping some time for oneself, for the purpose of introspection or for doing something one loves to do. In today's stressed and competitive life, there is also the need for "space" like never before, writes Sudeshna Chatterjee (*Sunday Times of India*, March 9, 2008). We are also in need to create an identity of our own, and hence the need for space calls for greater attention. During happy and favourable periods, we need space to appreciate how important is the moment or people for us. Likewise, during unhappy times, space is needed for an urgent introspection to understand where one is going wrong and take remedial steps. Often, parents fail to give enough space to their

children. They want to live their unfulfilled aspirations through their children, driving them to the edge, and at times, even to committing suicide. In the office environment, giving “space” to the colleagues means allowing them to talk, to take their time, to let them think and try their own way. Numerologist, Sunita Menon, believes that too much space or too little space, both spell disaster for any relationship, because then the people involved drift.

One should devote some time everyday, for quiet introspection and self-examination. It is necessary for self-improvement. It is during such quiet reflection that we become aware of our weaknesses, mistakes and also our strengths. We all need “space,” to enable us to connect with our divine source. When we are alone with our Self, we receive valuable guidance and insight into life’s problems. Lord Buddha advises us to build an island of “pure thoughts” that we can draw strength from, in our times of need.

Even physically, we need space. For instance, if the house is too small and over-crowded, we are not able to do much work. The atmosphere in the house gets claustrophobic. On the other hand, if we are alone, in a vast empty space, we may feel frightened. There are people, who suffer from agoraphobia, the fear of open spaces.

In one sense, every individual is undergoing an independent evolution, and must be allowed enough freedom to think for himself and make his own decisions. Even when two people are in love, it is not necessary to share one’s innermost experiences, especially, one’s most intimate thoughts and feelings, with the partner. At the root of many broken relationships is over-possessiveness. Speaking of marriage, Kahlil Gibran says: “Let there be spaces in your togetherness. Love one another, but make not a bond of love: Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Fill each other’s cup but drink not from one cup.”

DIFFICULTIES and friction are the accompaniments of existence.

—W. Q. JUDGE