

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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THE POWER OF CHOICE

DO WE have the power of choice or does life unfold according to some pre-determined plan or decree? Determinism is the doctrine that man does not have free will or power of choice because everything is pre-determined. It is evident that choice making is an integral part of our daily lives. We are confronted with a series of choices, such as, what we shall have for breakfast; what clothes we shall wear to office, what time we shall leave home, what work we will give priority to, and so on. Some choices are simple, to eat bread or pizza? Some are agonizingly difficult, to break up in a relationship or patch up? How to make the right or good choice is a crucial question. Should we trust our hearts to make the right choices, or should we be ruled by our heads?

Choice making involves certain amount of deliberation, as every choice has pros and cons associated with it. It is wise to reflect and weigh: what could be the probable impact, short-term and long-term, of the course that one may choose. Good choices play a crucial role in making our lives worthwhile and satisfying. Sometimes we make choices which bring immediate pleasure or benefit, which is only short-term, and end in long-term discomfort and pain. For example, the choice of over-eating one's favourite dish, that results in a severe stomach problem. But then there are choices which cause inconvenience and hardship but bring long-term benefit. For example, the choice of travelling long distance, for a few years, for

the sake of education that may result in a satisfying and well-paying job or a career. Some people distinguish between choice and decision. The point of decision is when we decide what we wish to do, after having considered all options.

The power to choose is a priceless human possession, but the knowledge which will enable a human being to benefit from his choice is sadly lacking today. In “*Because—*” *For the Children Who Ask Why* a young girl tells her aunt that it is not hard to choose between doing what is right and what is wrong. But when you have to choose between two things that seem good, does it make any difference which way you choose? The answer given is that whenever we make a choice, one way is always better than the other, whether we are able to see it or not. We can arrive at the *right* choice by asking ourselves some questions: “Which would I *rather* do? Why? Is it easier for *me*? Would the other way make it easier and happier for *others*? Which way will bring most happiness to others, and least inconvenience and discomfort to others?” This is also the way of choosing between right and wrong, because it is not always easy to apply a moral principle.

Often there are tricky situations. In an article that appeared in *The Times of India* (August 1, 2010), we are given the example of a servant who holds a ladder for his master, who is a robber. The servant may justify his act by saying that he is doing it only to keep his job, and that he intends no harm to the person his master is about to rob. We are all guilty of such acts at some time or other, at work or at home. In certain organizations and institutions, such as the military and the police, sometimes there are morally questionable orders, which must be complied else you stand to lose your job. When everyone else in the organization follows the orders obediently, one *refrains* from protesting, considering it futile. It is very difficult to determine in such cases, to what extent the person is morally responsible. It is not always easy to make a choice. Yet, choices have to be made, and what one does is who one is, or at least who one becomes, writes V. Tankha. Since good and evil are relative

terms we must be careful that we do not fall prey to “categorical morality” where things are labelled “right” or “wrong.”

Motive is another important factor to be taken into account in making the moral choice. There are times when we should not rigidly apply moral principles. When there is a pure motive—especially a lofty motive to benefit humanity—without any desire for reward, such choices are likely to be morally true and good. Though we may use *Upaykaushalya* or Skillfulness in action, it may happen that our choice may inconvenience others. For instance, an honest and upright father may decide not to take bribe, but if the family is extremely poor then all the family members have to suffer as a result. But at the same time, he might set an example of integrity and uprightness, which the members of the family may learn to appreciate and emulate in future, with their growing perception. Life is full of difficult choices.

We should not make impulsive decisions. When the decision-making process is analytical, deliberate and “rational,” it allows one to consider the consequences of a decision. But it is a slower process. Moreover, there are situations, where simple reasoning is not enough to help us differentiate between right and wrong. We must watch for heart response. Also, there are situations in which quick decisions have to be made, such as, in the profession of fire fighting. One has to then rely on intuition or gut feeling. When the mind works in conjunction with spiritual nature, it is the creative or intuitive mind, guided from within to make a right choice. If the mind is not completely receptive to guidance from the divine nature, then we would experience what is known as a *hunch*, which is partial reception on part of *manas*. Something within tells us to “do this” or “do not do that.” Some of us have gut feeling or hunch as to the right course of action, even though we are not able to explain why. We just *know*. Intuition soars far above reason as the vision of the high flying eagle soars far above that of the ant crawling on earth.

“Choices are the hinges of destiny,” says Edwin Markham. Destiny and free-will co-exist. A person may think ten times before

he makes a choice, but having made it, that choice becomes his destiny, by which he is bound. Human beings have free will but in making choices and decisions our will is influenced by our preconceptions, biases, educational and cultural background as also the moral values we hold. We are predisposed to making certain choices, driven by the power of our previous choices. For instance, an occasional smoker with confidence in his will power may finally become a habitual smoker, because having chosen to smoke several cigarettes he is only driven by the force of past choices. The fact is that we are conditioned, to an extent, by our previous right or wrong actions so that our present choices are, as it were, determined or influenced by the past. Hence, in a larger context, when applied to moral choices in life, H.P.B. points out that man is a free agent during his stay on earth, but “there are *external and internal conditions* which affect the determination of our will upon our actions.” In other words, the exercise of free will is conditioned or limited by the *external* circumstance, as well as the *inner* capacities and conditions—both being the result of past Karma.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa illustrates it by the example of a cow tethered to a pole with a long rope. The cow feels she is free to roam anywhere but the perimeter of the area in which she can move is fixed. Similarly, he explains, every human being has a free will but the length of rope is governed by God (or Law, based on our previous actions). Karma of previous lives force us in choosing and pursuing a particular career. We may aspire to become a doctor, but if we have brought from the past, delicate nature, so that we faint at the sight of blood, then that “internal” condition will debar us from pursuing that profession. Likewise, if we are born in a poor family, as a result of past karma, then again on account of this “external” restriction, we may be constrained to choose some other career.

When we are debarred from getting what we want in life, “checked by our past karma” and forced to play a humble role, and lead a humble life, we have three courses open to us: We may be disgruntled, sour, resentful at Karma or at people, and waste our

energies in fighting to get to the top. Thus, we engender worse Karma in the future, for our character has been strengthened for evil. *Or*, we may passively put up with the new conditions, doing nothing, and “letting go.” Again, we learn nothing but only strengthen the *tamasic* quality in our character. This is not patient bearing of Karma, but a negative bearing of it. Lastly, we may thank Karma for the opportunity to gain a needed experience and, by putting our will, alongside the will of Nature, *i.e.*, our Karma of the past, we can, not only help our own growth as a soul, but also use the position we are in to help others who surround us, by at least setting a good example.

Similarly, when we are up against a difficult situation or difficult person, instead of our usual reaction of frustration and despair we could always ask, “Why is it that no one else but *I* am put into this situation? Do I perhaps have to learn something from this?” This is the mark of a creative mind. As H.P.B. suggests, we must learn to *act* from within and not just *react* to stimuli from without. Let us learn to *respond*, instead of *reacting*. We should use the apparently bad or heavy Karma as an avenue of service, and while in it, use the opportunity to “point out the way to others.”

In the ultimate analysis, for those who want to grow spiritually, there is no alternative to making choices. It is by exercising the sovereign power of choice that we learn how *not to make mistakes*. We crave for freedom of choice, but many people go through life, without doing their own thinking or making their own choices. They are happy if someone else will tell them what to do and what not to do, in matters moral or otherwise. It is not suggested that others should not be consulted while making any choice, especially moral, but after taking input the final decision must be ours. It could be a suffocating experience, when all our choices are made by someone else.

“The more decisions that you are forced to make alone, the more you are aware of your freedom to choose,” says Thornton Wilder. It is a profound thought, because many of our decisions are made for

us, or are influenced by our education, beliefs, ideas, culture, etc. Our progress depends upon making choices. Theosophy tells us that in the lower kingdoms, evolution proceeds by natural impulse. However, once the human stage is reached, evolution takes place by “self-induced and self-devised efforts,” checked by Karma. Arjuna does not want to fight, but after the eighteenth Discourse of the *Gita*, giving him knowledge, Krishna tells him to “act as seemeth best” to him.

Theosophy teaches that in the middle of the Fifth Round, millions of years later, humanity as a whole will have a fully developed and active *Manas* (mind)—with complete powers and knowledge. Full development of mind will bring with it complete responsibility for the choices made. It is called the “Moment of Choice,” when every unit of the human race will be compelled to make the conscious choice of the *right* or *left* hand path; for good or evil. The choice of *right hand path* will lead to complete and conscious union with *Atman*, and hence conscious immortality, the other to the severance from the divine and hence annihilation.

But that *moment of choice* is made up of, and will be affected by, all the choices we make now. Just as our state after death is determined by our last group of prominent thoughts, and those in turn depend upon the kind of life lived, so also, by our present choices we will determine, in which direction we wish to go. An individual, who takes his evolution into his own hands, need not wait very long. “For the student of occultism it [‘Moment of Choice’] may come in the next instant, or it may come one hundred lives after. But it cannot come this instant unless all the previous lives have led up to it,” writes Mr. Judge.

CHOICE of attention...is to the inner life what choice of action is to the outer. In both cases, a man is responsible for his choice and must accept the consequences, whatever they may be.

—W. H. AUDEN

FOOD FOR THOUGHT THE SHIP OF THESEUS

THE SHIP of Theseus is a ship belonging to a legendary Greek general Theseus, who is supposed to have found the city of Athens. In gratitude, the Athenians dedicated a memorial by preserving his ship where it apparently remained for hundreds of years. However—and here is the catch—with time, some of the wooden planks started rotting. They were gradually replaced with new planks.

The catch is: if you replace one of the planks, is it still the same ship? This question is one of the most interesting problems of identity. What is a physical object? How do things stay the same even after they change? Like what happened to the ship after all its planks had been replaced? Was it still *Theseus*? A similar modern day conundrum goes like this. There is a knife comprising a handle and a blade. After a while the blade breaks, so you replace it with an identical one. Later the handle breaks and you replace that with an identical one too. Now is the knife with the replaced blade and handle the same as the original one? The conundrum then changes track slightly. (Almost) all cells in the human body die after a certain period and are replaced by new ones. So, after all the original cells in the body have been replaced, is the body the same as the old one or is it a new body? Or, more to the point, is it the same person or someone else?

These days the second part of the paradox is posed in a new avatar. A time will come, they say, when artificial (not cloned or transplanted) body parts—like hip replacement or diseased lungs for instance—will replace old, unusable or malfunctioning ones. Hypothetically, if every part is ultimately so replaced (the brain being digitally uploaded), is it the same person it originally was? Or again, is it a person at all any longer? The answer to all these “trick” questions is simple: Yes, it is still the original knife, still the original individual and, yes, still a person even after all body parts have been replaced. To discover why, we need to go back to the *Ship of*

Theseus once again.

Suppose during his own lifetime Theseus himself discovered that one or more planks on his ship were beginning to rot and ordered them replaced? May be he even decided that to make the ship completely battle worthy again the entire wooden superstructure had to be refurbished. It is something like we do when we change the jets in our car or get a new paint job or replace the tyres. Of course the car is still ours. In a similar vein notice how no one asks whether the knife is new or old after say, only the blade is replaced. That is because they take it for granted it is still the old original knife with just one part of it replaced—as indeed it is. Therefore, if it does continue to be the old original knife then how does it matter if yet another part of it—this time the handle—is replaced? What the false paradox overlooks is the fact that although change is inevitable and constant in the parts which make up the whole, the concept of a particular knife, individual or life form that emerges from the totality of those parts is capable of assimilating such changes in its stride to maintain integrity.

In a way, we are like a flowing river. The water in it changes from moment to moment so that, theoretically, we cannot take a second dip in the same river. But we can, because that does not change its identity. Or to paraphrase Tennyson: For cells may come and cells may go, but I go on forever, writes Mukul Sharma.

[Taken from *The Speaking Tree, Sunday Times of India*, November 4, 2018.]

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In the metaphysics of identity, the “Ship of Theseus” or “Theseus’s paradox” is a thought experiment that raises the question of whether a ship—standing for an object in general—that had all of its components replaced, remains fundamentally the same object. Thomas Hobbes, a seventeenth-century English philosopher, introduced a further puzzle, wondering what would happen if the original planks were gathered up after they were replaced, and used

to build a second ship. Hobbes asked which ship, the one in which the planks were replaced, or the “reconstructed” ship, would be the original ship of Theseus? The corollary question is: if it is a new ship when all the parts are replaced, then at what point does it become a “new” ship? Does it become a new ship when all the parts are replaced? If so, then can we say that when it had only one part replaced it was still old ship?

One assumption is that ordinary objects survive gradual change. Thus, for instance, if one of the buttons of the coat is removed we do not destroy the coat. It is still the same coat. On the assumption that the object goes where its parts go, the ship which is built from the parts of the old ship, in exact same arrangement, must be considered identical with the old ship. According to still another view, there is gradual loss of identity. As the parts of the ship are replaced, the identity of the ship gradually changes.

According to Aristotle, four causes describe a thing: *Formal cause* is the design of a thing; *material cause* is the matter of which the thing is made; *efficient cause* is how and by whom the thing is made, and *final cause* is the intended purpose of a thing. According to Aristotle, the “what-it-is” or “identity” of a thing is its “formal cause” or design. Thus, the ship of Theseus is the “same” ship because the design does not change, even though the matter (planks) used to construct it may vary with time. But it can be easily seen that two things having the same *formal cause* or design are not identical—they may be two ships, two cupboards, two machines, etc.

There is a concept called *spatio-temporal* continuity which says that all objects change continuously as they travel through space-time. From time to time, their parts may be replaced, their composition may change. Yet their identity remains.

We can apply this puzzle to human beings. If we take two photographs of a person and place them side by side; one is the photograph of the person as a young child, and other as an old person. Are they the same person? Science tells us that the cells of our body are completely replaced every seven years. Our ideas and

values also change radically from childhood to adult age. Then, should we be held accountable for the actions of another body, or another mind? The Ship of Theseus is the brilliant thought experiment which explores, what makes you, “you”? Is it our body? Is it our mind? Is it our memories? If so, what happens when some of those memories fade?

The word “identity” is derived from the Latin *idem ficare*, means “to make the same as ‘I.’” Thus, to begin with, our body, feelings or our possessions are not “I.” But as we grow, we tend to equate them or associate them with “I.” We identify ourselves with the ever-changing perishable body, with its conditions and relations, which are also ever-changing. We say, “I am happy, or I am sad,” “I am sick, or I am well.” These expressions are because of the self-identifying attachment to some form or conditions which are changing. We were likewise attached to other forms and conditions in the past, and in the future will be attached to another set of forms and conditions. But through all these conditions and forms, which are changing continually, there is that in us, the “we,” which has remained unchanged and unchanging, writes Mr. Crosbie. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, pp. 189-90)

Theosophy distinguishes between two identities, personal and individual. What we call our personal “I” or personality is the complex thought that “I am Mr. Smith,” or “Mrs. Brown.” The feeling of “I am so-and-so,” arises out of a long series of daily experiences strung together by the thread of memory. These experiences produce the sense of *Egoity* only while they last, which we call *personality*. In spite of all the changes, of the cells of the body, ideas, thoughts, feelings, desires and values, we retain the personal identity. We never feel that we are a different person from what we were in childhood, youth and in adult age. We are the same and yet not the same. A man of forty is identical with the youth of eighteen, as far as personality is concerned, and yet “by the continual waste and reparation of his body and change of mind and character, he is a different being,” writes H.P.B. And yet, the

man in his old age reaps the reward or suffering for the thoughts or actions of every previous year of his life.

There is a deeper sense of identity than the feeling, “I am Mr. or Ms. so-and-so.” It is the feeling of “I am I,” which constitutes *true Individuality*. Self-consciousness belongs to man alone, and proceeds from the higher *Manas* (Mind). Hence, unless science admits the existence of lower (animal) and higher (divine) mind in man, free will and higher manifestations of mind will remain a riddle to it. It is the higher mind which enables us to say “I am I,” and in conjunction with *Atma-Buddhi*, becomes the “Individuality” or Reincarnating Ego, or “Hidden Self.” When one wakes up in the morning one does not feel that one is a different person. There is a continuity of consciousness. Even in case of loss of memory, a person may forget his name and address, but he still feels that “I am myself and no other.” A schizophrenic may say, “I am Napoleon,” “I am a railway engine,” “I am a poached egg,” thus showing confusion at the level of personality, but the sense of “I-ness” remains. This feeling of identity is proof of the “Hidden Self.” It is termed as “Soul” and “Perceiver” by Patanjali and it is not dependent on body and brain but works through and feels sublunary things, through its *alter-ego* the (lower) mind.

H.P.B. compares *Individuality* with the actor, and *personality* with the roles played by the actor. In every new birth, there is a “new” personality. This “new” personality in each succeeding re-birth is the aggregate of “*skandhas*,” or the attributes, of old personality. Then the question may be asked whether this new aggregation of *Skandhas* is a new being or not. We then have to answer that “in one sense it is a new being, in another, it is not.” That is because, the new being of the re-birth is the same *individuality*, as before, but not the same *personality*, as the body, mind, likes and dislikes, desires, memory, all have changed.

Some say that people have thoughts and memories, but objects such as, ships do not have thoughts and memories. Philosopher John Locke says that we are linked by memory to our past selves and

that makes us the same person through the passage of time. Thus, for Locke it is not our body that makes us the same person, because it is constantly changing, but it is our mental life that makes us a person that lasts through change. The sense of identity in man arises from the mind—mind that was activated or lighted up by the beings called *Manasaputras*, *Kumaras* or *Agnishwatta pitris*, which endowed him with self-consciousness. Mind being latent in mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, the question of “identity” does not apply.

Probably, the pertinent question to be asked for the objects or plants is: What is the intrinsic *thing-ness* of a thing? There is something like “essence” of the ship, or that which makes the ship, a ship, what may be called “*ship-ness*.” It is what Plato calls “universals” or “*noumena*” of things. Consider, for example, a particular oak tree, which is a member of a species, and it has much in common with other oak trees. Its universal, or “*oakness*,” is a part of it. A biologist can study oak trees and learn about oakness. Plato taught that the Universals or *Ideas* or Forms of things, are self-existent and not dependent upon the particulars or ever-changing objects of the senses. *Ideas* are the *archetypes* or *models* of which particular objects, properties and relations are copies. Plato called the world of Ideas, *noumenal* world, and the world of objects, *phenomenal* world. These Ideas, *noumena* or the essence is *always-existing*, in opposition to the transitory objects in the phenomenal world. An object *as we see it* is not identical with the object *as it is in itself*. So, Kant said that there is something like a “thing-in-itself.” Absolute knowledge is the knowledge of the *thing-in-itself*.

OUR days are a kaleidoscope. Every instant a change takes place....New harmonies, new contrasts, new combinations of every sort....The most familiar people stand at each moment in some new relation to each other, to their work, to surrounding objects.

—HENRY WARD BEECHER

THE QUESTION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

THE RICH and the poor have always existed. But we see that every year the gap between the two is widening. Studies on wealth-distribution point towards the ever-growing inequality as a chilling trend. An unjust society always leads to social upheavals and bloody revolutions. Take the case of the French Revolution. Exploitation of the poor, indifference of the rich and the ruling class, and concentration of wealth and power in few hands, were some of the causes. Centuries-old monarchy was overthrown in a decade, and thousands of people—royals as well as common citizens—paid the price with their head at the guillotine. About forty thousand people were executed or murdered within a single year.

The revolution in France, which began with a quest for liberty and equality, morphed into Napoleon declaring himself the first Emperor of the French Republic. The republic transformed, over the years, into a colonizer and exploiter of African and Indo-China regions. A French statesman of Nineteenth Century, Jules François Camille Ferry, proclaimed that “the higher races have a right over the lower races; they have a duty to civilize the inferior races.” Colonization became “civilizing mission” of France.

Shall we today, likewise, take up forceful redistribution of wealth; enforce laws towards equality of wealth, and a “classless society”? Such attempts have resulted in horrors unspeakable. They result in more inequality and violence than the oppressive system they intend to replace. Pol Pot and his draconian experiments on Cambodian society is a warning sign against such attempts.

We are at the edge of a precipice, and the society may soon reach a tipping point, unless we correct our course through nobler, personal and societal ideals. What can save us from the threatening storms? Violent replacement of one system of government with another, without right ideals of duty and collective responsibility, will only lead to perpetuation of injustice. It will be just a cosmetic touch to a deep-rooted malaise.

Any attempt to transform society, without self-transformation, is like pouring old wine into new bottles. The very defects of human nature will work from within the new system and re-establish injustice and exploitation. The world is an enigmatic mirror of human heart, a faithful reflection of our cherished ideas and ideals. Issues of the world flow from the human heart. It is there that real reform, the “silent revolution,” has to begin. True reform educates the mind and ennobles the heart.

Plato in *Laws* introduces the concept of human good and Divine Good. The former—such as health, wealth, prosperity, long life—are necessary for human life. Nevertheless, these “goods” turn into evil when divorced from virtues:

“Now goods are of two kinds: there are human and there are divine goods, and the human hang upon the divine; and the state which attains the greater, at the same time acquires the less, or, not having the greater, has neither. Of the lesser goods the first is health, the second beauty, the third strength...and the fourth is wealth...if only he has wisdom for his companion. For wisdom is chief and leader of the divine class of goods, and next follows temperance; and from the union of these two with courage springs justice, and fourth in the scale of virtue is courage.” (Book I, *Laws*)

The poets of an ideal society, says Plato, would exalt virtue above everything else. Neither wealth nor fame, but virtue and wisdom would be extolled as supreme Good. A virtuous man would be recognized as an unconditionally happy man—it doesn’t matter if he is born as a king or a slave. The poet would sing that a man, “if he be temperate and just, is fortunate and happy; and this whether he be great and strong or small and weak, and whether he be rich or poor; and, on the other hand, if he have a wealth passing that of Cinyras or Midas, and be unjust, he is wretched and lives in misery.” (Book II, *Laws*)

Change proceeds from within outwards. Well aware of this psychological truth, the ancient Indian ideal of virtuous life—*Dharma*—

was burnt into the psyche of the young student through rigorous moral education. The convocation speech of the Guru to the disciple entering the householder life—found in *Taittiriya Upanishad*—sets the tone for a righteous family and society, the well-being of both being rooted in the righteousness of the individual.

Contrast those noble ideals with modern-day values. The social “poets” of today extol greed, make money the god, and make a virtue out of avarice and jealousy. Parents breed “race-horses” instead of sensitive, caring children, and convert the young minds into war-engines instead of truth-loving, rational beings. Where did we go wrong? No doubt we have progressed by leaps and bounds in exploration of the material world, in technological glitter, in dissection of the physical. A recollection of the meaning and purpose of life may help us find our way back.

Every being—from the meanest to the grandest—has a unique place and purpose in the grand scheme of life. Many cells make up a tissue, and the latter constitute an organ. A collection of organs harmoniously work and coordinate with one another for the good of the whole body. The health or ill-health of the body depends upon proper and harmonious working of each cell. That is so also, in the Universe. Each one of us is a unit-cell of the Universal Man—variously called *Virat-Purusha*, Adam-Kadmon, etc. We have a special as well as general purpose.

The journey of life is thus a pilgrimage to the holy shrine of Self-realization—realizing the unity of all beings. Like the seed develops its innate qualities and grows into a tree, every soul is evolving its innate, higher faculties and powers. Each birth is a step towards this grand aim. Thus gathering experience, humanity is collectively developing into a higher type.

The good of the whole alone ensures the good of the unit. Injustice to one unit is injustice to all. The dichotomy of our lives is such that we expect happiness and peace for oneself and loved ones, while spreading unhappiness in the lives of others through our deeds. This interconnectedness and interdependence has far reaching

consequences. Firstly, it implies that there is no strictly personal act or thought that we can retain for ourselves. Once an act is done or a thought arises, it distributes itself through the entire web of life, and becomes a common property of all—for good or ill.

Secondly, since we are essentially divine, our minds and bodies become engines of great power. Every act—of body, speech or mind—produces fruits, sweet or bitter. It may bear fruit the next instant or after many births. But no god or devil can alter the law of cause producing its effect. The prolific source of crime and corruption in our society is the mistaken notion that we can escape the consequences of our action. The supposed intervention of the priest and the allurements of rituals of every religion give a tacit permission to sin. No surprise, then, in Kant's observation that popular religion and true morality rarely go hand in hand!

Third consequence is that each one has a deep responsibility in leading a life which aids the welfare—spiritual, moral and physical—of the whole. This obligation is neither man-made nor a social construct. It is rooted in the fact that humanity is a collective vehicle of Divinity. As the waters of the Ocean make up the Ocean itself, so also, all sentient beings, in their innermost essence, collectively represent the Divine.

Teaching the unity of life, interdependence, and immutability of the law of cause and effect, is the only permanent cure to crime and corruption. This is the foundation of a peaceful and prosperous society. These natural laws, hinted at in all religions, are distorted by priest-craft and vested interests. The aim of true education is to reinstate these laws in the sacred land of our minds and hearts, and make them the foundation of our society.

Preparation of such soul-serving individuals was admirably accomplished in the *Chatur-ashrama* system of ancient India. The aim of the first stage of this system—*Brahmacharya*—was twofold: (i) to acquire a thorough knowledge of the laws of life, and (b) develop moral character. Both of these were geared towards making the man a fit instrument for the good of all beings, by entering

into the family life as a *Grihastha*. His purpose was to aid and support the grand evolution of the Soul. He realized the unity of life and the pilgrimage of the Soul. Discharging his duties to society through his family life was his constant endeavour. The latter was based on right appreciation of, and highest priority to, his spiritual nature.

A man who would acquire wealth and fame, tries to satisfy his insatiable desires, and thus neglects this duty incumbent on every one, was considered a failure. "He who does not go through his appointed work in life has lived in vain." Shri Krishna reminds us of the "Wheel of reciprocity," ever to be kept in motion, in the *Gita*: "He who enjoyeth what hath been given unto him by them, and offereth not a portion unto them, is even as a thief."

Knowing this, the rich will not see themselves as owners of wealth, but as trustees with responsibility. They would willingly lend a helping hand to the poor, not by making the latter dependent, but by the light of wisdom—that wisdom which sees the Soul within the body, recognizing its needs and requirements. Material wealth will be subservient to spiritual wisdom. The poor, on the other hand, will not resent their material disadvantage and rebel against it, and neither will they adopt acquisition of wealth as their life ideal. He will see every circumstance of life as a necessary means for soul-evolution. Trying circumstances would be used to develop moral character. Gratitude towards the good, and charity towards his fellow beings, would naturally arise.

Self-centeredness makes us forgetful of our responsibility towards each other. Our divine self, unlike its transient terrestrial counterpart, values not the earthly incarnation by the wealth amassed or fame achieved. The real and permanent value of our earthly life is found in duties well performed, defects overcome, and realization—to the best of our abilities—that the "Master-Soul is One." Wise is he who takes care not to infringe on the rights of others, who practices benevolence and charity, and does all his duties of life as a sacrifice to the Divinity within. Such a person makes the world his debtor.

EXTRACTS FROM UNPUBLISHED LETTERS MASTERS—II

THE BUDDHAS are full of Bliss and Enjoyment now and here because of Their Sacrifice and Service. Are we not called upon to learn the lesson of experiencing *Ananda* as we study and apply and promulgate? In the very attempt not to look for the fruits of our *karmas*, do we not develop the inner attitude that whatever is, is best? And does that not produce inner contentment in the ultimate analysis? Extend that idea to Those who know what They have renounced, and why and how. They are Healers and Helpers, Instructors and Inspirers of thousands of mortals. Then, there is that state of which the *Gita* speaks—“My highest place.” *Manvantaras* and *Pralayas* do not disturb those who have reached that place.

I do not think that for Buddhas and Bodhisattvas there is Bliss mixed with suffering. The pity aspect of Compassion is devoid of suffering. A doctor may feel pity for his patient, but if he felt suffering he would not be able to prescribe or to perform an operation. Judge has written about this “Path of Woe.” Those who have chosen the Path of Liberation fall into incarnation “after an immensity of years”; they take up the thread of Evolution.

Of course the Blessed Ones feel, but not as we know feeling. It seems to me that it would be futile to try to fathom how or what They feel face to face with the darkness of evil and of ignorance. We cannot say that the “Exile” is as happy as if “at home”; but freedom from doubt and regret, sticking at the self-chosen post—these are joys in themselves.

In one state or another, the immortal Self, the Waters of Wisdom, and Those who know the Self of the Whole are alive, awake, labouring. You are bound to find, if you persevere, your own life flooded with the memory of Them. Memory and Meditation are a pair—we are always thinking one way or another (and when we are not vigilant we should bring the mind to Master), according to our thoughts, cogitations, speculations or by true repetition, and the

last is the highest. May your ideation be always and ever of Them whose servant you aspire to become!

Impersonalizing our emotions does not mean doing away with affection. Devotion to Masters implies affection towards human beings. We cannot serve without loving those we serve. There is love between the Guru and the chela; also between each chela and his several co-disciples.

We are disciples of one Teacher in more than one sense and at more than one level. “The Master-Soul is one, Alaya, the Universal Soul.” That is the Logos—the Parent of the seven Dhyanis. Our own Triple Atma (see *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 21: “The three that dwell in glory and in bliss ineffable...”) is the correspondence at the human psychological level. Secondly, “Fix thy soul’s gaze upon the star whose ray thou art” refers to the original Dhyani-Buddha from which or whom our Atma-Buddhic Monad, the Eternal Pilgrim, has emanated. When the Duad becomes a Triad at the time of the lighting up of Manas, a new factor emerges—that Triadic Monad’s kinship with the Kumara-Rishi who gives light. Finally, there is the Great Guru, the Mahatma difficult to find, who is a Chief and Instructor of the Great Lodge and Fraternity. H.P.B. is the Guru for us all, for the Lodge sent her, and in her message each one of us finds his own way or path. The Path is one, but each walks it differently in speed of concentration. I hope all this will prove useful.

The ties of the soul are: (1) to its own Higher Triad and through It to the Dhyani-Buddha to whom that Triad looks up as the “star”; (2) to the Master whom Karmic kinship of soul-spirit makes our Initiator in the unspoken Mysteries; He very often, almost always, belongs to the same Beam, Ray or School to which we in our Triadic higher aspect belong; (3) to our colleagues and companions who under Karma, past and present, are striving for perfection side by side on the plane of the personal. Such make our affinities which anon bless and anon damn, as Judge puts it. The *Guruparampara* chain extends from the Dhyani Buddha to our teacher-helper whom

the Judge letter calls the “little guru.” You need to *reflect* upon this *Guruparampara* chain and see the chief and important links. Judge’s letter contains the clues. Then consider the footnote in the *Voice of the Silence* about the Hall of Wisdom where alone we are asked to seek our Guru—the great Father. Read also the *Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, pp. 567-578. Do not remain ignorant about the subject of chelaship. It is a very important subject for real practical evolution along the lines of the Third Fundamental.

What Judge has said about the Guru and the “little guru” taken by itself is a puzzle. But when the philosophical basis of *Guruparampara* is understood much of the difficulty vanishes. Idealizing a living personality, without understanding, is wrong. “Idealizing,” if based upon discernment and after checking up with the higher links of the chain as well as the teachings, and not on blind acceptance of everything said, is correct and beneficial. A safe test—does the “little guru” exploit the neophyte, interfere with his free will, order him about, tell him to sit down and get up, so to speak; or do there prevail love and trust which are mutual, brotherliness which is not sentimental and emotional but thoughtful, will-full and so on? Again, is it a steadily growing thing which aids the living of the spiritual life? Of course it is a matter which requires tact and discretion on the part of both the neophyte and his “little guru,” and also silence and secrecy, without which such a relationship will prove a disaster. In this relationship there is a test and a trying out of both parties; the pure in motive and in heart will have due protection as well as guidance. Increase your faith and trust when you find your own condition fulfilled: reliable, capable of helping and guiding.

It feels good and helps to know that there are a few who recognize one’s long efforts to hold grimly on and go forward with the Great Work. If one perseveres, one can feel Masters’ Eye watching and Hands protecting and guiding. Blessed be Their Names and Immortal Forms! One knows how very unworthy one has been and is, and yet what a solace it is to repeat—“Ingratitude is not one of

our vices”! Of course They help all who serve Them, for there are not many instruments at Their disposal and everyone who is earnest, sincere and devoted receives Their help. They look at these virtues and leave our vices and weaknesses to us to get over. Our study, effort and sacrifices for the Work enable us to overcome our defects in a great measure.

THE STAR under which a human Entity is born, says the Occult teaching, will remain forever its star, throughout the whole cycle of its incarnations in one Manvantara. But *this is not his astrological star*. The latter is concerned and connected with the *personality*, the former with the *INDIVIDUALITY*. The “Angel” of that Star, or the Dhyani-Buddha will be either the guiding or simply the presiding “Angel,” so to say, in every new rebirth of the monad, *which is part of his own essence*, though his vehicle, man, may remain forever ignorant of this fact. The adepts have each their Dhyani-Buddha, their elder “twin Soul,” and they know it, calling it “Father-Soul,” and “Father-Fire.” It is only at the last and supreme initiation, however, that they learn it when placed face to face with the bright “Image.”.....

“I and my Father are one,” said Jesus (John x. 30). When He is made to say, elsewhere (xx. 17): “I ascend to *my* Father and your Father,” it meant that which has just been stated. It was simply to show that the group of his disciples and followers attracted to Him belonged to the same Dhyani Buddha, “Star,” or “Father,” again of the same planetary realm and division as He did...“as seven distinct rays radiate from the ‘Central Spiritual Sun,’ *all adepts and Dhyani Chohans are divisible into seven classes*, each of which is guided, controlled, and overshadowed by *one of the seven forms* or manifestations of the divine Wisdom.”

—*The Secret Doctrine* (I, 572-74)

THE CONCEPT OF TIME

II

THE THREE periods—the Present, the Past, and the Future—are in the esoteric philosophy a compound time (*S.D.*, I, 43). A compound is different from mixture in that the constituents of a mixture can be separated, such as in rice mixed with wheat. But the compound is made by complete merging of one constituent into another, so that the constituents in a compound are indistinguishable from each other. In other words, of past, present and future, each contains the other two. The past is the child which becomes the present and the future, just as the future becomes present and then moves into past. The present is the link between past and future, and holds the “seed” from the past, and the tree or fruition of the future. That which we call future arises from the past and present *and is continuous with it*. Between the past and the future there is continuity of change and continuity of causation. Without continuity of causation we would be at a loss to anticipate a future.

In the real or noumenal world, there is only Eternal Now. “Live neither in the present nor the future, but in the eternal,” says *Light on the Path*. We are asked not to live even in the present, but to “live in the eternal.” We can live in the “Eternal” by refusing to be affected by memory of the past, and anticipation of the future, and by transmuting the present. We are on the earth as a result of our past karma, to pay our karmic debts. We cannot abandon actions. “If we renounce the fruits of deeds which are our duties, and offer them as sacrifice on the altar of human brotherhood, we shall have stepped out of the present in the Eternal,” writes Shri B. P. Wadia. When a seeker renounces action literally, by remaining inert or by shirking his duties, life after life, sooner or later he comes to realize that the real meaning of the renunciation of action is that he must continue to perform the actions, but renounce desire and concern for the fruits of them, as also the feeling of doership (*kartabhav*). There is bodily action but inward detachment or inaction. In other

words, when there is forgetfulness of one’s self, and sincere altruism, one becomes, as the *Voice of the Silence* says, “a Yogi of ‘Time’s Circle’.” What is this “Time’s Circle”? It is a circle of Time, as it passes, cyclically, it keeps on bringing us back to earth again and again. When one becomes a Yogi of “Time’s Circle,” he is no longer caught in the whirl of birth, death and rebirth.

That brings us to the concept of cyclic time. There are cycles in man and nature. Equinoxes and solstices are the stages in the cyclic journey of the Sun. In Nature’s calendar, 21st September is marked as the day of the Autumnal Equinox, when day and night are of equal length. It is the day on which the sun, on its southward journey, crosses the equator. Once again on its northward journey when the sun returns from the Tropic of Capricorn, it will cross the equator on 21st March. The Autumnal Equinox is a point or a stage in the cyclic movement of the sun, between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. This is one of the many cycles operating in the universe.

One of the fundamental propositions of Theosophy is that the law of cycles prevails in all departments of life, in all the kingdoms below man as well as those above man. Cycle means return of that which was before. A cycle is a period of time marked by sequence of stages. In a cycle there is orderly synchronization of quality and quantity. For instance, a cycle of 24 hours—of day and night—includes forenoon, afternoon, dusk, night, etc. After one day and one night are completed, there would start another cycle of 24 hours which also would have all these four stages, but the morning of this day is not exactly like the morning of yesterday. “The word cyclic is derived from the Greek word *Kuklos*, or a ring.” But a cycle is not a circle, so that we come back from where we started. It is more like a spring or spiral, so that we come back to the same point but at a higher level. A universe comes into existence and goes out of existence, periodically, and within the universe there are major and minor cycles—cycle of the seasons, cycle of the four *yugas*, cycle of birth and death, etc.

As the sun moves northward, from December 21st, the days become longer—bringing more light, warmth and brightness. Just as in the entire day the physical and psychic atmosphere of the early morning is most conducive for study and meditation, so also the time between Christmas and Easter is auspicious, because, writes H.P.B., “The astral life of the earth is young and strong between Christmas and Easter. Those who form their wishes now will have added strength to fulfil them consistently.” Sun is the giver of life, physical and metaphysical. During the northward movement of the sun there is renewal and refreshment of life energy. Astral body in man and astral light in nature is the vehicle of life energy. Every thought and feeling leaves an impression on the astral light. Good thoughts and ideation impressed on the astral are attracted to us and support us—by the law of consubstantiality—whenever we make a resolve to be good. Thus, the astral light acts as an unobstructed pipe or a sieve. This support is greater during this period due to renewal of life energy.

One of the most practical applications of the concept of time is in understanding the value of cycles. By paying attention to cyclic return of impressions, we can save time and effort in training of mind and body. If we study at a fixed time every day, then our mind comes ready for work so that more work gets done. So too, our “blues” or depression comes in cycles. In *U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 24*, Mr. Judge mentions that if we maintained a diary we would observe that depression occurs at regular intervals of time. When the depressive cycle returns, we must compel ourselves to feel joyous, even against our will—or at least try to feel the joy of others. We may do this next day or even two days later. We would then have implanted joyous impressions, so that when the depression returns, it brings along with it the impressions of joy and they would counteract each other’s momentum. Soon we would succeed in establishing a joyous cycle.

But why stop at moods and feelings? Day-to-day events and circumstances come to us under the great cycles of Karma and

Reincarnation. The law of Karma postulates that an impulse, action or thought returns to the sender in the course of time. The law of Reincarnation lays down that man comes into this world, lives a life and then dies to come back in due time in a new body and personality. It is not a mere mechanical repetition of birth-death-rebirth stages. In the state between death and rebirth, the soul goes to heaven or *Devachan* and assimilates the good garnered during earth life so as to come back enriched in the next life. The average stay of the Ego in *Devachan* is said to be 1000 to 1500 years. The time taken by the Ego for assimilation in *Devachan* is proportionately more than the time spent on earth in garnering experiences. It takes only a few minutes to eat our food but its digestion takes much longer time—about seven to eight hours.

We have to regard each life as a *precious* cyclic opportunity, which is going to come again only after 1000 to 1500 years. It is only proper to question every action and every aspiration: “Is this the thing I will take with me to *Devachan*?” We hear people say, “I have no time, I am busy.” Some even say, “Time is money.” We should ask ourselves, what use are we making of the time at our disposal? When a person who can complete a task in an hour delays it, he wastes time and often loses a precious and a rare opportunity. Hence the proverbial saying, “procrastination is the thief of time,” which comes from a poem by the English poet, Edward Young. One may prefer to do more pleasurable things in place of less pleasurable ones. Sometimes we end up paying a very heavy price for delaying. For instance, when one delays going to a doctor, ignoring the symptoms, the disease may become worse. Likewise, when one delays insuring one’s house, he will regret it when the house is gutted by a sudden fire. We may postpone seeing a friend, because we are very busy, saying, “I will see him next Sunday.” Thus, eternally postponing, one day we might learn that we have lost our dear friend forever. It is too late. Hence, we are asked to *act at once* on the suggestion from within, from our divine nature.

“Tomorrow,” is a word which denotes hope and promise, only if

we are doing all that we can today. Otherwise, it is an addictive word which allows us to postpone things endlessly. We say, “next week,” “next month,” “next year,” “next life,” and so our present opportunities slip away. We can never hope to achieve anything in the world physical or spiritual with such attitude.

We have Lord Buddha’s sage words in the *Dhammapada*: “Men who have not lived the disciplined life of a chaste mind, who have not gathered soul wealth in young age, pine away like old cranes in a lake without fish [or]...lie like worn-out bows, sighing after the past” (Verses 155-56). These verses show us the true intent of the Buddha’s discourse on old age. It warns us of the consequences of not making good use of the young age. Living of spiritual life must not be postponed to old age. It must begin when we are young and strong. In old age, we are like worn out bows which have lost tension and are useless to the warrior. In the same way, one who has not lived a disciplined life in young age will have nothing to reflect upon. This is the reason why some religions have initiation ceremonies such as the *Navjyot*-ceremony, thread-ceremony, etc. to impress upon a child’s mind the importance of gathering spiritual wealth. What cannot be moulded in young age will be difficult to mould when we are old. The old crane in a lake without fish does not have strength to fly to another lake. A person would find it difficult to begin the arduous journey at an old age, and can but sigh for the lost opportunity.

Shiva is called *Kala-bhairav*. *Bhairav* is that which makes you “*Bhiru*” (afraid) and we are all afraid of time, which snatches away things and people most dear to us. Krishna too, says, “I am Time matured, come hither for the destruction of these creatures.” (*Gita*, XI)

(*To be concluded*)

LET me tell thee, time is a very precious gift of God; so precious that it is only given to us moment by moment.

—AMELIA BARR

SAINT ROHIDAS—THE SHOEMAKER

SAINT ROHIDAS, also known as Raidas and Ravidas, was a great saint, poet, philosopher and social reformer in India during the fifteenth century. He was born in Varanasi (Benaras). He belonged to a lower *Chamaar* class—leather workers or cobblers. His profession of making and repairing shoes was considered menial and inferior in society. It is said that in his previous birth he was a Brahmin, who constantly listened to religious recitations, but did not give up meat. For this sin, he was born into a low-caste. It is interesting to note that almost all the great saint poets of medieval India chose to work for their living. For example, Kabir was a weaver, Gora Kumbhar was a potter. It could well have been to impress upon people the dignity of labour.

Often, an ego of a spiritually advanced being can choose to take birth in unfavourable circumstances, and low station in life, to set an example for others around, or for a specific purpose. That seems to be the case with Saint Rohidas. He was a thinker, a social reformer and a humanist, who dedicated his life to banish the caste system. He denounced superiority of the Brahmin caste. He used to say that a human being is recognized by his good deeds and not by his caste. It is one’s karma (actions) which helps him to attain salvation, and not his birth. He declared that reading of the Holy Scriptures was the birthright of every human being, irrespective of his caste. He believed that God is present everywhere, and in every human heart. So, it was quite futile to separate people on the basis of their caste, creed or social status. Anyone with a clear conscience and true devotion can reach God. He preached universal brotherhood and tolerance. He beautifully expresses the relation of a human being with God, by saying: “Thou art me, I am Thou, what is the difference? The same as between gold and its bracelet, and between water and its ripples.”

In the *Secret Doctrine* (I, 78), H.P.B. tells us that “Kalaham-sa” or “I am I” in the eternity of Time answers to the Biblical “I am that I am.” *Hamsa* is equal to *a-ham-sa* meaning “I am he”; while in still

another way it will read “*So-ham*,” “he (is) I” or “I am he” (*Sah*=“he” and *aham*=“I”). In this alone is contained the Universal mystery of the identity of god’s essence with man’s essence. There is an indissoluble union between Man and the Universe.

In one of his poems, Rohidas coined a term *Begumpura* or *Begum-pura*, a city without sorrow, or a city without any hierarchical system of caste or creed. It is an idealized city visualized by him, where there is no suffering or fear, and all are equal. He says that he, who devotes his mind and soul to Almighty, attains the blissful state of mind, and he can become a citizen of this city, Begumpura.

During his time, low caste people were neglected and not allowed to visit temples and offer worship. Worship of God was declared to be the sole right of the Brahmins. Saint Rohidas started worshipping God. He simplified the mode of worship and discarded rituals. It is said that one day, his disciples decided to take a dip in the river Ganges. They asked him to join them but Rohidas declined saying that he had to deliver shoes to a customer. When one of his disciples kept urging and requesting him to go with them, Saint Rohidas said: “*Man changa to kathrot mein Ganga*,” i.e., “If your heart is pure, then the holy river Ganga is right there in your tub, and you need not go anywhere else to take a dip.” In this connection there is an anecdote in Saint Rohidas’s life. Once all the villagers were going to attend Kumbh festival, at Haridwar, on the bank of river Ganga. Since Rohidas was unable to go, he gave a small coin to a lady to offer it to river Goddess. The lady did what she was asked to do, but while taking bath in the Ganges she lost her gold chain. On returning she told Rohidas that she had lost her gold chain. Rohidas put his hand in the vessel of water in which he used to soak leather, and said, “*Man changa to kathrot mein Ganga*.” In few seconds he removed gold chain from the water in the vessel. It was as if he made Ganga water appear in that small vessel for a while.

His religious discourses were simple and convincing. As a result, large number of people became his followers. This was a challenge to the priestly supremacy of the Brahmins, so they forbade Saint

Rohidas from worshipping God. The Brahmins approached the King of Kashi and complained against Rohidas. Saint Rohidas said that every human being has a right to worship God, and that he was the truthful worshipper of God. The King asked the Brahmin-priests and Saint Rohidas to come to river Ganga, and bring with them the Idols they worshipped, saying that the one whose idol will float on water would be judged a true worshipper. It is said that after blowing of conch shell and amidst chanting of mantras, one by one, the priests placed their respective idols in the river. To their disappointment, their idols sank deep into the river. They were all small idols. A square stone weighing forty kilogram was the idol carried by Saint Rohidas. It is said that after offering a prayer to God, in all humility he placed his stone in the river water. To everyone’s amazement, his stone (idol) floated majestically. Saint Rohidas was declared a true worshipper, while the Brahmin-priests were declared false worshippers.

This is not surprising if we understand how radically his views on God differed from those of the Brahmins. It is said that once when Rohidas was about to sit down for his worship of God, a Brahmin came to his house. He saw that Rohidas was sitting on a leather seat, carrying water in a leather bag, and was removing Saligram, the idol of Vishnu from his leather bag, for worship. The Brahmin priest asked, “How is it that you have placed the idol in a *leather* bag? How is it that you are worshipping God while sitting upon a *leather* seat?”

Hearing this Rohidas replied: What object have you ever seen which does not have leather connected with it? The musical instruments and drums that are used in the praise-service of God have leather in them. The black cow has a leather skin, yet her milk is holy, and is used in bathing the idol of God. Animate things that are born, those hatched from eggs, and those produced from seed, all three are covered with skin, and God (*Atmaram*) is in them alike. People of all four castes, *Shudras*, *Vaishyas*, *Kshatriyas* and *Brahmins*, are covered with skin. The Brahmin argued, “You may be right philosophically, but while life is in the body, the body, and

hence the skin is never defiled.” Rohidas said, “The skin might be filthy and yet God may be in it, as God is without spot, and is alike in everything.” But now the Brahmin questioned his right to worship Vishnu, saying, “Only Brahmins who have authority to invest themselves with the sacred thread, can worship Vishnu.” Rohidas then ripped open his stomach by his sharp tool and showed him the golden sacred thread within it. The Brahmin then exclaimed, “You are indeed a *bhakta* (devotee) of Vishnu, I was thoughtless and persecuted you. If sandalwood is rubbed on the flat stone, its full fragrance is at once known, so in persecuting you I have but increased your glory.” (*Stories of Indian Saints*, Translation of Mahipati’s Marathi *Bhaktivijay*, pp. 403-405)

It is said that he preferred to lead a poor man’s life. One day, God in the guise of a saint, visited his hut and offered him a philosopher’s stone, which could convert iron into gold. The saint asked him to produce some gold and live a comfortable life. When Rohidas refused to accept the stone, the saint requested him to keep it with him, which he would collect on his return. The saint came back after 13 months and asked for the stone. Rohidas asked him to collect it from the place where he had kept, as he had not touched it. The saint was pleased with Rohidas’s detachment towards worldly wealth.

Rohidas was capable of resolving spiritual doubts of those who held discussion with him, and was unafraid to state his humble origin and caste. He subscribed to non-dualism. Though he was born in the *Chamar* caste, his devotional songs were included in the Sikh scriptures, *Guru Granth Sahib*, which can be considered as the highest honour given to a poet. We are reminded of Jacob Boehme, who was also a cobbler by profession, wholly unlettered, and yet his writings show that he knew the true doctrines found in the Hindu scriptures and secret books. “The reason is that” such men “have attained to devotion, and thereby cleared away from before the eye of the soul the clouds of sense whose shadows obscure our view of truth” says Mr. Judge. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 75)

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

A spiritual seeker must learn to avoid “pious” pitfalls. Despite all its miraculous benefits, spirituality too, tends to become a trap—rather a seeker makes a trap out of it, if he is not vigilant and awake. “A casual spiritual shopper conveniently furthers his own agenda through ‘spirituality,’ while a genuine and alert seeker will see through his own deceptions on the journey,” says Bhaavin Shah. The author identifies, from his own experience, some of the traps in which a seeker could fall. For instance, one may choose compassion over confrontation, and then such fake compassion could become a cover-up for not turning into a self-protective adult. One may tend to judge others, including the near and dear ones, because owing to one’s spiritual education, one thinks that one knows more than the others. While one yearns for pleasures of life, one may settle for fake form of simplicity because a spiritual seeker is expected to lead a simple life. One tends to hand over one’s personal power to one’s Guru, instead of learning to be devoted and yet remaining empowered.

We are caught in a trap because as we move from the mundane world towards spirituality, we tend to perpetuate our limitations but from under a mask. Thus, for instance, the ego which was ambitious for money now becomes ambitious for *moksha*. The ego, who saw no value in the spiritual experience now sees little value in the human experience. The ego which took pride in “more” holidays abroad now takes pride in helping “more” people—“more” being the trap here. The personality is the same, the domain is different. The spiritual ego is more subtle than the mundane ego, so that its defence mechanisms wear a holy garb, and is able to rationalize every action with the additional knowledge it possesses. Hence, the *sutra*, “knowledge is bondage.”

We may ask, like a tribal asked a priest: “Would I be guilty of all these sins if I did not know they were sins?” The priest truthfully replied, “No.” The tribal questioned back, almost rhetorically, “Then why did you have to tell me that they are sins? I was better off the

way I was.”

The pitfalls on the way are part of the maturation process. The key to coming out of a trap is to see the trap for what it is. Once we realize, for instance, that we are using meditation to escape from emotional discomfort, then, we may learn to postpone meditation until we have learnt to deal with the emotion and learn from it. It helps to ask oneself some challenging questions: How come my issues refuse to budge even though I have been attending a whole host of workshops, reading many books and practicing a dozen techniques? How come my relationships, which are supposed to improve as I improve, have not improved significantly? Such sincere probing can give deep insights, initiating you into that pure spiritual domain, writes Bhaavin Shah, a Mumbai-based trainer, healer, life and business coach. (*Life Positive*, November 2018)

There is always the possibility for a spiritual aspirant to have mistaken notions about spirituality, either out of ignorance or owing to hypocrisy. It is difficult to become aware of mistaken notions, traps, and vices, because “Vices of the ordinary man pass through a subtle transformation and reappear with changed aspect in the heart of the disciple.” Daily self-examination is the key to self-awareness. Acquirement of psychic powers, a little progress in meditation, psychic experiences and visions, and the like, are mistaken for signs of “spirituality.” A spiritual person may not linger and waste time in idle chatting, but also, he will not avoid people or miss out on a friendly greeting. He is self-dependent but not self-centred. When the discipline is only external, or when the desire is given up only outwardly, the inner longing eats us up. Mere external discipline is useless. What good is celibacy if the mind is full of thoughts of the opposite sex? “Spirituality” and “joyfulness” are not opposed to each other. An aspirant must learn to create heaven in hell’s despair with his optimism and positive outlook on life.

A person who is puffed up about his worldly accomplishments can be corrected with spiritual knowledge, but when a person feels proud about his spiritual achievements how is he to be helped? If

we have learnt to appreciate spiritual living, while others around are engrossed in pleasures, then we must help to make their life joyous, instead of condemning or criticizing—knowing that their time for spiritual life is not yet ripe.

A 27-year-old US national, John Allen Chau, American adventurer and Christian missionary, entered North Sentinel Island of Andaman, situated a few miles west of Port Blair, on November 17, with the help of some fishermen. Sources say that Chau tried to befriend tribals with many gifts. He is feared killed by Sentinelese tribesmen. He wanted to “declare Jesus” to one of the last uncontacted tribes in Asia, and save their souls. The North Sentinelese are among the only surviving last descendants of the first humans in Asia. The tribe has several times made clear that it wants no contact with the outside world, and have lived apart from others for millennia. This makes sense since their long isolation has left them with no immunity to our germs. The Andaman Islands are home to four aboriginal tribes, who have been here for tens of thousands of years. It is believed that the Great Andamanese, the first to encounter outsiders, numbered around 5000, but their number dwindled drastically as they succumbed to diseases like measles and syphilis after the British established a penal colony.

The Onge, too, in Littler Andaman island, have been battered by an alien culture. So also the Jarawas have not benefited by their interactions with outsiders. What they have received is all kinds of diseases, sexual exploitation, poaching of their resources. We must attempt to understand the indigenous people, and appreciate that their idea of good life, their knowledge, and their social and spiritual values are not the same as those of their neighbours. All “tribes” cannot be painted with the same brush, says Anvita Abbi, a linguist, who has studied the disappearing languages of the Great Andamanese. The Andamanese tribes are entirely different from the central Indian groups or even the Nicobarese. “What does assimilation mean, they are already assimilated into their

environment, and we are not,” says Abbi. She discovered that they did not have a word for rape or sexual assault, but now they are painfully aware of what it means, having been attacked by outsiders. Our vision of development is not necessarily same as theirs, writes Amulya Gopalkrishnan. (*Sunday Times of India*, November 25, 2018)

Occult science teaches that at a certain point in evolution, man was mindless, *i.e.*, devoid of thinking and choosing powers and lacked *self-consciousness*. Millions of years ago, the mindless men of the Third Race united with huge she-animals, producing man-like monsters. Such a union was fruitful, because man as well as animals, were in the semi-astral form. The huge man-like monsters produced through this union, still in semi-astral form, then consolidated into physical and later dwindled in size, producing the lower apes of the Miocene period. After this, man was endowed with mind (sacred spark), and hence with the power to think and choose, and also with self-consciousness. But once again, men with mind, belonging to the Atlantean Race (Fourth Race), repeated the sin of the mindless, by uniting with the lower apes of the Miocene period, giving rise to the species of apes—the Orang-outang, the gorilla and the chimpanzee—now known as anthropoid apes (*S.D.*, II, 683 and 689). They are described as “human presentments,” and are half descended from man—distorted copies of early humanity. H.P.B. writes that “there are, or rather still were a few years ago, descendants of these half-animal tribes or races, both of remote Lemurian and Lemuro-Atlantean origin. The world knows them as Tasmanians (now extinct), Australians, Andaman Islanders, etc.” (*S.D.*, II, 195). Further, “There are, however, considerable numbers of the mixed Lemuro-Atlantean peoples produced by various crossings with such semi-human stocks—*e.g.*, the wild men of Borneo, the Veddhas of Ceylon... most of the remaining Australians, Bushmen, Negritos, Andaman Islanders, etc.” (*S.D.*, II, 195-96 fn.)

“No amount of culture, nor generations of training amid civilization, could raise such human specimens as the Bushmen,

the Veddhas of Ceylon, and some African tribes, to the same intellectual level as the Aryans, the Semites, and the Turanians so called. The ‘sacred spark’ is missing in them and it is they who are the only *inferior* races on the globe, now happily—owing to the wise adjustment of nature which ever works in that direction—fast dying out” (*S.D.*, II, 421 fn.). It is clear that it is futile to attempt to civilize these tribes of savages whose reasoning powers are only a little above the level of animals.

We are told that when attempts were made by Europeans to unite with females of the Tasmanian tribe, their women were suddenly struck with sterility, *en masse*, sometime after the arrival among them of the European colonists. Occultists explain that such sterility was brought because Tasmanian women are seen to be representatives of a race, whose progenitors were animals and mindless man. They see in this a decree of *Karmic* evolution, which stopped through sterility in women, further perpetuation of the abnormal race. (*S.D.*, II, 196)

A woman in China has given birth to two genetically edited girls, according to Associated Press news agency. The aim of the experiment was to create children who are immune to HIV but it has not been independently verified. The experiment has been widely criticised as unethical. The critics include more than 100 prominent Chinese scientists around the world who have signed a letter condemning the experiment. He Jiankui of the Southern University of Science and Technology in China, and his team have used the CRISPR gene-editing technique to disable the gene for CCR5, because one way HIV infects cells is by binding to a protein on their surface called CCR5. Greg Neely, at the University of Sydney, Australia, says, “We do not know what the full effects will be,” if it is safe to delete both the copies of CCR5 gene in every cell of the body.

Moreover, in the given case, the baby’s mother does not have HIV and her father’s HIV is apparently well-controlled. It is felt

that there is no need for gene-editing, as simple measures would be enough to prevent the father from passing the virus to his child. “If true, this experiment exposes healthy children to the risks of gene editing for no real necessary benefit,” ethicist Julian Savulescu at the University of Oxford told the U.K.’s Science Media Centre. “The vast majority of biologists who use CRISPR gene editing think it is too early to attempt to use it for editing human embryos because it is still far from clear it is safe,” write Alice Klein and Michael Le Page. (*New Scientist*, December 1, 2018)

Theosophy teaches that the physical evolves from the spiritual, the mental and the psychic. Heredity is but a mode of the evolutionary process by which the conscious Force within matter strives for fuller self-expression and self-realization. Heredity is determined by the arrangement of genes within the bodies of the germ cell that are called chromosomes, but that arrangement is not mechanical. It is instrumental rather than causal. Human heredity is enormously more complicated as compared to heredity in lower kingdoms, because human evolution is not by natural impulse but by self-conscious choices. The human germ plasm is dominated by the spiritual plasm, which is a spiritual potency in the Ego itself. In case of human beings, heredity is subservient to individual and racial Karma. Really speaking, inborn mental and moral characteristics are not inherited from parents and ancestors, but are brought over by the individual from his own past lives.

Heredity and Atavism are handmaidens of Karma and Reincarnation. The form in which we take birth is not determined by our ancestors, but by our *rupa skandhas* pertaining to form, which determine the stature, colour, shape of the body, with all the diseases inherent in it. The Ego gets attracted to a particular family stream which can provide the Ego with the necessary tenement. If an individual has to suffer from certain disease, under karma, then by gene editing we are only postponing that suffering to some future life, which will come again, in the form of a disease or otherwise.