

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

Vol. 2, No. 9

January 17, 2010

A Magazine Devoted to The Living of the Higher Life

WHO AM I?	3
ON MAKING RESOLUTIONS	9
STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA—OLD AGE—I	13
ON SIVA AND SIVALINGAM	17
HAVE WE LIVED BEFORE?—I	23
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS	28
IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY	33

THEOSOPHY COMPANY (INDIA) PRIVATE LTD.

40 New Marine Lines, Mumbai 400 020, India
email: ultmumbai@mtnl.net.in ♦ Phone : 22039024
website:www.ultindia.org

WHO AM I?

WHO am I? You are not what you think you are, or identify yourself with, nor what others think you are. Yet, you are what you “think.” The general answer to the question is, “I am Mr. or Ms. ‘X,’ of certain height, weight, skin and hair colour, with certain academic qualifications and emotional nature.” No one finds anything wrong with such a concept of “I.” But a deeper thinking shows that such a sense of “I” is a derived sense of identity. We tend to derive our identity from our body, ideas, feelings, education, etc. This derived sense of self could be extremely fragile, requiring continual maintenance, nurturing and defending. To bolster the sense of identity we gather possessions. Our identity is often measured in terms of our houses, cars, television sets, furniture and paintings. 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 forms 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 real “I,” which has remained unchanged and unchanging. “If we can grasp this idea and hold to it, we will have taken first step towards right knowledge and freedom,” writes Mr. Crosbie. (*Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita*, pp. 189-90)

It is important that we have the right answer to this question because a lot depends upon our understanding of who “I” am. Our self-worth is generally measured by others, and also ourselves, on the basis of derived “self.” There are experiences in life that open our eyes to the fact that our identity runs deeper than our appearance, our achievements, our ideas or feelings. A model who is rejected with the remarks that her hair is not silky enough or skin is not glowing enough, might slip into depression, saying, “I was rejected.” Similar feeling is experienced when one is rejected by the opposite sex, or rejected in a job interview, and so on. The feeling in each such case is, “I was rejected.” When we associate “I” with the body, ideas or feelings, we tend to become most vulnerable. It could also be the reverse. When we are praised and put on a pedestal, for our beauty, eloquence, intelligence or skill, our personal worth is immeasurably increased.

Mr. Judge asks us to cultivate *higher patience*, which is a fine line between pride and humility. How shall we be proud, when we are so small? How dare we be humble when we are so great? In both we blaspheme. But between these two extremes there is a place, “neither too high nor too low,” and *there* we may stand calmly, not overshadowed by any man however great, because each of us contains potentialities of every other. That *special* skill, *special* virtue or *special* power that the other person possesses, “I” also possess. “I” am not a poor, miserable sinner, either. I have the *potentiality* of creation, preservation, destruction and regeneration.

Our Egoism or “I-ness” is derived from *Mahat*, which is Universal Cognition or Thought Divine. When *Mahat* develops into the feeling of self-consciousness or “I,” then it assumes the name of Egoism. 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.” The real “I,” or the true individuality is different from the complex feeling, “I am Mr. Smith or Mrs. Brown” which 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 *personal* “I” or *terrestrial* “I.” At times, the personal “I” gets thoroughly degraded, but can regain the lost ground by its connection with the Spiritual “I.” Even if a thousand rupee note, was crumpled, stained, or folded into innumerable folds, in spite of the spoiled outer appearance, the *value* of the currency note does not diminish. So also, our true worth is derived from the real “I.” Hence, Shri Krishna says in the *Gita*, “Even if the man of most evil ways worships me with exclusive devotion, he is to be considered as righteous, for he hath judged aright. Such a man soon becometh of righteous soul and obtaineth perpetual happiness.” The lower “I” can get corrupted but it can be salvaged if it makes its connection with the Spiritual “I.”

There is a constant telegraphic communication going on, day and night, between the physical brain and the inner man. It is the “voice of conscience.” At times, a prick of conscience prevents us from some line of conduct, or makes us feel uneasy just after we have done something wrong. However, if we do not look at a telegram when it is received, or let the telephone go on ringing, we miss the opportunity to contact the friend who is trying to get in touch with us. Hence, we are asked to remember every day that life is for the experience of the soul. Whatever we think, feel or act, do we ask ourselves, “What would the Master do, if he were in my place?” or before retiring for the night, “What has my soul experienced today?” Every day and as often as you can, think, think, think, “I” am not the body, the mind, the emotions, the intellect, praise or blame, but I am THAT.

We fear physical death because it implies separation from everything that we depend upon for a sense of self. On the other hand, if we are able to dissociate our sense of “I” from the body,

then there is no fear or pain. Occasionally we are able to bring about such dissociation, when we are completely concentrated and identified with the work on hand, and forget our headache or stomach ache. When we are able to perfectly concentrate, we automatically lose all sense of bodily existence as it happened in case of Valmiki and Mahavira. It is said that an anthill got formed around Valmiki as he sat, lost in meditation. Similarly, so perfect was the meditation of Mahavira that he remained unaffected even when an iron nail was pierced through his ear, for failing to look after the cows of a cowherd. The story goes that when Mahavira was meditating, a cowherd told him to look after his cows for a while, in his absence. When he returned, the cows were all gone. He got angry with Mahavira and pierced his ear with a nail. But so deep was his meditation that he remained unaware of what was being done to his body.

The personal and the spiritual “I” in man are described in the *Mundaka Upanishad*, thus: “Two birds, inseparable companions, perch on the same tree. Of these two, one eats the fruit (suffers and enjoys); the other looks on without eating.” The first bird is our individual self, feeding on pleasures and pains of this world, the other is the Universal Self, silently witnessing all. A spiritual man is affected by pleasure and pain, but does not allow them to shake him. A disciple has to experience keenest pleasure or intense pain and yet not get shaken by it. We can do this by assuming the position of an observer. To reach this state we have to keep constant awareness of who we really are.

A person is able to maintain his balance while he is standing or walking because the perpendicular from the centre of gravity of his body falls within the base of support—between his feet. When we bend forward or backward too much, the perpendicular from the centre of gravity no longer falls within the base of support. Our psychological base of support is our higher nature, which gives us a true sense of “I am I.” When there is a sudden surge of emotion, such that it is all centred in one feeling, then our awareness of “I am

I” goes awry and falls, so to speak, outside the base of support. One gets so completely identified with one particular feeling, that of grief or immense joy, that at times the person goes mad with grief or sudden good news.

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, or the real “I,”—the unchanging and the eternal aspect in man. The “branches,” represent the personal “I,” emotions and the evanescent aspects of life. When we are too elated or too dejected, we are only looking at the “branches.” Both in 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. We have to get beyond the personal “I.” Are we aware of that aspect in us which is unaffected by praise or blame, adversity or prosperity? Mr. Judge recommends a meditation in which he asks us to *identify* ourselves with the poor, ignorant, wicked and those who dislike us. In such a meditation, we must try to *feel* that *we are that person*, with all his idiosyncracies, weaknesses and feeling of aversion. We could get some insight into human nature.

Thinking of oneself as this, that or the other, is the chief factor in the production of every kind of psychic and physical phenomena, writes H.P.B. We may compare it with the concept of *sanyama* mentioned in *Vibhuti Pada* of *The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*. *Sanyama* means integration. It is integration of consciousness or integration of concentration, contemplation and meditation, so that

the three exist as a single thread. The limited sense of “I” as a personality or individuality seems to be temporarily replaced by total absorption and identification with the subject or object, endowing the *yogi* with “discerning power” or insight. When the consciousness of the *yogi* is identified with the consciousness of an ant, he perceives what is passing in the mind of ant. By practising *sanyama* on moment and on the continuous flow of the moments, the *yogi* gains subtle knowledge, free from the limitations of time and space. But Patanjali cautions that if the *yogi* begins to identify himself with these powers, it will hinder his progress towards self-awareness and universal consciousness. The discipline of concentration, contemplation and meditation, gradually brings about the shift in the consciousness of the aspirant. There is a gradual realization that “I” am not the body, mind, feelings, and much less the possessions. When we are able to transcend the self-identifying attachment to not only family and loved ones, but also to physical form, ideas, desires, emotions, etc., we succeed in merging the Personal “I” into Individual “I.” But even when we cease to identify ourselves with the personality, so long as there remains even a subtle sense of separateness, union with the divine is not possible. When the universe grows “I,” and there is the realization that “I am verily that Brahman,” one enters *Samadhi* state, when the higher spiritual consciousness of the Initiate is entirely absorbed in the ONE ESSENCE, which is *Atman*.

We experience oneness when for few brief moments there is transcendence of personal and individual “I.” Jane Goodall is well known for her work for the protection of wildlife, especially the chimpanzees. As she sought consolation in the forest of Gombe, after her husband’s death, she experienced ecstatic mystical moments of oneness with Nature. In those moments she was looking out into the world through a window, through which the mystics and holy men of the East have gazed as they searched for the meaning of life on earth.

ON MAKING RESOLUTIONS

WISHES, resolves, vows are closely connected with this cyclic season. Why is that so? Why should we make New Year resolutions? Is there any truly scientific or ethical reason for making resolves at this time of the year, a reason which satisfies our mind and soul?

This is the season when, as the sun moves northwards, the seeds underneath the earth begin to germinate and all Nature becomes active once again, silently and secretly. All the Saviours and Teachers of humanity pour their influence in certain directions and upon certain centres at this seasonal cycle when the occult forces in nature have an upward and increasing tendency; and so it is with man, in whom is reflected what happens in Nature. This is a season of awakening; hearts and minds and souls are more open to spiritual influences at this time.

And so this festive season serves to remind us of something that is stirring within—within the heart of human nature as well as the heart of Mother Nature. Hearts and minds that are open may profit by the resurgence of life and energy, and receive added strength to keep a resolution after it is made.

A resolve implies a decision, a choice. To enhance our ability to hold on to a decision, let us always pause and think, and act coolly and deliberately. In business life, for instance, we have to continually make decisions. If they are wrong ones, we shall have to admit that our knowledge of business conditions was inadequate. If they prove to be the right decisions, then we generally find success attending our efforts. Similarly, in social life, in household and family life, as also in our inner life, we are continually called upon to act and to make decisions regarding our future actions; and in each instance if our decisions are based on knowledge, and if we hold on to them, we shall have varying degrees of success.

If we would examine the kinds of decisions with which we are often confronted and the type of thinking and feeling that influences those decisions, we might gather more readily why it is that even

though we continually make decisions and choices, we do not make any headway. It is the very law of life that we should be faced with decisions every moment of our lives. Why is this? Because act we must (and action includes thinking and feeling), and as we are free-willed beings we can act in a hundred different ways. We can see many different courses of action that we might take, and there arises the necessity of selecting and determining how we shall act in a particular circumstance. On looking back at some of our decisions, we may wish we had not made them; there are also decisions we wish we could adhere to, but something prevents us. Why? It needs to be understood that conjoined with decisions and resolves is *search*. We as souls are at different stages of evolutions and we know that some are searching, not for the real values of life, but for useless pursuits and paths. That sort of search will not bring us to the position where we can make wise decisions and resolves and adhere to them. But there are those who have begun to see that they are responsible beings, that they are souls, and that they must not only make a decision but must *act* in accordance with it.

At this season of the year, many of us find stirring within our hearts and minds noble desires, feelings, thoughts, and there is the strengthening of the wish to determine upon a more definite course of action. Does that mean that we are going to change in all our outside occupations? The change has to do with ourselves, our thoughts and feelings. To make a resolution and to hold it requires knowledge. For one thing, when we make a resolution and stick to it, we have to make adjustment. We have to destroy old habits of thought and feeling, weaknesses, inefficiency, ineffectual and flaccid wills. That is the real difficulty in the way of making resolves and holding to them. The carrying through of a line of action is not as difficult as the breaking of old habits of thought, will, feeling based upon our previous knowledge, preconceptions, traditions.

The ability to stick to a resolution is rooted in the eternal and immortal aspect of our nature in which inheres the memory of our latent divinity, of the high estate from which we have descended, of

great heroic and noble deeds performed by us in other bodies. Through those still halls of soul memory we search again for the Path that leads to Wisdom. What we do not always realize is that at this time of the year we are being influenced, stirred, awakened by the great Intelligences, the presiding deities of the season.

Theosophy teaches that the great Souls, Saviours, Teachers, who have achieved what they have by the power of a vow have impregnated the invisible atmosphere of the Universe with their ideas, thoughts and feelings, and because we are universal beings on the plane of spirit, they are *our* ideas, our thoughts, our feelings. And so when we read the ideas and words of Great Teachers as contained in the sacred Scriptures of the world, we read literature which is of the Soul and therefore speaks to our Souls. These ideas are deeply rooted in enlightened hearts, in compassionate heads, and may be translated into spiritual will, which is so little used and understood because we have pandered so long to ignorance, to the lower nature and to sense life—because, in short, we have lost our way.

Each one has different ways of fulfilling his decisions and resolves, but if we would after making a resolve begin to control ourselves, to think of the highest thoughts that we have ever had, to recall the most sublime and spiritual feelings we have experienced and the noble deeds we have performed selflessly, forgetful of whether or not they please our personal nature, then if we would study the knowledge that all true teachers have given out in reference to the Path of Action, to the power of resolves and of vows and to the nature of the Soul, we would come upon a science of the fulfilment of decisions and vows and be freed from the thralldom, the turbulence and unceasing strife caused by ignorance. We would come to the realization that great Souls and High Beings were once erring mortals like ourselves; but, having determined to change their way of living, they stuck to their vows. The power of such a vow as that of Kwan-Yin—“Never will I seek nor receive private, individual salvation; never will I enter into final peace alone; but for ever and everywhere will I live and strive for the redemption of every creature

throughout the world”— enables the Buddhas and the Christs of the race to make the supreme renunciation of the well-earned peace and bliss of Nirvana and say, “For others’ sake this great reward I yield.”

Such a vow is the result, not of a sudden impulse, but of decisions made and adhered to over many lives. We can all recall many of those paths we have erstwhile trodden, many of those ideas, aspirations, high hopes we have once held, many of those resolutions we have at one time made. All present decisions are based upon past decisions, and the power to adhere to them comes from performing little selfless acts until they accumulate and become one great symphony of thought and will and feeling.

Once this stage is reached, we have but one aim, one purpose; all others become subsidiary. This aim and this purpose persistently adhered to gives us the strength which comes from the chamber of the heart, and will bring us into the presence of those Great Souls who have similarly vowed to serve others from age to age, *Yuge-yuge*.

Knowledge of Theosophy gives us the Head to think clearly, the Heart to help freely, and the Will to act righteously and to stick to our wishes, resolves, and vows.

ANY knowledge that does not bring us this supreme bliss and freedom is not worth acquiring. We stuff our minds with knowledge of so many facts and things gained from all and sundry, or reading all kinds of books. The brain becomes a repository of learning about all the ephemeral and passing phases of life. Naturally, such a man becomes a restless being—unbalanced, confused and erratic in his behaviour and conduct. Seek, therefore, to know the true source of your life—God. That is why you are here.

—SWAMI RAMDAS

STUDIES IN THE DHAMMAPADA

OLD AGE—I

THE CHAPTER is called *Jaravaggo* or Old Age. Some people do not like to even *think* of unpleasant subjects like old age, death, sickness, etc. However, it is very important for every mortal to dwell, nay, meditate on these subjects. In the *Gita*, meditation upon birth, death, decay, sickness, and error is considered to be spiritual wisdom. It is the soul-searching and deep meditation that transformed prince Siddhartha into Gautama the Buddha—the Enlightened One. The sight of an old man, a sick person and a dead body, as it were, shook the very foundation of the happy world of prince Siddhartha, so that he set out in the quest of the cause and cure of sorrow. But most of us live as if these facts have very slight connection to our own life. Hence, the Buddha has to actually draw our attention to the grim facts which we prefer to ignore.

1. *Why this laughter, why this jubilation, when this world is burning, burning? Shrouded in darkness why do you not seek for light? (146)*

2. *Behold this painted image, this body full of sores, stuck together, sickly, and full of many thoughts devoid of permanence and stability. (147)*

3. *This body is wearing out; it is a nest of diseases; it is frail. This heap of corruption is breaking to pieces. Life ends in death. (148)*

4. *What pleasure is there in looking at these bleached bones, like gourds cast away in the autumn? (149)*

5. *Of these bones a citadel is made, plastered over with flesh and blood; therein lurk pride and deceit, decay and death. (150)*

The above verses are like shock therapy to one who is immersed in enjoyments of the physical existence. They are like water sprinkled on the face of a sleeping man; it at once awakens him. Deep reflection on these verses shows us the impermanent nature of the body. To

one who does not like to pay attention to the unwelcome facts of life, Buddha speaks sternly, urging him to start thinking of these things before it is too late. He seems to say: how can you laugh or rejoice when the world around is constantly changing; slowly but steadily destroying the very things that now give you pleasure? For, what becomes of a man or a woman in old age, even the one most beautiful and of robust health? As age progresses, body begins to wear out. It becomes frail and is attacked by diseases which it is unable to resist anymore. Then, others are as interested in this person as one would be interested in looking at the bleached bones. Hence, we are asked, as it were, to *clinically* examine the nature of the body, to realize that it is like a citadel of bones, plastered over with flesh and blood wherein lurk pride, deceit, decay and death. But this does not mean that Buddha despised life or bodily existence. On the contrary, it is because he valued life, that he wants us not to waste the precious opportunity and youthful years in human form which has come to us after countless births in lower forms. In the canto of “The Enlightened Ones,” he points out: “Difficult it is to obtain birth as a human being. Difficult it is to live the life of a man. Difficult it is to get to hear the True Law. Difficult it is to obtain Enlightenment.”

Many of us postpone the spiritual pursuits to the time when we would retire and have lot of time at our disposal. Little realizing, that when we have retired, we would also have grown older and may or may not have the required stamina to commence this serious pursuit. Also, our habits and tendencies would have become so hardened that it would be very difficult for us to break them. Even when there is faint awareness of this fact, we find it very difficult to give up the present way of life. Reflection on above verses is likely to awaken us to the importance of beginning the journey without delay.

In Buddhist tradition there are meditation exercises prescribed as an antidote to cravings of bodily existence. Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, in his book, *A Guide to the Buddhist Path*,

enumerates these exercises. For instance, Contemplation of the Ten Stages of Decomposition of a Corpse is quite a popular practice in some Buddhist countries. There is nothing morbid in the practice. For chronic diseases drastic remedies are required. In Tibet, where fear is not allowed to veil the process of dissolution in the name of decency, the charnel ground is still the resort of those bent on subjugating all attachment to the flesh. “Verily, this body of mine, too, is of the same nature, it will become like that and will not escape it”—thus, with corpses in various stages of decomposition scattered around him, the *yogin* reflects. But, if one cannot go whole hog, there is a milder version of this practice: meditating in a cremation ground. The fragments of charred bones, charred cloth lying about and a stench of burning human flesh in the air can have sobering effect on the mind obsessed with worldly desires. If even an occasional visit to the graveyard is too much and one wants a still milder form of the same kind of practice, one can simply meditate on death: that death is inevitable, that it comes to everybody in due course, and that none can escape it. Since it must come, why not make the best possible use of one’s life? Why indulge in miserable cravings which do not bring any lasting satisfaction and happiness? One can also meditate upon impermanence: that everything is impermanent, that nothing lasts—from the solar system to one’s own breath; making one realize that one cannot hang on very determinedly to things when one knows that sooner or later one is going to have to give them up. Another kind of practice consists in what is known as the Contemplation of the Loathsomeness of Food. This is particularly suited for one who is neurotically addicted to food.

Visuddhimagga gives a story which illustrates the view of the body as a citadel of bones. The hermit Maha-Tissa was walking near Anuradhapura meditating on the transience of life. A woman who had quarreled with her husband passed him, gaily dressed and smiled at him, showing her teeth. When the husband who was in pursuit asked him whether he saw a woman pass by, the sage replied:

“I saw only a skeleton, whether it was man or woman I know not.”

6. *The splendid chariots of kings wear away; the body also comes to old age; but the virtue of the good never ages. Thus the saintly teach each other. (151)*

7. *A man who has learnt but little grows old like an ox; his flesh increases, but his knowledge does not grow. (152)*

Having shown the impermanent nature of the body, the Buddha seems to point out that such is the fate of all things and beings in the world. Even the splendid chariots of Kings finally wear away despite good care and maintenance. Similarly, body also becomes old and dies. One may prolong life in the body through good care and good living, but finally, it grows old and dies. One may grow old without much learning or knowledge. What does not grow old with age is the virtue of the good. He shows the importance of learning the lessons of life, gaining knowledge and becoming virtuous.

In Katha Upanishad, when young Nachiketas asked Yama, the God of Death, to answer his question whether the man exists or does not exist after he has died, Yama told him to spare him from answering this question. He offered him sons, grandsons of a hundred years, and lots of cattle, elephants, horses, gold, rare beauties, chariots and lutes as gifts for sparing him. Nachiketas replied: “These fleeting things wear out the vigour of a mortal’s power. Even the whole of life is short; thine are the chariots and dance and song. Not by wealth can a man be satisfied. Shall we choose wealth if we have seen thee? Shall we desire life while thou art master?”

Often, the Buddha makes clear his point by giving example of animals. The man who grows old without becoming wiser is compared with an ox. An ox is mostly used for the tasks which are repetitive and require physical strength, but do not require use of mind. Many of us live in a rut, failing to explore other possibilities, failing to exercise other faculties.

(To be concluded)

ON SIVA AND SIVALINGAM

IN Hinduism, the *trimurti* of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva represents, three aspects of One Reality or *Parabrahmam*, viz., creative, preservative, destructive (and regenerative). Siva appears in the Yajur Veda as the great god or MAHADEVA, whose symbol is *lingam*. In Rig-Veda he is called *Rudra*, the “howler,” depicted as Healer and Destroyer at the same time. In Vishnu Purana, he is shown to spring from the forehead of Brahma. In Hindu temples we see that *sivalingam* is also worshipped along with the idol of Siva. What could be the significance? What are the teachings of *Linga Purana*?

As a deity presiding over destruction and regeneration Siva is symbolized by a *lingam*, a phallic emblem. A *sivalingam* is the most ancient symbol of Lord Siva. A *lingam* is a rounded, elliptical, *aniconic* image, usually set on a circular base. Some of these *lingams* are made of basalt or dark-coloured green stone, but it could also be made of metal or crystal, and sometimes, of a transitory material such as rice, ice, clay or wood. For instance, a *lingam* is often made out of the clay of river Ganga, in the morning and evening, and then immersed into the river after worship. A *sphatika lingam*, made up of quartz, has no colour, but takes on the colour of the substance it comes into contact with. It represents *Nirgunabrahmam* or the transcendental and attributeless Reality, the Supreme Self. The Thirteenth Chapter of the *Gita*, says, “Spirit (*purusha*) when invested with matter or *prakriti*, experienceth qualities which proceed from *prakriti*; its connection with these qualities is the cause of its rebirth in good and evil wombs.” There are *svayambhu* or self-existent *sivalingams*. These are naturally existing lingas, not made by human hands. Some of them are believed to have risen up in the antiquity.

The word *Lingam* or *Linga* has many meanings in Sanskrit language. It means gender. It also means phallus, or male generative organ and male creative energy. *Linga* also means “mark” or “sign.” Smoke is a sign of fire. We can infer the presence of fire from smoke,

so also, manifestation is the mark of Omniscient, Omnipresent and Omnipotent God or One Reality. According to some scholars the word *lingam* is derived from two Sanskrit words, *laya* (dissolution) and *agaman* (recreation), which is what Siva represents. As Siva-rudra, he is *terrible*, a *destroyer* of ordinary passions and desires. He destroys things on the lower plane to recall them on a higher plane. There is a continuous or moment-to-moment destruction and regeneration going on, not only at the physical level but even at the level of thoughts and feelings. Thus:

Siva-Rudra is the Destroyer, as Vishnu is the preserver; and both are the regenerators of spiritual as well as of physical nature. To live as a plant, the *seed* must die. To live as a conscious entity in the Eternity, the passions and the 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, 459fn.)

Linga Purana, *Skanda Purana*, *Matsya Purana*, *Siva Purana*, etc., speak of the origin of *Sivalingam*. Hindu Puranas state that *sivalingam* is the source of the universe. *Skanda Purana* reveres *sivalingam* as the Supreme Being, in whom the universe originates and into whom it finally merges. *Linga Purana* speaks of Siva as being present in the *Agni-linga* or great fiery phallus. The first part of *Linga Purana* describes the origin of the *Linga* and gives the process of its worship. It also deals with creation of the universe, and describes Varaha and Narsimha *avatars* of Vishnu. According to a story in *Linga Purana*, once Brahma and Vishnu were engaged in an argument as to who was greater. Lord Siva appeared before them as a huge pillar of fire. Brahma and Vishnu were told that whoever was able to find the beginning and the end of the pillar of light will be considered greater than the other. It is said that Brahma

took the form of a swan to find the top or beginning of the pillar, while Vishnu took the form of Boar to find the bottom or end of the pillar, but neither of them succeeded. Thus, *lingam* might represent, the beginningless and endless transcendental Reality.

A *svayambhuva* *lingam* could be the naturally occurring stone *lingam* made of stone, which is shaped by the constantly flowing waters of a flowing river. A *lingam* at Amarnath in the western Himalayas forms every winter from ice dripping on the floor of a cave and freezing like a stalagmite. In India, there are *twelve Jyotirlinga* (or effulgent lingas), considered to be self-existent or *svayambhuva*, around each of which a Siva temple has been built. They are found in Kedarnath, Kashi Visvanath, Somanth, Baijnath, Rameswar, Bhimashankar, Mahakal, Malikarjuna, Amaleshwar, Nageshwar and Tryambakeshwar. A temple in the island of Rameswaram, in Southern Tamilnadu enshrines a *Jyotirlingam* which, according to legend is associated with Lord Rama. When Rama was on his way to battle Ravana, and when he was drinking water at the seashore, a voice reminded him that he was drinking water without worshipping Lord Siva. It is said that Rama made a *linga* of sand and worshipped it. He asked for the blessings of Lord Siva and requested him to reside at that place for eternity. It is said that Siva manifested himself as the *linga* and got installed there for eternity. This *lingam* is referred to as *Ramalingam*.

In some temples the *Lingam* is often represented with the *Yoni*, which is female generative organ, and symbolizes female creative energy. To the practicing Hindus, the two together are a reminder that the male and female principles—*purusha* and *prakriti*—are inseparable and that they represent the totality of all existence. The *lingam* is generally placed in the *Yoni*, and their union represents the abstract form of creation.

H.P.B. points out that the counterpart of *lingam* and *Yoni* is to be found in most religions, and is reflected in the very structure of their temples, mosques and synagogues. All the steeples, turrets, domes, and Christian temples, are reproductions of the primitive idea of the

lithos, or phallus. The Binlang stone, sacred to Lord Siva, is the reddish stone found in river Narmada, and is anointed. It is unhewn stone like Be-thel, which was consecrated by Patriarch Jacob. According to an account given in *Genesis* (Chapter 28:10-22), Jacob was fleeing from his elder twin brother Esau. On his flight, Jacob rested at a city and used a stone as a pillow. During his sleep he dreamt of a ladder to heaven. After waking up, Jacob felt that the place was blessed; it was house of God and the gate of heaven. He set up the stone he had slept on as a pillar, and anointed it with oil. He called the place and the rock, “Beth-el” (house of God). The Hindu *Lingam* is identical with “*Jacob’s Pillar*”—most undeniably, writes H.P.B. The esoteric significance of the *Lingam* was truly too sacred and metaphysical to be revealed to the profane and vulgar.

H.P.B. points out that in many temples there is *Sanctum Sanctorum* with walls on three sides and there is a curtain in front of the door on the fourth side, which is the *Adytum*. The *sanctum sanctorum* or the *Holy of Holies* in the temples is the symbol of the womb. This idea seems to have been borrowed by the Jews from the Egyptians and Indians. *King’s Chamber* in the Great Pyramid of Egypt, as also *Yoni*, symbolize the *Holy of Holies*. The Levites had in their *adytum*, “Sacred” Ark of the Covenant. The Ark is the emblem of female generative power and is often depicted in the form of *Yoni*. The Ark is the sacred *Argha* of the Hindus, which was an oblong vessel used by the priests in the worship of Isis, Astarte and Venus-Aphrodite, which were all goddesses of generative powers of nature. It is the Ark containing the germ of all living things.

The “King’s Chamber” in the *Pyramid of Cheops* is the Egyptian “Holy of Holies.” Mysteries of initiation were enacted in the Pyramids. On the days of the mysteries of initiation, the candidate representing the solar god had to descend into the sarcophagus. The sarcophagus is oblong and boat-shaped, representing the female principle, containing the germs of life. The candidate for initiation represents the solar god or the energizing ray of the sun that enters

the sarcophagus, fecundating the female principle. This represents *spiritual conception*. After remaining there for two days and two nights, and after undergoing most cruel trials on the last night, the candidate for initiation is resurrected. In India, instead of Sarcophagus, it is the “golden” Cow through which the candidate has to pass, in order to become a *DWIJA* or twice-born. The ceremony of passing through the *Holy of Holies* meant *spiritual conception* and *spiritual rebirth* of an individual, and his regeneration. The *Holy of Holies* which was “earlier symbolized by *Hiranyagarbha* or golden egg, and is now symbolized by the cow, is the symbol of universal abstract nature. The stooping man at the entrance of the *Sanctum Sanctorum*, ready to pass through the matrix of mother nature is the physical man ready to re-become the original spiritual Being,” writes H.P.B. The spiritual man is Hermaphrodite, in whom there is a permanent conjunction of *Buddhi* (Hermes) with *Manas* (Venus-Aphrodite).

There is the verse in *Genesis* (I, v.27), which says, “God creates ‘Man in his own image,’ male and female created he them.” H.P.B. points out that “male-female” refers to androgynous Adam-Kadmon. Adam-Kadmon is a Kabalistic name, which represents neither a living man, nor a human or divine Being, but the two sexes or organs of creation, called in Hebrew *sacr* and *n’cavah*. The Hebrew words, *sacr* and *n’cavah* are translated in the Bible as “male and female,” but literally translated, they are *lingam* (phallus) and *yonis* of the Hindus, writes H.P.B. Adam is in one sense Jehovah, the male-female. “Noah daily prayed in the ark before the BODY OF ADAM,” or before the Phallus in the ark, or Holy of Holies. Further,

Jehovah says to Moses “the Summation of my name is *Sacr*, the carrier of the germ”—*phallus*. “It is the vehicle of the annunciation, and the *sacr* has passed down through ages to the *sacr-factum* of the Roman priest, and the *sacr-fice*, and *sacrament* of the English speaking race” (*Source of Measures*, p. 236). Thence marriage is a *sacrament* in the Greek and Roman Churches. (*S.D.*, II, 476 fn.)

Purusha and *Prakriti* or Spirit and Matter are coeval and co-eternal. They are two poles of One Reality and are necessary for manifestation. H.P.B. points out that phallic worship only developed with the gradual loss of the keys to the inner meaning of the religious symbols. When the symbology of *lingam* and *yonis* is not understood, it leads to phallic or sexual worship. Some of the Hindu sects believe that it is possible to experience spiritual ecstasy through union of the two sexes. The corruption began from the time of the Atlanteans. In the *Secret Doctrine* (II, 273 and 279) H.P.B. mentions that after the separation of sexes, the Atlanteans, who were pure as gods, to begin with, started to worship form and matter and that led to *self-worship* which in the course of time, degenerated into phallic worship. In Egypt, Osiris was represented by man having bull's head, while Isis by a woman with cow's head. They were shown to be connected with Sun and Moon. Both cow and woman have same period of parturition, *i.e.*, 280 days or 10 lunar months. These symbols degenerated into phallic worship (*S.D.*, I, 390-91). The Mysteries of initiation were degenerated after the days of Plato and Pythagoras. There is one Creative power, which manifests itself as *Kriyasakti* or creative power of thought, *Ichhasakti* or creative power of will, *Kundalini sakti* or creative power of activated *Buddhi*, etc. Only at the lowest level it manifests itself as animal procreative power.

QUICKSILVER is the mother of all metals, on account of its coldness and moistness; and if it be once purified and cleansed of all foreign matter it cannot be mixed any more with grossness of any kind, neither can it be changed back into an imperfect metal. For Nature does not undo her work, and that which has once become perfectly pure can never become impure again.

—*A Tract of Great Price*

HAVE WE LIVED BEFORE?

I

HAVE we lived before? How do we get the correct answer? The seventh aphorism in the *Yoga Aphorisms* of Patanjali tells us that: "Correct Cognition results from Perception, Inference, and Testimony." Thus, we have at our disposal three approaches to arrive at the correct answer to this most philosophical and important question. The first method is to know the truth by direct perception or through personal experience. The second method is to arrive at the truth through inference or deduction, *i.e.*, by use of logic and reasoning. The third approach relies on the testimony from authoritative sacred scriptures or experienced persons. We may use all the three methods to arrive at the truth on the subject of rebirth.

Direct perception is the first hand experience. It is what Sankara calls *aparokshanubhuti*, experience not through the eyes of another. Our five senses bring data to the mind. Mind then gets transformed into the form of the object of perception and thereby receives the impression or gets an idea of the thing perceived, be it sound, smell, touch, taste or sight. *Inference* on the other hand involves use of logic and reasoning, by analogy and comparison of the thing under consideration with other known things. Thus, if we see smoke, we can infer the presence of fire. We have not seen the fire, but merely *inferred* its presence. A lot of our perception is in terms of inference, putting "two and two together." In *testimony*, when someone competent communicates by word, something experienced by him, with the intention of conveying his own knowledge to the other, it is authority or testimony for the hearer.

Let us try to answer the question on the basis of our direct perception. Do we have any first hand experience or knowledge of our having lived before? No. For most of us, there is no direct experience which shows us unequivocally that we have lived before. Of course, now and then, we do come across cases of people who claim to remember their past life. They are able to recognize places

and people in minutest and intimate details, which show pretty conclusively that it is the same individual who had lived before as Mr. X or Mrs. Y, who is *now* Mr. Z. Hundreds of such cases have been scientifically investigated and authenticated by researchers.

Many verified cases of past life memory have been recorded by researchers. The book, *Reincarnation and Biology* by Ian Stevens of Virginia University and the book, *Claims of Reincarnation* by Dr. Satwant Pasaria, a clinical psychologist from Bangalore, are based on study of 225 and 500 such cases, respectively. This has triggered a debate among scientists as to their cause and interpretation. Such cases are more common among children, who remember their past life and then as they grow up, they forget it. These are cases of perfectly ordinary people remembering their past life.

A charming little story appeared in the American magazine of 1915 written by a photographer in Minneapolis about her younger sister. She was also given to telling stories which contained bits of truth far beyond the imagination of a child. Her elder sister would note them down in a diary. Once when the child was angry for some reason, she threatened that she would go away. Her father asked whether she would go away to the heaven from where she came. She replied that she did not come from heaven. She said that she went to the moon first, which used to have people on it, before it became very hard. She said that she has been here [on earth] lots of times, sometimes as a man and sometimes as a woman. Once she went to Canada when she was a man by name Lishus Faber. When asked as to what she did for living, she said: "I was a soldier" and "I took the gates!" Her sister then studied all the histories of Canada and came across an old book in a library which contained a brief account of the taking of a little walled city by a small company of soldiers in which a young lieutenant with his small band "took the gates." The name of the young lieutenant was Aloysius Le Faber! It is interesting to note that her family neither believed nor knew anything of the doctrine of rebirth!

However, not everyone is able to remember their past life. This

is the main objection to the doctrine of reincarnation. We do not realize that much of what happened even in the present life is forgotten by us and yet we have no doubt that we have lived through our childhood, adolescence and adult life to become what we are now. The fact that we do not consciously remember is not a very strong reason for rejecting the doctrine. Experiments in hypnotism throw up the memory of experiences of early age, including the pre-natal stage, in minutest details to show that these experiences are not lost. The past life regression also brings forth memory of previous lives which indicate the existence of a continuing entity, a real self within each and every one of us. Actually, we should be thankful that we do not remember our past life. As it is, we find it difficult to handle the complexities of human relations of a single life; can we imagine our plight if we started remembering the good and bad incidences of our past lives? We would be lost in a maze. It is the wisdom of cosmic order that we do not remember. Even science admits that forgetting is essential for surviving:

Without forgetting, adaptive ability would suffer; for example, learned behaviour that might have been correct a decade ago may no longer be [correct now]. Cases are recorded of people who (by ordinary standards) forgot so little that their everyday activities were full of confusion. Thus, forgetting seems to serve the survival of the individual and the species. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*)

However, Theosophy does not consider such instances as the real proof of reincarnation because it may be simply a case of a soul looking into the astral records of someone else's life and narrating them as his own, unconsciously. But we can rely on the testimony of the spiritually perfected beings like the Buddha, Mahavira and others, who not only preached this doctrine but also possessed the knowledge of past incarnations. In Jainism it is taught that as you advance spiritually, you begin to remember past lives, one or more, depending on the level of spiritual perfection. In Buddhism there is

the highest stage of *Samma-Sambuddha*, wherein the person gets the complete knowledge of all the past incarnations. *Jataka Tales* is the collection of incidences from past lives of the Buddha. An ordinary person builds up the stock of memory from childhood as he grows. But at death, the body with the brain gets destroyed. In the new birth, new body with new brain is acquired and memory pertaining to that life develops as the person grows. Since the new brain was not involved in the experiences of the previous life, it cannot be expected to remember anything of that life. It is the soul, the immortal man who possesses this memory and if the brain is made porous to the higher influences, then it is possible for the new brain to transmit the knowledge of past life as it happens in the spiritually advanced person.

At the present stage of our development, since we are not able to recall our past lives, we can turn to the *testimony* of our scriptures and of spiritually wise beings. We should study and understand what the widely accepted religions of the world and the spiritually perfected men have to say about this important doctrine. The doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation are the fundamental teachings of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. Shri Krishna in the fourth chapter of the *Gita* tells Arjuna: “Both I and thou have passed through many births, O harasser of thy foes! Mine are known unto me, but thou knowest not of thine.” Gandhari, the mother of hundred Kauravas had the terrible misfortune of witnessing the death of all her hundred sons and she was told to look for its cause in her past life. She finally traced it to her fifty-first life in which she had inadvertently poured water on an anthill and killed a hundred ants, for which she was now punished by death of her hundred sons. The incidence must be interpreted allegorically.

Reincarnation was believed in also by Jesus and church fathers until anathema was hurled at the doctrine of reincarnation in the council of Constantinople about 500 A.D. The new doctrine teaches that God creates new soul for every new born baby. But what basis do we have for claiming that reincarnation was believed in by Jesus?

That basis can be found in the *Bible* itself. In *The Ocean of Theosophy* Mr. Judge tells us that Christians should remember that Jesus was a Jew and he must have well known the doctrines held by them. They all believed in reincarnation. At the time of Jesus it was currently believed that the old prophet Elias was yet to return. Jesus told his disciples that John the Baptist was actually the Elias of old whom the people were expecting. Jesus, being a seer, could look into the past and tell them just what the historical character any one had been and so he gave them the details about John. If the doctrine was false and Jesus did not believe in it then he would have refuted it. The same doctrine was always applied by the Jews to Adam, David, Moses, Seth, and Abel. Abel who was killed by Cain was reborn as Seth and then as Moses. Cain died and reincarnated as Yethrokorah; who died and was reborn as the Egyptian who was killed by Moses. Here we find the confirmation of belief of Jewish people in the doctrines of both Karma and Reincarnation. St. Paul also gives the theory of reincarnation where he refers to the cases of Jacob and Esau, saying that the Lord loved the one and hated the other *before they were born*. It is obvious that Lord cannot love or hate a non-existing thing, and that means Jacob and Esau had been in their former lives, respectively, good and bad and therefore the Lord—or Karma loved the one and hated the other before their present birth. The voice of the Almighty told John the Revealer that the man who overcame should “go out no more” from heaven. Meaning thereby that the man who by constant struggle of many lives at last overcomes the delusions of matter will have no need to go out into life any more, but from that time will be a pillar [of light], what the Theosophists call as “Dhyan Chohan,” forevermore. And this is exactly the old and oriental doctrine on the point.

(To be concluded)

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: There are presiding deities, intelligences and intelligent powers connected with the life of man. Likewise, are there any intelligences presiding over his death?

Answer: Ancient philosophy tells us that the whole universe is governed by intelligent powers and forces, ordinarily termed “gods.” Besides gods of water, fire, air, etc., there are “gods” of various degrees, directly connected with physical and spiritual evolution of man. These are variously designated as *Pitris*, *Dhyanis*, *Dhyani Buddhas*, *Manus*, and so on. The *Gita* speaks of presiding deities or *devatas*, which preside over the five senses. Some of these *devatas* or elemental beings are carriers of Karma, and play an important role in Karmic dispensation. These “lives” or elementals seem to function under greater agents called *Chitra-gupta* or *Lipikas*, who are the agents in karmic dispensation. They impress on the “invisible tablets of the Astral Light, ‘the great picture-gallery of eternity’ a faithful record of every act, and even thought, of man, of all that was, is, or ever will be, in the phenomenal Universe.” Since the states after death are effectual states, the *Lipikas* must also be concerned with the after-life of the person.

In the Egyptian tradition, Amenti, literally the dwelling of Amen, the hidden God, was the kingdom of Osiris, in which were fourteen halls or “mansions,” each one set aside for some special purpose connected with the after-death state of the soul. Besides the Hall of Judgment there were the Elysian Fields, or Fields of *Aanroo* [Heaven], and many other mystical halls. On entering Amenti, god Anubis conducts the soul to the Hall of Osiris where it is judged.

The soul seeking admission to the Judgment Hall is at once confronted by its doors and even the various parts of its gates—all forbidding his entrance unless he tells them their mystery names, as well as that of the *gods and guardians* of these domains. The defunct, having complied with this initial requirement, begins a recital of his good deeds, and not until he has given evidence that he has acted with justice and mercy towards his fellows, is he allowed to pass on. In spite of the attempt of the deceased to justify himself, it is the *heart* that determines the balance up or down. In the Egyptian tradition there are forty-two “Assessors” who are supposed to be in the region of Amenti, and they read out the account of every soul’s life from the “heart” of the dead, which becomes an open book before Osiris, the Egyptian equivalent of Yama or Karma. Similarly, the Hindu *Chitra-Gupta*, reads out the account of every soul’s life from his register, called *Agra-sandhini*, which refers to Astral records. The dead, if justified, is addressed as Osiris, the Deity, and the following words, full of majesty and justice are pronounced: “Let the Osiris go; ye see he is without fault. He lived on truth.”

Yama is the god of the dead, comparable to Pluto who presides over Hades, underworld or *Kamaloka*, and with whom shades or Kamarupic shells of the departed dwell. It is believed that character of Yama as a punisher and a judge, is a later creation. He was regarded in one of the hymns, as the first of men to have died and the first that departed to the world of bliss, heaven or *Devachan*. Thus, in one sense, Yama is the embodiment of the human race that was endowed with the light of mind or self-consciousness, without which there could be neither Heaven nor Hell. Further, Yama and his twin sister *Yami* are the symbol of dual mind—the higher and the lower. In this twin character of *Yama-Yami*, he is depicted as both judge and the criminal, *i.e.*, the restrainer of his own evil doings and the evil-doer himself.

After the death of the body, the surviving entity passes through various states and it appears from the description of after-death states given in many religious traditions that the passage of soul is guided

and presided over by intelligent powers. For instance, with the followers of *Visishtadwaita* philosophy, there is a belief that there are the *Pitris* or *Devas*, who help the disembodied soul or *Jiva* in its transit from dead body to the ultimate abode, *Paramapadha*. They are called *ativahikas* or bearers in transit. H.P.B. explains that *Paramapadha* is not a material state but is made up of *shuddhasattwa* (pure essence, or substance not subject to qualities of matter) and it is reached by those who have attained to *moksha*. There, the *Muktas* or *Jivatmas* are not subject to the qualities of matter or Karma. (*S.D.*, I, 132)

Charon, in Greek mythology, is the ferryman of the dead. The souls of the deceased are brought to him by Hermes, and Charon ferries them across the river Styx, which forms boundary between the earth and the underworld. Charon is a variant of Khu-en-ua, the hawk-headed steersman. The dead were obliged to pay an *obolus*, a small piece of money, to this grim ferryman of the Styx. Therefore, the ancients always placed a coin under the tongue of the deceased. H.P.B. points out that Hades was only a place of retributive justice. This could only be reached by crossing the river to the “other shore”, *i.e.*, by crossing the river Death, and being once more reborn, for weal or for woe.

Question: Why is it said that time is an illusion? Why does a Master of Wisdom say that “Past, Present and Future” are clumsy terms?

Answer: Generally we reckon time in hours, minutes and seconds, following the rotation of the earth around its own axis. But apart from this, there is a sense of time that is subjective. *Time is something created entirely by ourselves*, says a Master of Wisdom. Time seems to *fly* in happier moments, while it seems to drag on, ever so slowly, during painful experiences. “Time is an illusion produced by the succession of our states of consciousness as we travel through eternal duration, and it does not exist where no consciousness exists in which the illusion can be produced; but lies asleep” (*S.D.*, I, 37). H.P.B. implies that time is but a by-product of consciousness. In the experience of the mystic, past, present, and future merge in the

ETERNAL NOW. Hence, a Master of Wisdom says that “past, present and future” are clumsy words. The subdivisions, which seem natural, are man-made and purely subjective. It is impossible to point out the dividing line between the past and present, or the present and future. Even as we say, “now,” it has moved into the past. Our divisions of time are relative to the observer.

By means of analogies H.P.B. explains that we seem to have only an illusion of a present moment. What we call present is like a mathematical line which divides future from the past, both of which are part of the eternal duration. We can imagine a circle with a horizontal diameter which divides it into two. The upper half may be called future and the lower half may be called past. That which connects them both is just a thin mathematical line which we can call as present. As compared to the large portion occupied by the two halves, the space occupied by the thin line is very small. Before we know it, the future moment turns into the past. The term “duration” applies to that which has no beginning and no end. In that sense, we can never have experience of “duration” while we exist in the phenomenal world. There is constant change or *nityapralaya* going on. Nothing remains without change even *for the billionth part of a second*. Our sensation of “present” is really blurring of momentary glimpses, or succession of glimpses as given out by our senses, as those impressions pass from the region of future to the region of memories which we call past.

Science tells us that the image persists on our retina for one-sixteenth of a second. Hence, even before the impression produced by an image has gone out, another one superimposes it, thereby producing the illusion of continuity. This is called “persistence of vision.” This principle is used in the movies. It presents to us a series of still images in quick succession within certain time, thereby producing the illusion of actual movements. If someone rotates a sparkler in a circle or makes a figure of eight, our eye actually receives images in quick succession which persist on retina and produce an illusion of seeing a circle or a figure of eight made by the sparkler.

Thus, we experience only a “sensation of duration” in what we term as “present” when the succession of moments are blurred so that we do not have perception of the beginning or end of the moments as in case of the instantaneous electric spark. We may have similar experience when we are completely and deeply engrossed in some work and have lost all sense of time. We obtain that sort of state during deep sleep and also meditation or *Samadhi*. In reality, moments are like spokes of a wheel which move continually in succession, giving rise to chronological time.

H.P.B. writes: “No one could say that a bar of metal dropped into the sea came into existence as it left the air, and ceased to exist as it entered the water, and that the bar itself consisted only of that cross-section thereof which at any given moment coincided with the mathematical plane that separates, and, at the same time, joins, the atmosphere and the ocean” (*S.D.*, I, 37). It is a comment on the way we divide time into past, present and future. Can we say that a metal bar dipped into the water did not exist when it was in air, but came into existence when it touched the plane of water and disappeared when it went below the water; assuming that our perception existed on the plane which divided air and water—the plane on which we perceive only a cross-section of the bar and never the full bar? No. Similarly, things and persons present to our senses only “cross-section” of their total selves, as they drop out of the to-be into the has-been, out of the future into the past, as they pass through time, space and matter from one eternity to another. The real person or thing does not consist solely of what we see at any particular moment but is composed of all that (sum-total) which existed eternally in the “future,” and passes through what we call “present” and shall exist for eternity in the “past.” Hence, past, present and future are erroneous terms. They arise due to limitation of our perception.

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

What is a Hero? A hero is someone who possesses and displays certain heroic attributes such as integrity, compassion and moral courage, heightened by an understanding of power of situational forces and an enhanced social awareness. Heroism is a social concept and it can be explained and taught through education and practice. “I believe that heroism is common, a universal attribute of human nature and not exclusive to a few special individuals. The heroic act is extraordinary, the heroic actor is ordinary individual—until he or she becomes a heroic special individual,” writes Philip Zimbardo, professor emeritus of psychology at Stanford University and originator of the Stanford Prison Experiment. It is necessary for the well being of the society and the civilization to acknowledge that every one of us is capable of heroic acts. Sadly, in the present generation, it is very rare to find individuals who are ready to sacrifice on behalf of fellow human beings. We have a flawed vision of the hero as sports figure, rock star, gang leader, or fantastic *super* hero. Keeping this in mind Philip Zimbardo has formed the Heroic Imagination Project (HIP) which seeks to fit individuals to undertake heroic acts on behalf of others, for a moral cause and without expectation of any gain. The project involves research into component attributes of heroism, such as, ethical behaviour, courage and leadership and its practical application, such as, defiance of unjust authority, facing physical danger, etc. They propose to instill in all people self-confidence and the ability to perform actions that can improve the lives of other people and society as a whole. The idea is to develop everyday heroism, by cultivating mind-set with heroic imagination which makes one feel, “I can be a hero when the opportunity arises.” His Stanford Prison Experiment showed that there are situational forces which can corrupt even good people into becoming perpetrators of evil. We must actively seek to empower individuals faced with challenging circumstances to make the difficult but moral decisions, writes Zimbardo. (*The Futurist*,

November-December 2010)

Theosophy teaches that each one of us has a dual nature, which we generally call good and bad or higher and lower. Psychologically, we name them soul-nature and body nature. These two, as everyone knows, are in perpetual conflict: the soul aspires for one thing, the body desires the opposite; soul wants divine companionship, the senses run after carnal companionship, and so on. Why is not there harmony between our two natures? Because, through this struggle each incarnated human entity is acquiring the fundamental power of Self-Reliance, of Dependence on the Self. There is a Hero in each of us. Every man is a King and a Hero. The truly noble and kingly person has to learn to recognize that every other person is also a King, a Hero.

At the present, there are many millions who unconsciously to themselves feel that within their own mind there is something that is noble and strong. But out of these many millions, only a very few begin to enquire about the nature of that something, which they vaguely call the Soul. The step necessary to be taken is ascertaining the nature and powers of that Soul. Everyone, every man, woman and child, also holds in the depth of the heart that gem of gems, the sparkling diamond of *Atman*, the spirit. When it is recognized that not only we ourselves are Kings, but that all, all are kings endowed with Royal grace and Royal Beneficence, then egotism weakens in us and the Superman hidden so far, begins to emerge.

The Irish mystic poet George William Russell wrote: "It is true that men have done wrong—hence their pain: but back of all this there is something infinitely soothing, a light which does not wound, which says no harsh thing, even although the darkest of spirits turns to it in its agony, for the darkest of human spirits has still around him this first glory which shines from a deeper being within, whose history may be told as legend of the Hero in man."

What is prayer? Does it do any good? There are many different ways to pray. But from Buddhists to Baptists, from Jews to the dancing dervishes of Islam, "prayer shawls" have been part of tradition for centuries. In America, hundreds of groups of believers and nonbelievers, as also, knitters and crocheters, are formed to make shawls created with prayer and presented with prayer to those who are hurt, ill, grief-stricken, or in pain. East congregational church in Milton has prayer shawl group, which is one of the many hundreds across the country. Women of this group have woven more than 60 prayer shawls by their hands. After weaving a shawl, the women of the group lay their hands upon the shawl, and offer a prayer, asking God to help the person for whom it was intended. The women weaving the prayer shawls seem to weave hope and faith together. When people are at a distance from their loved ones that are ailing or troubled, they choose to send a prayer shawl, blessed with prayer, "may the person be cradled in hope, kept in joy, graced with peace and wrapped in love," writes Ellen Michaud (*The Saturday Evening Post*, September-October 2010). Doctors are of divided opinion as to the efficacy of prayers. Dr. Harold Koenig, M.D., director of Duke University's Centre for Spirituality, Theology and Health says that the purpose of prayer is not to change the situation but it is to change the *person* in the situation. He says that when your prayer is for getting healed or getting rich, it may or may not be answered. However, when your prayer consists in expressing gratitude for the many blessings in your life, it is likely that you will start functioning differently and that is what makes a difference to your health.

What is prayer? It might be an expression of gratitude, a petition, a demand or a request. Prayer is generally considered to be a means of communicating one's problems, wishes and desires to Almighty. Extensive research is being undertaken and millions of dollars are spent on study of biological effects of meditation and prayer on the brain and disease. Experiments in this direction have shown that although prayers are a source of comfort for family members and the patient, it is not always true that those prayed for fared better

than those who were not.

In India, when help is needed for some orphanages, they pray to some patron god and help comes most miraculously. Mr. Judge explains that strong and constant faith carries the thoughts of the prayer into receptive minds and they are then moved to action. When prayer is offered to formless and unseen God, one's faith is not too firm. In case of idol-worshipper, the image of Virgin Mary or Krishna helps to arouse strong and constant faith.

Often, when we are unable to do anything personally, but have the strong desire to help, our intense desire may strike like Vulcan, upon other hearts in the world, and another person may do that which *we* desired to do. Our thoughts are, more often than not, like soap bubbles and they do not travel very far. Our good thoughts must be sustained. Some people think even on the most trifling things from the higher plane of thought so that their thoughts are more intense than thoughts of ordinary men, and by that very intensity, they acquire power of creation, says H.P.B.

American lawyer Baruch Cohen gives an example of a puzzling moral problem. He asks us to consider a situation where a certain person "A" is in need of immediate heart transplant or he will die. The donor is a person "B," an accident victim, from whom the otherwise healthy heart is to be removed quickly while it is still beating, and trans-operated into "A." Such a transplant would not be acceptable if B is deliberately killed in order to extract the heart so that "A" might live. We are asked to consider the hypothetical situation in which a doctor kills "B" in order to save "A," because he feels that donor's life is not important. What are we to do? Do we discard the heart so extracted and allow "A" to die? Or do we allow the transplant, saying that at least some good came out of the evil? Similar puzzling moral dilemma is faced in a real life situation

concerning the war victims. During the Second World War, often German air force planes were shot down by the enemy fire over the North Sea. They had to bail out the pilot from freezing water. The authorities had to determine how long a human being survives in freezing waters before succumbing to hypothermia and dying, so as to be able to decide whether it would be worthwhile wasting manpower and equipments in a fruitless rescue operation. Heinrich Himmler, the chief of the Gestapo in Nazi Germany, decided to use Prisoners of War for the experiment, in which the Prisoners of War would be stripped naked and immersed into tanks of ice water for many hours to find out how long they would survive. In one such experiment, out of 300 prisoners around 80 to 90 of them died, but the doctors felt the experiment was justified as these prisoners were anyway condemned to death. Should we carry on the research in our days with the hope of being able to save some lives in the future? "Can the merciless suffering of people be reduced to impersonal scientific data and treated as such? It has stirred widespread soul-searching about the social responsibility and potential abuse of science," writes Mukul Sharma (*The Speaking Tree [The Times of India]*, December 19, 2010). The American lawyer, Baruch Cohen is of the opinion that Ethical scientists cannot isolate human agony. It is true that such research can help save a person's life; but can it save his soul? Are there times, when saving a life is not the ultimate good to be achieved?

Human life is precious and we should do all in our power to relieve the suffering, but we must employ proper means for the same. End does not always justify the means. Even if there are individuals ready to offer themselves to be used as guinea pigs, often for money, we must be cautious. H.P.B. points out that self-sacrifice is a duty, but we have to discriminate. "A man has no right to starve himself *to death* that another man may have food, unless the life of that man is obviously more useful to many than his own life." The same logic must be applied to vivisection and animal or human experiments.

Prof. C. S. Lewis argues that it is not right that one species should

suffer for the happiness or comfort of another. If human beings claim their right to torment animals, just because they are higher than animals, by that very superiority they should be better than the beasts and abstain from inflicting pain. If we must torture them in order to improve human life or relieve human pain, it is our grave responsibility to live a life of such superior order as to justify the sacrifice of those animals. Such a justification based on “superiority” could be dangerous, as tomorrow we may feel no qualms in torturing and killing human beings whom we consider inferior! It has happened in the past. Some Germans thought they were the only true Aryans and superior to the Jews. The White race considered itself superior to the Black. The civilized man thinks himself superior to a savage. In India, a Brahmin felt justified in ill-treating a Harijan and calling him “untouchable.”

The immediate effect of such experiments would be hardening of the heart. In Shakespeare’s play, *Cymbeline*, when a queen asked the doctor for poisons to experiment on animals, the doctor said: “Your Highness shall from this practice but make hard your heart.” Karmically, of course, we are sowing seeds or causes that may be reaped by us, in subsequent incarnation, in the form of similar *helpless suffering*.

IN this state of absorbed contemplation there is no longer question of holding an object in view; the vision is continuous so that seeing and seen are one;...of all that until then filled the eye no memory remains. The first seeing is of Intellect knowing, the second that of intellect in love....The vision floods the eyes with light, but it is not light showing some other thing, the light is itself the vision. No longer is there object seen and light to show it, no longer Intellect and object of Intellection; this is the very Radiance that brought both into being.

—PLOTINUS