

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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### IMAGINATION—THE KING FACULTY

IMAGINATION is the faculty of imagining or of forming mental images or concepts of what is not actually present to the senses. The term imagination comes from the Latin verb *imaginari* meaning “to picture oneself.” It is the ability of the mind to build mental scenes, objects or events that do not exist, are not present, or have not happened in the past. Jim Davies, an associate Professor and the Director of the Science Imagination Laboratory at Carleton University believes that imagination is used in a whole variety of cognitive processes, including planning, hypothetical reasoning, picturing things in the past or the future, and in design and creativity in engineering and the arts.

The faculty of imagination is very likely unique to human beings. According to an article in *New Scientist* magazine, some researchers who study apes and other tool-making animals, such as crows, see powers of imagination in their subjects, arguing that they plan ahead when making complex tools, and solve problems that they have never encountered before without resorting to trial and error. Others are of the opinion that it is impossible to say whether the animals that solve problems without trial and error are consciously imagining different solutions, or subconsciously integrating information to come up with the correct solution. They wonder if chimpanzees and other animals conceive of something that is not present or think of something that happened yesterday.

Everyone possesses the faculty of imagination, but its expression or manifestation varies from person to person. The faculty of imagination must be trained and exercised, else it tends to get atrophied, both in children and adults. When children play make-believe they get a chance to exercise their power of imagination. A child tends to use the huge box in which the washing machine was delivered, imagining it to be a spaceship, a train, or a car. There is a growing concern that television, videogames, Internet and other forms of electronic entertainment have an adverse effect on the creative thinking of the children.

Psychologist Jonathan Schooler of the University of California, Santa Barbara, believes that those who pay attention to their daydreams are likely to harvest creative insights from their reveries. In her article, “Dreams become Reality,” Vinita Nangia gives a list of her daydreams. Extremes of weather would make her imagine being enveloped in an individualised, invisible bubble, within which the weather never changes and pollution cannot intrude! Not just poets and artistes, but scientists and inventors too daydream, as without a dream or a wish nothing is possible, says Nangia.

Theosophy differentiates between fancy, phantasy, daydreaming and imagination. In the article, “Phantasy and Psychism,” (*Theosophy*, Vol. 17), *phantasy* is defined as “the faculty by which images, thoughts, impressions, are evoked from the storehouse of conscious or unconscious memory and automatically rearranged and dramatized into a never-ending series of stories or pictures...” Phantasy is automatic and operates without the control of the Ego. Day-dreaming is mild form of phantasy wherein the Ego has weak and intermittent control. Phantasy differs from the faculty of imagination in which there is conscious arrangement of impressions and images in the mind.

Albert Einstein said: “Imagination is more important than knowledge, for knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.” He imagined himself

running alongside a light wave, a fantasy that ultimately led to his theory of special relativity. The Scottish philosopher David Hume believed that fantasy helps us to move beyond and change our present reality. Leonardo da Vinci’s fantastical flying machines paved the way for the Wright brothers, and likewise, H. G. Wells’ novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898) inspired the first liquid-fuelled space rocket.

In his work, *Biographia Literaria*, Samuel T. Coleridge distinguishes between fancy and imagination, saying that fancy rested on the mechanical and passive operations of one’s mind to accumulate and store data, while imagination held a “mysterious power” to extract “hidden ideas and meaning” from such data. Coleridge argues that a good literary work employs the use of the imagination which he called “Esemplastic Imagination.” *Esemplastic* means having the ability to shape diverse elements or concepts into a unified whole. The “esemplastic power of poetic imagination” implies a process wherein the poet takes images, words, and emotions from a number of realms of human endeavour and thought, and unifies them all into a single work. Such an accomplishment, argues Coleridge, requires an enormous effort of imagination.

In the field of science one can quote the anecdote from Newton’s life, when he saw an apple fall to the ground. In fact, he noticed that apples always descend perpendicularly to the ground, and that they do not go up or sideways, and for that matter anything left to itself falls to the ground. The conclusion was that our earth draws it. In this case also, we can see esemplastic imagination at work, wherein Newton reduced his observations of diverse things falling to the ground, to one guiding principle, namely, the Law of gravitational attraction.

To achieve the desired result, we need to *picturise*, or form a clear mental picture of what we want. When one believes in and is identified with whatever one dreams to achieve, one is more likely to translate it into reality. Perhaps that is what Henry David Thoreau meant when he said, “If you build castles in the air, your work need not be lost, that is where they should be. Now put the foundation

under them.” Trained imagination can produce an actual image or form in the astral substance which works as a mould. “The Imagination is the picture-making power of the human mind. In the ordinary average human person it has not enough training or force to be more than a sort of dream, but it may be trained,” says Mr. Judge. A wonder-worker in the east makes his audience see a snake, where there is no snake, because he was asked to see a snake before his mind’s eye, right from his childhood, so that the image he forms of the snake is so strong that everyone in the audience had to see it. Fancy, is the decay of the power of imagination, where there is mixing up of the desire, image and the mind with all its powers.

In “Creative visualization,” “imagination” and “lucid dreaming,” there is awareness and *conscious control*. In “lucid dreaming,” you are aware that you are dreaming and you direct the dreaming. Creative visualization is learning to imagine the desired outcome. For instance, a person who wants to overcome his fear of swimming, might visualize himself jumping into the water and making movements of hands and feet, probably sinking a little and yet not giving up, and finally reaching the other end of the swimming pool.

Most of our diseases are caused by fear and wrong imagination. If we would remove the fear and give a right bent to our imagination, then two-thirds of the diseases will vanish, says H.P.B. In *Isis Unveiled* Madame Blavatsky gives examples of infants born with missing limbs—cases of imagination of mother affecting the astral form of the child in the womb. In one case, a woman gave birth to a child with a wounded and bleeding forehead, because her husband had threatened her with a sword pointed to her forehead. During pregnancy, women become particularly receptive to influences of the astral light, which assists them in the formation of the child and constantly presents to them the images of the forms with which it is filled. The creative faculty of imagination can fashion the coming child into whatever form she likes. The image of the object, making strong impressions on the mother’s mind, is instantly projected into the astral light. Her magnetic emanations then attract and unite

themselves with the descending current which bears the image upon it. It rebounds, and re-percussing more or less violently, impresses itself upon the foetus. “The kabalistic use of the pentagram can therefore determine the countenance of unborn infants, and an initiated woman might give to her son the features of Nereus or Achilles, as well as those of Louis XV or Napoleon” (*Isis*, I, pp. 395, 398). Many magical phenomena can be explained on the basis of Will and Imagination. It is “because men do not perfectly imagine and believe the result, is that the [magical] arts are uncertain, while they might be perfectly certain,” writes H.P.B.

Each one of us has two natures, the higher personal and the lower individual, and therefore also dual power of imagination, the higher and the lower. The higher imagination works from within without. The personal man’s imagination is mostly phantasy and fancy. It interferes with his attempts to control, purify and raise his thought and ideation. The Individual man’s imagination is “the plastic or creative power of the soul” (*Isis*, I, 396). It is described as one of the noblest faculties in man. It is the human soul, *Manas*, the Thinker, aided by *Buddhi*, who uses imagination.

Right imagination enables us to trace every deed to its archetypal soul. The common tasks of waking and sleeping, bathing and dressing, talking and listening, etc., are not merely mundane activities, but they are related to something in the higher world. Thus waking and sleeping correspond to manifestation and non-manifestation. Bathing may be taken to correspond to sacred bathing or baptism. Likewise, talking and listening may be related to becoming pupil-teachers so that we may become true *Shravakas*. Performing sacramental deeds the whole day, *i.e.*, seeing in the mundane activities the reflection of celestial, we grow in holiness and our faculty of imagination grows strong.

Individual or higher ideation is the creative activity of the Manasic Ego by which he influences, impresses and inspires the personality. This is true imagination or *sankalpa*, a power that creates images by Will, Thought, Feeling or Aspiration. When we undertake self-

discipline, we first make an ideal plan or *Sankalpa* and then execute it. *Kalpa* means, “to form an idea or image.” Thus, *Sankalpa* is to so thoroughly think and imagine that the thing thought about gets translated into action. When the personal man leans more and more towards the divine parent, or *Buddhi*, he may acquire the knowledge about the nature and character of the imagination power. A Master of Wisdom writes: “Good resolutions are mind-painted pictures of good deeds: fancies, day-dreams, whisperings of the *Buddhi* to the *Manas*. If we encourage them they will not fade away like the dissolving mirage in the Shamo desert, but grow stronger and stronger until one’s whole life becomes the expression and outward proof of the divine motive within.”

A conscious and cautious arousing of the faculty of the imagination protects a person from a great harm, as impulsive actions are to a large extent eliminated. Thus, for instance, if one has fought with a person but decides to forget about the quarrel and be friends again, then one can just sit down and vividly imagine, in all details, how one will go and talk to the other person gently. But if the other person is not willing to forget and move on, then he or she may react badly. In which case, one must imagine how one will absorb the shock and be ready to approach the person once again. When initiating an action, the student-aspirant can ask himself: Does the act exalt both the doer and the deed? Will it evoke spontaneous spiritual reaction in the person who will be affected by the deed? Images thus woven by the imagination do not fade away, when time ripens, they spontaneously move the man to action. For such an exercise, there are certain axiomatic rules, such as, truthfulness shall always prevail, purity shall be maintained and Brotherhood shall be preserved through strife. Imagination, “when trained...is the Constructor in the Human Workshop...It is therefore the King faculty, inasmuch as the Will cannot do its work if the Imagination be at all weak or untrained,” writes Mr. Judge.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT KNOWLEDGE BY IDENTIFICATION

ONE MUST *become* that which one wants to know. One may surmise, imagine, deduce, one may reason, but one does not know.

*So is it something difficult for human beings?*

No, why?

One can learn how to identify oneself. One must learn. It is indispensable if one wants to get out of one’s ego. For so long as one is shut up in one’s ego, one cannot make any progress.

How can it be done?

There are many processes. I will tell you one.

When I was in Paris, I used to go to many places where there were gatherings of all kinds, people making all sorts of researches, spiritual (so-called spiritual), occult researches, etc. And once I was invited to meet a young lady (I believe she was Swedish) who had found a process of knowledge, exactly a process of learning. And so she explained it to us. We were three or four (her French was not very good but she was full of conviction!); she said: “It is like this, you take an object or make a design on a blackboard or take a drawing—that is not important—take whatever is most convenient for you. Suppose, for instance, that I draw for you...(she had a blackboard) I draw a design.” She drew a kind of half-geometric design. “Now, you sit in front of the design and concentrate all your attention upon it—upon that design which is there. You concentrate, concentrate without letting anything else enter your consciousness—except that. Your eyes are fixed on the drawing and do not move at all. You are, as it were, hypnotised by the drawing. You look (and so she sat there, looking), you look, look, look...I do not know, it takes more or less time, but still for one who is used to it, it goes pretty fast. You look, look, you become that drawing you are looking at. Nothing else exists in the world any longer except the drawing, and then, suddenly, you pass to the other side; and when you pass to the other side you enter a new consciousness, and you know.”

We had a good laugh, for it was amusing. But it is quite true: it is an excellent method to practice. Naturally, instead of taking a drawing or any object, you may take, for instance, an ideal, a few words. You have a problem preoccupying you, you do not know the solution of the problem; well, you objectify your problem in your mind, put it in the most precise, exact, succinct terms possible, and then concentrate, make an effort; you concentrate only on the words, and if possible on the idea they represent, that is, upon your problem—you concentrate, concentrate, concentrate until nothing else exists but that. And it is true that, all of a sudden, you have the feeling of something opening, and one is on the other side. The other side of what?...It means that you have opened a door of your consciousness, and instantaneously you have the solution of your problem.

It is an excellent method of learning “how” to identify oneself....

There are in Paris, theatres of the third or fourth rank where sensational dramas are performed. These are suburban theatres. They are not for intellectuals but for the masses, and all the elements are always extremely dramatic, moving. Well, those who go there are mostly very simple people and forget completely that they are in a theatre. They identify themselves with the drama. And so things like this happen: on the stage there is the traitor hiding behind the door, and the hero comes along, not aware naturally that the traitor is hiding there and he is going to be killed. Now, there are people sitting up there (in what is called gallery), right up in the theatre, who shout: “Look out, he is there!” (*laughter*). It has not happened just once, it happens hundreds of times, spontaneously. I had seen a play of this kind called *Le Bossu*, I believe; anyway it was quite a sensational drama and it was being played at the *Theatre de la Porte Saint-Martin*. In this play there was a room. On the stage a large room could be seen and at its side a small room and....I do not remember the story now, but in the small room there was a button which could be pressed, and by pressing the button the ceiling of the bigger room could be brought down on those who were there

so as to crush them inexorably!...And we knew about it, people had already spoken about it, passed on the word. And now there was the traitor who had hidden himself in the little room and he knew the trick of the button, and there was the hero who came in with other people, and they started arguing; and everyone knew that the ceiling was going to come down...I did not say anything, I remembered I was in the theatre, I was waiting to see how the author was going to find a way to save his hero (for it was evident he could not kill him off like that before everybody!). But the others were not at all in the same state. Well, there were spectators who shouted, really shouted: “Look out, mind the ceiling!” That is how it was.

There are phenomena of self-identification. Only, they are involuntary. And this is also one of the methods used today to cure nervous diseases. When someone cannot sleep, cannot be restful because he is too excited and nervous and his nerves are ill and weakened by excessive agitation, he is told to sit in front of an aquarium, for instance—an aquarium, that is very lovely, isn’t it?—before an aquarium with pretty little fish in it, gold-fish; just to sit there, settle down in an easy-chair and try not to think of anything (particularly not of his troubles) and look at the fish. So he looks at the fish, moving around, coming and going, swimming, gliding, turning, meeting, crossing, chasing one another indefinitely, and also the water flowing slowly and the passing fish. After a while he lives the life of fishes: he comes and goes, swims, glides, plays. And at the end of the hour his nerves are in a perfect state and he is completely restful.

12 August 1953.

[Taken from, *Stories Told By the Mother*, II. Published by, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry.]

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One of the steps in the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha is *Samma sati* which is translated as perfect mindfulness or awareness. Sangharakshita, a Buddhist teacher, says that there are many levels



of awareness. We need to be “aware” of things and people around us, of ourselves and of the Reality. Most of the time we are only vaguely conscious of the things around us, and that includes the environment, the people and the cosmos. We have only peripheral awareness of them. The reason for this is that we seldom or never really stop and look at things. And even if we have time to stop and look at things, we hardly ever see things in themselves. What we usually see is our own projected subjectivity. We see things through our own mental conditioning. We have to learn to look at things themselves, for their own sake, untainted by any trace of subjectivity, personal preference or desire. Our attention is drawn to a story of a painter who once asked his master, how to paint bamboos. The master’s answer was, “If you want to learn to paint bamboos, first learn to *see* bamboos.” We are told that the painter just looked at the stems, the leaves, of the bamboos, and he looked at them in the mist, in the rain, in autumn, in winter, in spring. He looked at them when they were green and yellow, when they were dry and decayed. Thus seeing them and being aware of them, he became at one with the bamboos. We may be sure that the bamboos that he painted after that must be real bamboos. In other words, when we are identified with something, we truly *know* it, which in turn enables us to truly create.

One must also become aware of people, and especially of one’s teacher. According to Indian spiritual tradition it is not enough to learn by listening to the teacher’s instruction. One must be aware of him as a spiritual person. Without this kind of awareness one may gain intellectually, but one will not gain spiritually.

In Patanjali’s Yoga Aphorisms *Sanyama* has been defined as the integration of concentration, contemplation and meditation. From mastery of *sanyama* comes light of awareness and insight. “Ordinarily, our intelligence flits from object to object and from place to place, making it impossible to penetrate fully any one thing. In *sanyama*, the knower comes closer and closer to the known, and merging in it, loses his separateness,” explains Shri B.K.S Iyengar.

He explains this by giving an example of a diamond. When one contemplates a diamond, at first, one sees with great clarity, the gem itself. Gradually one becomes aware of the light glowing from its centre. As an awareness of the light grows, awareness of the stone as an object diminishes. Then there is only brightness, no source, no object. When the light is everywhere that is *Samadhi*. Thus, for instance, by practicing *sanyama* on the navel, the yogi acquires perfect knowledge of the disposition of the human body.

We do not learn only by passing through an experience ourselves, we can also learn by “imaginative sympathy,” in which we are temporarily identified with a person and the situation, he or she may be passing through. Empathy may be regarded as a form of “imaginative sympathy,” and good literature helps us cultivate it. The more we have cultivated the feeling of oneness, and the more impersonal we are, the easier it is for us to practise empathy.

We cannot perceive God like we perceive everything else, because It is Itself the knower, and the knower cannot be the object of its own knowledge. For instance, the finger cannot catch hold of itself or the fire cannot burn itself. To know It is to become It. How does one achieve this? We identify ourselves with the ever-changing perishable body, and 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.” 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,” then the higher spiritual consciousness of the Initiate is entirely absorbed in the ONE ESSENCE, which is *Atman*.

## STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

## THE MEANING OF PAIN—II

ALL IN THIS universe is contrast, so the light of the Dhyān Chohans and their pure intelligence is contrasted by the Mamo Chohans, and their destructive intelligence. The beings referred to as Mamo Chohans are the *Asuras* of the Sixteenth discourse. In the *Voice of the Silence* also reference is made to these beings, and they are referred to as the “murderers of the soul.” All that is wicked, impure and corrupted in the world comes under the influence of these evil forces. On the other hand, all that is of the nature of truth and goodness, of light, of altruism, movements of pure and sincere effort, come under the spiritual influence that radiates and manifests continuously from the great Masters of Wisdom. If it is dangerous for us to try to dwell much upon the black ones, it is necessary for us to understand exactly where they stand, and verse 7 gives us a clue to that.

The two paths of evolution, *pravritti* or the path of going forth, and *nivritti* or the path of returning, were seen in connection with the three great *gunas* or qualities in nature—*tamas*, the quality of darkness and ignorance, *rajas*, the quality of passion or desire, and *sattva*, the quality of light, truth, knowledge and goodness. These beings stand on the other side of the two paths, on the other side of the three qualities in nature. The beings centred in the lowest *guna*, the beings that are in the unreal and dull condition of *tamas* have not yet started on their upward way, but they are preparing themselves for it, they are treading the path that is known as the path of *a-pravritti*, the path of non-motion, the stationary condition, yet they will in the course of time begin to tread the evolving path, the path of *pravritti*. In that path they will try to go outside of themselves, moved by the energy of desire, and they will contact the outside universe. Having thus gained experience from the outside world, and realizing that they can only understand that objective universe when they have understood their own natures, they will return and

begin to tread the path of *nivritti*, going back within themselves, and learning to know their own constitution. These beings, then, have not yet begun those three paths of evolution. They are not beings centred in the quality of *tamas*, but they are below *tamas*.

It is from this point of view that there are not three classes of beings according to the three qualities or *gunas*, but five definite classes of beings: those in the lowest regions of the universe, below the quality of *tamas* or darkness; beings who are centred in the quality of darkness; beings who have come into the stage known as the *rajasic* state, where the quality of *rajas* or desire becomes the energizing force; beings who have transcended the desire and entered the pure sphere of *sattva*, or truth, and finally those beings who have overcome and transcended the three qualities and stand above *sattva* itself. It is necessary for a person to go through this process of evolution, but it is not necessary for him to fall below the quality of *tamas*. And beings must overcome *sattva* itself before they enter the path of *chelaship* or the Path of the Masters, thereby gaining for themselves the opportunity of becoming truly self-conscious, immortal beings. At the beginning of any new evolution, at the awakening of manifestation, when the universe comes out of the deep slumber of *pralaya*, we find that there are these five classes of beings. The highest stand as the silent watchers in the night, those who do not go to sleep throughout the whole of non-manifestation, the great Masters, then respectively, the three classes of beings belonging to the three qualities, those in *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva* consecutively, and those that are below the beings centred in *tamas*, the black magicians, or the evil ones.

When we consider these five classes of beings, we can still divide them in somewhat a different way. We can distinguish immediately two classes of divine beings, two classes of devilish beings, and one great middle class of beings, which is pulled sometimes in one direction and sometimes in the other. The two classes of divine beings are first, of course, the Divine Beings themselves, the great Masters, then those other beings who, having taken refuge in the quality of

*sattva* have succeeded in purifying their own natures and in gaining truth and knowledge. But the very fact of their having stopped at the *sattva* stage and not having gone beyond, implies their falling from heaven, and beginning the cyclic evolutionary movement once more. But they begin on the light side of the universe, and co-operate and assist the great Masters in all their work, which is a work of regeneration, of purification, of spreading truth and the great spiritual message. They are really the good forces, the divine powers, used by the great Masters in doing of their work.

But if there are those two classes of divine beings, there is also a two-fold classification among the devilish ones. First, those below *tamas*, the black magicians themselves, and those beings who are moved by the quality of *tamas* alone. These latter beings, who, albeit unconsciously to themselves, do obey and assist and come under the direct influence of the black magicians. Between these two classes of beings, the Divine Ones, and the infernal ones, stands the whole of humanity. Generally speaking, we can say that all of us human beings, who belong to the middle sphere, are centred in and moved by the quality of *rajas* or desire and passion. We find in ourselves both the tendencies—the tendency to go forwards towards the great Masters, and also, unfortunately, the tendency to go towards our own lower nature, and thereby, under the influence of the dark ones. All students of Theosophy know that this quality of desire is the middle principle of our constitution, and marks the turning point. From this principle the ways go up or down, but man being a free agent, it is entirely according to his own choice and his own efforts, whether he will go up or he will be dragged and pulled down.

The two sides—the side of wisdom and law, and that of ignorance and darkness continuously fight one another, for the dark ones are the enemies of the Masters of Wisdom and compassion. In our own natures we combine the whole of the universe, and there too a great struggle is raging furiously between our higher aspirations and the lower tendencies in our nature. It is then a question of trying to uproot the evil tendencies in us and to begin to strengthen the divine

and god-like qualities and attributes. Every time that any one of us allows his lower nature to rule him, he falls under the influence of the dark side of the universe, and thereby strengthens that darkness. Every time, on the contrary, that he succeeds in subduing and mastering the principle of desire, he tends towards the Great Ones, and gives further assistance to the side of light. It is therefore not only for our own good and growth that it becomes the duty of all of us to fight the evil tendencies and to try to increase the divine virtues, but because alone through the work we achieve in our own constitution, are we able to help and assist the good and growth of the whole of humanity.

The natural process of evolution is successively through these three qualities. But when men persevere unnecessarily in any of these stages, instead of helping themselves to go forward, they retrograde, they lose their step, and they go into the stage below. Beings who persevere in the inertia of *tamas*, of darkness and ignorance, will fall below *tamas*. They will not succeed in helping their own evolution and enter the *rajasic* stage. Beings, who persevere in the quality of *rajas*, desire and passion, when it is no longer fit that they should so persevere, in that quality, will fall again into *tamas*. Even beings who have reached the sphere of *sattva*, truth and light, may again be tempted by the quality of selfish and personal desire, and fall into *rajas*. Beings who have overcome *sattva* to a certain extent, and are treading the path of chelaship, may also fall, and they must climb anew. It is then an upward motion, and at the same time there is such a thing as retrogression, because of our own mistakes and weaknesses. This two-fold movement, the natural evolutionary movement from below upwards, and that motion which we inflict upon ourselves when we persist in doing evil, the going backwards, will give us the true meaning of what we know as pain and suffering. It is in that two-fold movement that real pain is hidden.

(To be concluded)



## TRANSCENDING THE LAW OF KARMA

## I

KARMA, in very simple terms, can be thought of as cause and effect; action and reaction. However, this is a very superficial understanding, and we need to understand Karma from a holistic point of view. It is an inherent, intelligent Law which works from an atom up to Brahma, and works on all planes of consciousness. In this context we need to realise, at least to some degree, that all beings and everything in the manifested, conditioned universe came from One source, One essence, and hence we are all inter-connected and united on inner and invisible planes.

The real or inner man, which is the basis and foundation of the outer visible man, is of that very same essence. Hence the Self of Man is the *Atman*, the ONE. The One is expressed in various forms, and hence we err in saying, “my soul” and “your soul,” and then acting on the basis of separateness, create disharmony through our thoughts and actions, based on this false understanding. However, Nature maintains the inherent harmony *via* the law of Karma which is the undeviating and unerring tendency in the universes to restore equilibrium. The ONE LIFE is closely related to the *one* law which governs the World of Being—This Law is KARMA.

Here we need to note that the Law of Karma is just, unbiased, and also it is merciful, since it does not precipitate all the past karma at one go. In this aspect the Law of Karma is like a compassionate teacher in the school of Life. Thus:

This Law—whether Conscious or Unconscious—predestines nothing and no one. It exists from and in Eternity, truly, for it is ETERNITY itself; and as such, since no act can be co-equal with eternity, it cannot be said to act, for it is ACTION itself....Karma creates nothing, nor does it design. It is man who plans and creates causes, and Karmic law adjusts the effects; which adjustment is not an act, but universal harmony, tending ever to resume its original

position....KARMA is an Absolute and Eternal law in the World of manifestation; and as there can only be one Absolute, as One eternal ever present Cause.... (S.D., II, 304-6)

Here we see that it is man who creates the causes, and Karmic law, which is absolute, impartial and just, and an aspect of the Unknowable, adjusts the effects to causes, thus restoring the universal harmony.

“The operations of the actual laws of Karma are not to be studied until the disciple has reached the point at which they no longer affect himself,” says *Light on the Path*. Hence he who desires to understand the law of karma should first attempt to free himself from these laws. Let us try to understand how we can achieve the same.

*The Dhammapada* teaches that man is a bundle of thoughts, so that “all that we are is founded on our thoughts and formed of our thoughts.” Similarly, we read in *Notes on the Bhagavad-gita* (p. 141): “Man, made of thoughts, occupant only of many bodies from time to time, is eternally thinking. His chains are through thought, his release due to nothing else.” Everything which we experience, whether pain or pleasure, or so-called good or bad, is a result of our thoughts and actions. Hence, we are our own creations. Our life is of our own making, and we cannot blame anyone for anything.

We need to realise this and completely accept our responsibility of both, what we are, and what we may become. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that we understand the working and nature of the Law of Karma. The motive being in this case: (i) To be more responsible for our actions. (ii) To better understand the purpose of life. (iii) To be the better able to help our fellow beings in the most appropriate manner. (iv) To live a more harmonious life. (v) For the right performance of our duty in every situation of life.

The Second Fundamental proposition of the *Secret Doctrine* deals with the “Law of Periodicity” or the Law of Cycles. In every department of nature, we can observe this law in action. There is cyclic manifestation of the universe and worlds, there is day and night of the universe and similarly of man. All this can be observed

with reference to Eternal Duration, since Time is an illusion, created by the successive states of our consciousness. In this context it is evident that the present moment is the outcome of the previous moment. The up-coming so-called future moment is the outcome of the present moment. Hence, we also see that there is a chain of events, wherein each event acts as either the cause of the upcoming state, which is its effect, or is the effect of the previous event which was its cause. Thus, there is a chain of cause and effect. However, all these events are nothing but the present moment from the perspective of the observer who detaches himself from the panoramic view of nature, and while staying apart observes the world of forms in its varied modes of motion. Here the observer fixes his attention on THAT, which is unaffected.

This gives us a hint, as to how we can try to transcend Karma. Karma, may be regarded as the continuance of the nature of the act, and each act contains within itself the past and the future. Each event contains within itself the seed of the next event. Further, we can see that not only is there a relation between the cause and the effect, but there is also a relation between the cause and the individual who experiences the effects. So, if we perform an action whether on the physical or mental plane, we experience the effects in this life or in some future life, in the form of pain or pleasure. This leads us to the first aphorism on Karma: “There is no Karma unless there is a being to make it or feel its effects.”

The Buddha says, “Ye suffer from yourselves. None else compels, None other holds you that ye live and die.” Hence, to consider action in all its aspects, it becomes necessary to understand the nature of Karma and its relation to the individual. It is important to note that every act proceeds from our mind, and hence beyond the mind there is no action, and therefore no karma. Thoughts originate on the plane of mind, and they feed the desires. We can see the chain of cause and effect: Mind—Thought—Desire—Will—Action. It is important to note that our desires become the matrix of every act. Therefore, in all religions we are advised to kill or rather

transform all base desires.

Again we observe an important point that in this case both the act and the consequences are the effects, and the cause being on the plane of desire. So, *Desire* is the propeller, the basis of action in its first manifestation on the physical plane. Moreover, desire determines the continuation of the act in its karmic relation to the individual. Therefore, to be free from the effects of any act we must have passed on to a state, which no longer forms the basis in which that act exists. Hence, the advice in *Light on the Path*: “Kill out ambition. Kill out desire for life. Kill out desire for comfort.”

Therefore, (i) We only need to have pure desire to help humanity. In fact, our very existence should be for the sake of others and for humanity. (ii) We need to encourage higher and nobler thoughts in our minds, which lead to harmony and not discord. (iii) We must learn to act, for and as the Self of all creatures, and without any attachment to the act or the outcome of the same. (iv) We need to perform our duty to the best of our capabilities and understanding, leaving the results to the Law.

The first important result of Karmic action is incarnation in the physical life. The same also applies to the birth of a world, a universe or the Kosmos. The birth of a world is linked to karma of all the beings which formed the previous world. We are compelled to take birth, again and again, as we are bound by karma and *Tanha*. *Tanha* or *Trishna* is the thirst for material life.

The birth-seeking soul is pulled to incarnation, driven by desires and tendencies. The strongest tendencies in us lead us to the point of manifestation at which there is the least opposition. We incarnate in those circumstances and surroundings which are more harmonious with our karmic tendencies. We can see how strongly we are governed by these tendencies which we have developed over several incarnations. We need to be very careful as regards the tendencies we encourage and allow to develop in ourselves.

*(To be concluded)*

## THEORY OF EVOLUTION—MODERN AND ANCIENT

THE IDEA of evolution is familiar to everyone in the literate world. When in 1859 Charles Darwin published his famous theory of biological evolution in his famous work, *The Origin of Species*, it made a great impact on the Western thought. Here was a well-reasoned theory of evolution of plant and animal species based on meticulous observation of life in the natural world by the great scientist in his long voyages round the globe. It challenged the theological doctrine of creation based on the literal interpretation of the word of the Bible as a matter of faith, which scientists and free-thinkers of the Western world rejected as defying reason and lacking in scientific basis. In the tussle between science and theology Darwin's work came as a shot in the arm for scientific men and independent thinkers as a credible alternative to the creation idea. The universe is seen as governed by uniform laws which could be investigated and mysteries of nature unravelled by a scientific method, requiring intervention of neither God nor his grace. John Draper recounts the contest between the two titans in his work, *History of Conflict Between Science and Religion*. The question is, if the biblical idea of creation suffers from deficiency in logic and philosophy to satisfy the criterion of truth, according to scientists, does the Darwinian theory of biological evolution fare any better?

However, the Scientists in their anti-clerical enthusiasm and despair of any alternative theory to Darwinism, except that of "special creation," are unconsciously insincere in "forcing" a hypothesis the elasticity of which is inadequate, and which resents the severe strain to which it is now subjected. (*S.D.*, II, 645)

Inadequacy of the Darwinian theory has been amply demonstrated since the appearance of Darwin's work by scientists themselves. Perhaps the conceptions of ancient Theosophy offer a middle ground between the two conflicting views and reconciles them. Theosophy presents the view that the remedy for the very

deficiencies in the modern scientific idea of evolution, which makes it incomplete and self-contradictory, is to be found in the esotericism, or the hidden sense, of the literal meaning of the word of the Bible, and in the symbolism of other ancient religious philosophies. Hence, it is the duty of scientific men and religionists to impartially consider the Theosophical view of evolution, if they are true to their calling, which is, pursuit of Truth with an open and unbiased mind.

The sum and substance of the Darwinian theory of evolution is: Every group of organism originating from a few Root-types, differentiated into many species under the influence of changing environmental conditions; species tended to multiply beyond the means of subsistence; in the ensuing battle for life among species, to eat and escape from being eaten, they tended to adapt themselves to the challenges of changing environmental conditions; this necessitated perpetual weeding out of the unfit, and perpetuation of the elite of the stock through hereditary transmission of their organic characteristic to their descendants, thus perpetuating useful variations in species; and forces of evolution thus effected progressive improvement in the organisms, through the mechanism of "Natural Selection."

He hypothesized that man is the highest product of this process of evolution from the animal species. He furnished as evidence, in support of his theory, similarities in the anatomical and bodily structure of man and animal. Strongest evidence of evolution of man from lower forms of life, he said, is found in the stages of embryonic development of the child in the womb, in which nature rehearses in the human time-scale the whole series of evolutionary development of the species which she effected on a geological time-scale. Other evidences he pointed to were, presence of rudimentary organs in man which have now become obsolete but continue to exist in animals, and some of the mental characteristics man shares in common with the higher mammalian species. He hypothesized that either Anthropoid Apes are the last link in the chain of evolution of man from the animal species, or that man descended from an

ancestor common to both man and the ape. He was emphatic in his assertion that human civilization has arisen from a barbaric past, and not a fall from grace, as theologians hold.

Ingenuous as the theory may appear, several eminent scientists, nevertheless, have demonstrated its inadequacy to account for the many missing vital links in chain of organic evolution of species, and inexplicable gaps and inconsistencies in the theory itself. Absurdity of the idea that “Nature,” acting blindly and mechanically, without design, purpose and guiding intelligence, and effecting complex process of organic evolution is evident. Many a scientist has despaired of the efficacy of *unaided* Natural Selection. If the vast diversity of species is shown to have resulted from a few ancestral forms, or root types, on the evidence of fossil records, how, in the first place, did the root types arise, is a question on which the theory throws no light. What is life itself and its origin on earth, as also the mystery of mind and consciousness, remains unresolved except a tacit, but questionable, assumption that they are no more than temporary effects produced by the action of mechanically acting physical, chemical and molecular forces.

Evolutionary anthropologists dispute the theory of the ape origin of man on the grounds that no archeological evidence of the existence of the anthropoid apes are found prior to the first appearance of man, or “humanoid,” on earth; and that, even if the ape origin of man is admitted, evolution of most complex being as man on so short a time scale—from tertiary to quaternary epoch—contravenes the basic axiom of the theory of evolution, which is, *natura non facit saltum*. Moreover, the impassable gulf between the man and the ape in the fact of mental consciousness is a mystery that modern theorists are at a loss to explain. Great Orientalists, Max Muller and George Rawlinson, dispute the Darwin’s theory of savage ancestry of man on the grounds that prehistoric sacred literature and monuments left behind by the ancients bear overwhelming evidence that most ancient civilizations and cultures of the pre-historic past were far superior to our own.

Theosophy points out that the reason for failure of modern science to unriddle the mysteries of life lies, firstly, in its basic assumptions, and, secondly, in its sole reliance on empirical and inductive methods. It distinguishes between inorganic and organic matter, and postulates that it is from life-less matter that life, mind and consciousness arise as a transitory secondary effect. It tries to interpret nature by assumption of mechanical laws, rejecting conscious, intelligent forces at work underlying nature.

Fundamental conceptions of Theosophy, in contrast to the assumptions of modern science, are reverse of modern assumptions. In the first place, the former postulates that life, consciousness, spirit—the three being one and the same—is universal and eternal principle of all that is, that was, or ever shall be. Hence, life being all-pervasive, indestructible, exhaustless basis of everything, to make distinction between organic and inorganic, or living and non-living, matter is fallacious. What is considered inorganic matter has life and consciousness latent in it, which, in the course of evolutionary march, will unfold and transform itself into higher life forms. This can be seen in the subtle transitional stages of transformation of minerals into lowest forms of plant life, such as, lichen. Infinite potentiality of One Life is latent in the atom, which gradually unfolds, into higher forms of life and consciousness in an ascending scale, to, at last, culminate in man as a thinking being, and then man, the thinker, into perfection of conscious godhood. Thus, universe is embodied consciousness, all Beings being the same in kind and in essence, but differing in degree of development or unfoldment. It speaks of no creation nor evolution but teaches the doctrine of Emanation under immutable Law.

The basic idea is that there can be no evolution unless, at first, there is involution. It implies that all life proceeds from spiritual potency from above. “The lower orders before they develop into higher ones must emanate from the higher spiritual ones, and when arrived at the turning point, be reabsorbed again into the infinite” (*Isis*, I, 7). The “turning point” being physicalization, so to speak, of



archetypal forms in the world of spirit through a series of emanations down into Astral ante-types, and thence into physical types.

Neither the form of man, nor that of any animal, plant or stone has ever been *created*, and it is only on this plane of ours that it commenced “becoming,” *i.e.*, objectivising into its present materiality, or expanding *from within outwards*, from the most sublimated and supersensuous essence into its grossest appearance. (*S.D.*, I, 282)

Darwin begins his speculation at the last stage of the series of emanations, when physical types appear in the world of gross matter. The evolutionary processes that take place on the higher metaphysical plane, preceding the appearance of physical types by incalculable aeons, is far removed from speculations of modern natural sciences, and hence, the incompleteness of its theories.

Therefore, *our* human forms have existed in the Eternity as astral or ethereal prototypes; according to which models, the Spiritual Beings (or Gods) whose duty it was to bring them into objective being and terrestrial Life, evolved the protoplasmic forms of the future *Egos* from *their own essence*. After which, when this human *Upadhi*, or basic mould was ready, the natural terrestrial Forces began to work on those supersensuous moulds, *which contained, besides their own, the elements of all the past vegetable and future animal forms of this globe in them.* (*ibid.*)

Which means that the eternal archetype of the human form—after the model of the “Heavenly Man”—which had been emanated on the spiritual plane, as the instrument for the Monad for its higher evolution, passed through every vegetable and animal body before it reassumed human shape on higher ethereal planes, aeons before the appearance of gross physical earth. Thus the *Inner Man* is the storehouse of types of all life forms, and the types of mammalian animal forms were shed by ethereal human forms on the terrestrial plane at the beginning of concretization of the earth. Thus, appeared the “root types,” which Darwinians are unable to account for, on

which types terrestrial environmental forces acted, resulting in differentiation of species. The ancient doctrine of emanation, involution and evolution accounts for the mystery of the human foetal growth epitomizing the whole series of evolutionary development from mineral to man, and also the mystery of rare appearance of vestigial organs in new born children, which Darwinists call “reversion to ancestral types.”

Science cannot find all the missing links in the chain of evolutionary development of species either in the geological strata or in the human “genome.” They can only be found in the Astral Body of man, or *Inner Man*, in which lies concealed the whole history and all the links of evolution of species from mineral kingdom up to the human. Theosophy posits a triple evolutionary scheme in the universe for the formation of three fundamental *bases*, or *upadhis*, for the production of three-fold Man—spiritual, *Manasic* or Intellectual and physical, which three are interwoven and interblended at every point.

It is essentially Monadic evolution, *i.e.*, development into higher stages of consciousness and action on an ascending scale, that can have no end, of the Divine Monad, *Atma-Buddhi*, till it becomes self-consciously one with All-Being—*Paramartha Satya*; this is aided, on the one hand, by evolution of the physical form to serve as the instrument for the Monad to come in touch with, and gain experience from, contact with the terrestrial nature; and, on the other, by *Manasic* (Egoic) evolution, through which to reap and assimilate idealized experiences of its innumerable reincarnations on earth in the fire of self-conscious experience and suffering, propelled by its own Karma, the law of ethical causation. Thus, Man was a god, becomes human, re-becomes a god, and GOD. In this ancient Theosophical scheme is found all the missing links, gaps and chasms in the modern theory of evolution, and makes of it a comprehensive and holistic theory.



## SAINT JNANESHWAR—LIFE AND TEACHINGS

## II

WHEN Jnaneshwar and his siblings returned to Alandi, they were greeted with great respect by all, except Visoba Chati, an orthodox Brahmin who hated Jnaneshwar and his siblings. Once, when Jnaneshwar's sister Muktabai went to get some earthenware from the potter, Visoba did not allow the potter to sell her his pans. Disheartened, Muktabai returned home and told the tale to Jnaneshwar. The text says that Jnaneshwar heated his back by his yogic powers and Muktabai baked the food on his back. Astonished by seeing this miracle, Visoba repented and asked for forgiveness from Jnaneshwar. Initially, it is said, Jnaneshwar called Visoba "a mule," which gave him the name Visoba Khechara, and one meaning of "Khechara" is mule. Initially, Visoba ridiculed Jnaneshwar and Muktabai, but after realizing their spiritual greatness he became their disciple. It was truly the case of "those who came to scoff, but remained to pray." Such was the transformation of Visoba that he went on to become a guru to Namdeva, another saintly person in Maharashtra. According to another version, the latter part of the name, "*Khechara*," literally means "one who is moving in the air," and relates him to being a *Siddha*, possessing magical powers, linking him to Nath tradition of Maharashtra. Thus, once again Jnaneshwar had performed the miracle of awakening the erring soul from the slumber of ignorance.

There lived not far from Alandi a yogi, named Chang Dev, who had succeeded by the correct use of *Hatha Yoga* (breathing and postures) in reaching up to the age of 1,400 years. He had thousands of disciples. When he heard of Jnaneshwar, he desired to meet him. But he did not know how to address such a young sage, so he sent him a messenger carrying a blank piece of paper instead of a letter. This caused a great amusement among Jnaneshwar and his siblings. Muktabai, Saint Jnaneshwar's sister wrote a reply, "Even though your age is 1400 years, you are still as blank as your letter." According

to another version, following his elder brother's instruction, Jnaneshwar wrote 65 verses on that blank paper, which were the quintessence of Vedanta. When the paper reached Chang Dev, he had difficulty in understanding what was written. These verses later came to be known as *Changdev Pasashti* (*Pasasht* means sixty five in Marathi language) which is considered to be one of the holy scriptures among the followers of Jnaneshwar.

Chang Dev then decided to meet Jnaneshwar. He chose an appearance calculated to impress and strike terror in young sages. He was dressed in skins, astride a fierce tiger, with a cobra whip and his long matted locks beating the air, he approached Alandi like a raging tornado, along with his retinue of disciples, writes Savitribai Khanolkar. At that time Jnaneshwar was sitting with his brothers and sister on a wall. Seeing Chang Dev approach them riding a tiger, they decided to go and greet him and show him their respect. It is said that Jnaneshwar patted the wall with his hand and ordered it gently to rise and carry them towards the yogi. The disciples accompanying Chang Dev fell silent in sheer amazement when they saw four figures riding a brick wall approaching them. Chang Dev got down from his tiger and threw himself at the feet of Jnaneshwar, and said, "Though I lived 1,400 years, I have achieved nothing more than having power over living things, whereas you are an accomplished yogi at such a young age, so as to master and control even *inert matter*. Instead of pursuing the goal of Self Realization, I have wasted such a long life in trifles like yogic powers!"

Muktabai, a mere girl of fourteen, gave instructions to Chang Dev, an old man of a thousand and four hundred years. She taught that the first step in attainment of salvation was sincere devotion, which in turn will bring *vairagya* or detachment. Then, *vairagya* would lead to *Jnana* or knowledge. Hence, one's aim should be to acquire *Jnana*, and the way to it is through devotion. Chang Dev was *Vayo vriddha*, or old in age, but Muktabai was *Jnana vriddha*, *i.e.*, old or advanced in knowledge. Even the Buddha says, "He is called an elder in whom dwell truth, virtue, non-violence, restraint,

and control, and who is free from impurity and is wise.”

Muktabai is believed to be the spiritual guide of Chang Dev. Once Muktabai and her brothers were sitting in the *ashram*, when Chang Dev happened to pass by. Muktabai was fully clad, but she appeared to Chang Dev as unclad, and at once he turned away. Muktabai told him that he was not perfect, as he still had a complex of sex and shame, and did not see God in every being. These words had great impact on Chang Dev, who eradicated his weakness through intense *sadhana*. Chang Dev wished to take Jnaneshwar as his guru, but Jnaneshwar said that Muktabai was the right spiritual guru instead of himself.

Theosophy does not encourage development of powers. Powers are of two types, lower and higher, psychic and spiritual. While one can obtain lower or psychic powers without becoming morally chaste, or having highest altruistic motives; the spiritual powers cannot be acquired unless these conditions are fulfilled. Development of these powers without corresponding moral purity is likely to lead a person into Black Magic by misuse of these powers. Therefore, Theosophy asks us to purify our motive, live an altruistic life and work upon ourselves to eradicate every vice and personal desire. Powers are the by-product of spiritual development. A spiritually developed person has no pride and is able to use his powers with discrimination.

Sufis say that a despondent man seeks consolation in intoxication. If the wine is good it may help him reach a state of material ecstasy and forget his sorrow. But if bad, then his state can be worse than before. So also, it is true of what one considers as Spiritual wine—spiritual progress and knowledge. If it is true and pure it can lift the disciple to the realm of perfect contemplation of the truth, but if adulterated, then it can throw him back even further than the point that was attained. For instance, dabbling in the psychic realm, without proper training or guide, can produce more harm than good, as is seen in the case of wrong meditation practices, exercises to cultivate clairvoyance, etc. Often, a little progress in the psychic realm

produces delusion in the aspirant of having attained great heights. Mr. Judge describes it as *astral intoxication*. He writes that experiences such as being able to hear certain sounds, or see colourful lights or even predict the future, is no proof that one has cultivated spirituality.

Among the followers of Jnaneshwar, was Namadeva, the tailor’s son. When Jnaneshwar came to know of the great devotion of Namadeva to Vitthal (Krishna), he left for Pandharpur (in the State of Maharashtra) along with his brothers and sister. Namadeva was five years older to Jnaneshwar, and on meeting him, became greatly devoted to him. After some time, Jnaneshwar and Namadeva went on a pilgrimage to various holy places in India, which included Ujjain, Prayag, Kasi, Ayodhya, Vrindavan and Dwarka. The other followers of Jnaneshwar, who later were reckoned among the saints of Maharashtra, were: Narahari, a goldsmith, Gora, an ordinary potter, Chokmela and his wife, who were outcastes, and Janabai, a maid-servant.

They formed themselves into a group called *Varkaris* (the pilgrims) or the Vitthal *Sampradaya*. They were on an incessant pilgrimage of life, the goal of which was union with the Divine. The *Varkaris* made no distinction between Shiva and Vishnu, between Brahmins and outcastes; the keys to the sanctum of the divine Lord were simple enough: Love of Panduranga (God) and love of all his devotees. No country has ever seen such a conglomeration of saints all at once and at the same time.

When Jnaneshwar and Namadeva returned to Pandharpur from their pilgrimage, Jnaneshwar suddenly declared his desire to enter into *Sanjeevan Samadhi*, a practice to sum up the life after entering into a deep meditative state, at Alandi. Entering *Samadhi* by the power of his own will, he gave up his body. He was twenty-one years old. They dug a pit to the left of the Siddheshwar temple, at the foot of an Ajana tree, spreading a mat of Kusa grass and covered it with a deer’s skin. Jnaneshwar descended to the bottom of the pit and sat cross-legged. He plunged into deep concentration, drawing

his life-breaths up, stage by stage and discarding the body in the process. In the final stage of *Samadhi*, the soul left through *Brahmarandra*, located at the top of the head, and merged blissfully into the infinite. This happened on the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Kartika, in 1296, writes Savitribai Khanolkar.

He said that his mission was accomplished and it was time for him to go. In this form of voluntary death, the decision to end life is an outward expression of inward detachment. *Light on the Path* mentions that a person in whom the crude wish to live and to experience pain and pleasure has departed, he takes up the body only in pursuit of the divine object, to accomplish the work of “the Masters.” Once the object for which the birth was taken is accomplished, such a person can withdraw his “will to live” and thus leave the body. Three hundred years later, it was Saint Eknath who built a temple over Saint Jnaneshwar’s *Samadhi*. In the lunar month of *Ashadh*, devotees of *Varkari* sect join an annual pilgrimage called *Wari*, with symbolic Sandals (*Paduka*) of Jnaneshwar, carried in a *palkhi* (palanquin), from Jnaneshwar’s shrine at Alandi to the Vitthala (Krishna) temple in Pandharpur, as Jnaneshwar is said to have inspired works of later poet saints of the *Varkari* movement.

During his brief lifetime, Jnaneshwar had broken down the bigotry of the dogmatic Brahmins of his time, teaching that all human beings should be free to unfold spiritually, irrespective of their station of birth. To awaken even simple people to spiritual living, in addition to social and religious reforms, he left behind his invaluable writings. Having experienced the rigidity of the caste system and the dogmatism of scriptural learning, Jnaneshwar was sympathetic towards issues of common people. He chose the vernacular Marathi language instead of the classical Sanskrit language in his writings, so that his teachings could reach the masses, who were not well-versed in Sanskrit.

(To be continued)

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Is it becoming harder to forgive than ever before? How does one go about it? The Oxford Dictionary meaning of the word “forgive” is “to stop feeling angry or resentful towards someone for an offence, flaw or mistake.” The definition carries the hint that the process of forgiveness begins and ends with us. Today, somehow, it has become impossible to forgive, forget and move on, writes Haimanti Mukherjee. Krista Tippett, American journalist, author and entrepreneur, probably has the answer as to why this has happened, as she says, in her TedTalk *Reconnecting with Compassion*, “Our cultural imagination about compassion has been deadened by idealistic images.” One begins to feel that one can never be heroic like the people who exhibited feelings of compassion. In the 1960s, when America encountered true diversity for the first time, tolerance became the core civic virtue. We find that “tolerance” nowadays, is not a natural human quality. These days tolerance is an aspirational ideal preached and idealised, but not practiced, and without the core values of compassion and tolerance, it is difficult to achieve forgiveness.

Actor Nandita Das says that these days people are touchy about petty things. We seem to be on a continuous emotional trip, and need a lot of persuasion to let go of hurt feelings. We thrive on an impulse to lash out at the slightest provocation. Cultural commentator and advertisement guru, Santosh Desai says that we are forever passing judgment on the world, and this aggrandized sense of self does not allow us to let go, and it becomes a mild form of addiction.

To be able to forgive requires us to acknowledge our fundamental human vulnerability. Duke University researchers found a strong correlation between improved immune system function and forgiveness in HIV-positive patients, and between forgiveness and improved mortality rates across the general population. Dr. Fred Luskin, who runs the Stanford Forgiveness Project, the largest interpersonal forgiveness training research project ever conducted,

advises that forgiveness does not necessarily mean condoning the action, but seeking peace and understanding that comes from blaming people less and taking those offences less personally. Make a commitment to yourself to feel better. Forgiveness is for you and no one else. In order to make the heroic choice to forgive we need to correct the way we look at our past. Often we are not ready to let go of the hurt feelings. (*Times Life!*, *Sunday Times of India*, December 24, 2017)

Lord Buddha says that when our mind is tied with the intention of retaliation all our mental energies are taken up by that single emotion, destroying inner peace. On the other hand, when someone shows charity and forgiveness, the relief and lightness experienced on both sides is like coming across a sunny patch while walking in a dark forest. We may condemn the *act* but not the *actor*. Forgive, forgive and largely forget, says H.P.B. Some of us cannot forgive and forget for many years and many months. Gradually, we must discipline ourselves and learn to forgive in few days, then within few minutes, and so on. There is this suggestive verse in the Lord's Prayer, which says: "Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us."

It is in *our* self-interest to forgive, because holding in hurt and anger keeps us in a negative state, and delays the process of healing. We must *willfully* abandon resentment and anger, and compassionately put ourselves in the offender's shoes. There are examples of people, who have forgiven the worst of offences. Gladys Staines, whose priest husband and two sons were murdered by youths in Orissa, said that she had forgiven the murderers, because forgiving brings healing, and liberates both the forgiver and the forgiven. Forgiving someone is not a sign of weakness, but that of strength, says Nirmala Wilson, a counselling psychologist.

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Your nose knows more than you think. According to a 2015 study by researchers in Israel, sniffing palms after a handshake, usually

within 30 seconds of the interaction, is likely to help people to learn about another's health and genetic compatibility. Sniffing can also offer information on people's emotional state, such as, if they are happy, sad or fearful. The smeller gleans these emotions subconsciously. Animals use their noses more than human beings, and yet human beings do have powerful smell potential. A 2014 study showed that we can distinguish at least one trillion different odours. Unlike other senses, the olfactory nerves do not proceed directly to the brain's thalamus, but feed cortical areas to arouse emotions and memories without our awareness. People can be influenced by smells, and not realize it.

It is not so easy to conclude that an animal's sense of smell is superior to that of a human. When senses of smell were compared across species it was found that humans were far more sensitive sniffers than rats and monkeys on a limited range of odours. Humans even beat the indomitable dog for at least a handful of scents. These include aromas produced by plants. According to a 2015 study by scientists in Portugal and Sweden, every person has a unique scent. "It is like a fingerprint. There is a large genetic component to body odour. Even trained sniffer dogs have hard time distinguishing between identical twins," says Johan Lundstrom, a neuroscientist at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden. It is possible to identify a person by smell. There is much more information in body odours than we can extract from normal odours. New mothers can distinguish their biological babies by sniffing them, writes Marta Zaraska.

There is a lot of evidence that suggests that emotions have a scent, and such smelled emotions can be contagious. For instance, you go out to meet a friend, who had been watching videos that made her feel happy. As you approach her, you catch a whiff of her scent and automatically smile. Although our noses can sometimes lead us astray, in general they send us important messages about other people. "Listen to your inner voice because your inner voice might be your nose telling you what to do," says Lundstrom.

(*Discover*, October 2017)



Senses are used by our body to get information about the world around us. The powers of seeing, tasting, smelling, hearing and the sense of touch are all in the astral body. Once we accept the correlation of senses, we are able to appreciate that all our senses are, to a certain extent, interchangeable. Scientists now accept the phenomenon that one type of sensory input (such as hearing music) evokes an additional one (such as seeing colours). The phenomenon is termed *synesthesia*, from the Greek roots *syn* (together) and *aesthesia* (perception). In the magazine *Theosophy* (Vol. 11, pp. 495-496), the case of one Ms. Huggins is printed. At the age of ten, she began losing the sense of sight and hearing, and completely lost them within a year. She could determine as many as thirty different colours by her sense of smell. The article concludes by saying that all the senses are *astral*, distinct from the physical *organs*, and are *interchangeable*. Helen Keller was blind, deaf and mute, but her remaining senses were finely attuned. Her sense of smell was especially acute. Through her sense of smell, she used to become aware of a coming storm, hours before any sign of it was visible. She found that babies did not have unique odours, like the adults. She described masculine exhalations to be stronger, more vivid than those of women. “In the odour of young men there is something elemental, as of fire, storm, and salt sea,” said Keller.

In the article, “The Harmonics of Smell” (*The Theosophist*, August 1882) H.P.B. shows that occult science is in agreement with the observation of Professor William Ramsay, an English scientist, that smell resembles sound in having its quality influenced by harmonics of vibrations. He says that the quality of tone in a violin differs from that of a flute by the different harmonics or overtones peculiar to each instrument, so also, the quality of smell possessed by different substances may be attributed to harmonics. When two sounds are heard simultaneously, which may produce discord or concord, our ear is able to distinguish them separately, and so is our nose able to distinguish two different smells in a mixture of smells.

Why is it wrong to judge our decisions by results? If you blame yourself for every failure and decisions that backfires, you are being too harsh on yourself. Annie Duke, author, psychologist and ace poker player tells *Nautilus* that we tend to attribute blame for failure and credit for success to our skills, whereas luck also plays a role in shaping an outcome. When we cross an intersection safely at a green light, is it proof of our skill or a matter of chance? Most people would say skill, but what if a drunk driver jumped the light and hit you? If you would blame the crash on luck, you might as well credit it for safely getting you home.

There are far more complex situations in life. For instance, if children take to crime then can it be attributed to faulty parenting? If a person gets lung cancer without ever smoking a cigarette, is it the result of his decision to settle down in a polluted city? Duke says we need to accept uncertainty in our lives and “focus on process” instead of results, because it is the only thing under our control. For instance, when a coin is tossed, no person or computer can predict the outcome with hundred per cent accuracy, but if it is tossed several times, one can predict, using the probability theory, the number of heads and tails one will get. However, one cannot use a probability formula to predict rain.

Although results are no test of our decisions, we humans are “resulters” by nature. “We are rational beings that think things are supposed to make sense....We are really uncomfortable with randomness in that way. It is just the way we are built: to recognise patterns. Which can be bad for decision making in some ways,” says Duke. For instance, we might say that the 2008 financial crisis was because the people implementing the schemes only looked at the outcomes instead of looking at the processes and seeing where they would lead them in the long run. We must learn not to focus too much on results, while evaluating our own decisions, or those of others, but look at the decision-making process instead. (*Sunday Times of India*, December 17, 2017)

When we decide, we are exercising our free will. But our will is



not so free, but 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, 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 *external* circumstance, as well as, the *inner* capacities and conditions—both being the result of past Karma. We are driven to make a wrong choice, driven by the force of past karma, and the same holds good when we are making the right choice.

But having made a choice, the outcome of a decision or an action is also influenced by past Karma. When a surgeon performs an operation, he naturally wishes for the recovery of his patient. But even if the surgeon is extremely skillful, the operation may not be successful and the patient may die, and that outcome is not determined by present action alone, but is also dependent on past karma, of both the patient and the doctor. Krishna advises Arjuna in the *Gita* to “make...gain and loss, victory and defeat, the same to thee.” We must seek the thing for its own sake. We are required to do the best that the circumstances demand and leave the results to the law. In the Eighteenth chapter of the *Gita* (verse 14) we are given five agents of action, of which the fifth agent is *daivam*, which is translated as “providence” by S. Radhakrishnan. He says that *daivam* “represents the non-human factor that interferes and disposes of human effort. In all human actions there is an unaccountable element which is called luck, destiny, fate or the force accumulated by the acts of one’s past lives...*Daiva*...is the resultant of all that has happened in the past, which rules unnoticed.” “Chance” or “luck” is the term used to describe occurrences for which we are not able to discover some obvious cause.