

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

## THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

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### ON LEARNING AND EXPERIENCE

WHEN WE personally encounter or undergo something, we call it an experience. Experience is the knowledge or mastery of an event or subject gained through involvement in or exposure to it. The concept of experiential learning, which is learning through experience, or learning by doing, is an ancient concept. For instance, in “gurukuls” of ancient India, students learnt by doing. Albert Einstein once said, “Pure logical thinking cannot yield us any knowledge of the empirical world; all knowledge of reality starts from experience and ends in it.” Conceptual knowledge is of little use. A person may know all about toothache conceptually, but so long as he has not *undergone the pain* of “toothache,” this knowledge is inadequate. So also, in spiritual life we achieve very little by somebody’s telling us something. No amount of someone telling us about faith and love will help. We are required to have undergone various experiences of faith and love to know what it is.

The Sanskrit term for experience is *anubhava*, i.e., becoming (something different) as a sequel to some event. Theosophy teaches that in the scheme of evolution it is necessary for the Ego, the “eternal pilgrim,” to have gained experience, by passing through various kingdoms of nature—mineral, vegetable, animal and human. Experience works as an impulse to evolution, and we may say that without experience there would be no evolution. Hence, all the general experiences are necessary because they are inevitable. Mr. Crosbie points out that the Self is the same in each being, no matter how great or

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low that being may be. We may say that the soul represents the acquired experience gained through evolution by each and every class of being. Each individual being is not only the Self, but, in addition, the acquired experience gained through contact with all other beings. Thus, the only differences between souls are in their degrees of acquired experience. (*The Friendly Philosopher*, pp. 343-44)

It is these experiences which bring about a change in the instruments used by the Ego, as also, the capacity of the Ego to use these instruments and express itself. H.P.B. sums up the idea in the article, "Genius." What is the difference between the ordinary man, an idiot and a genius? The Ego in each of these cases is of the same essence and substance. No Ego differs from another Ego, in its essential nature. That, which makes one person a great individual and another a silly person is the capability of the brain and body to transmit and give expression to the light of the *Inner man* within, writes H.P.B. The instruments of the Ego are the body and the brain. Even the great Violinist Paganini cannot bring out the melody if the violin is broken or if the strings are strung too loose or, too tight.

Unlike the lower kingdoms, a human being has to consciously learn lessons from his experiences. *Light on the Path* says: "And before you can attain knowledge you must have passed through all places, foul and clean alike." This seems to suggest that it is necessary for an individual to pass through all kinds of good as well as bad experiences. However, "all experience" implies general types of experiences which are necessary to develop the necessary aptitudes, faculties, emotions, and so on. Thus, one has to pass through the life of a plumber or carpenter or an electrician, in order to gain "mechanical" experience. "How would an ego know of motherhood and fatherhood if it never had the experience? Telling about them would not suffice. How would it know of governing if it had never governed, nor of submission if it had not been in bonds?" asks Mr. Judge.

The whole life is a school in which every event and experience yields a lesson, and the learning of the lesson is the most important factor. For some people nothing is an experience till it happens to *them*. But it is

possible to learn from the experience of another, if we have empathy. We enjoy and suffer vicariously, by reading a book or watching a movie or television. This learning from experiences of other people calls for great imagination and sympathy. Without ourselves being an orphan or even without encountering one in our life, we can experience that state, if we are sensitive enough, when we read, say, about the little girl Topsy, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, who says that she never had a father or mother, she just grew. When we genuinely *sympathize* with the person who has lost a loved one, or is experiencing sickness or financial loss, we *live* that experience with him/her. We *know* where the shoe pinches. While travelling in a railway compartment, many things happen around us. For those who are attentive, this journey may prove to be an experience, whereas someone who is engrossed only in what he would do on getting down, this journey means nothing. The same is also true of life's journey.

*Light on the Path* says that in order to reach perfection we must learn that light and darkness, good and evil are the world's eternal ways. A person, who is pure and innocent like a child, because he never faced temptation and evil, may find that he is unable to handle evil when he encounters it. The first reaction to encountering evil is a shock. Whereas spiritual perfection implies not only having the ability to handle evil oneself, but also being able to help others overcome it. When Buddha met Angulimala, the highway robber, he was not shaken and was able to deal with him, as he knew of worse kinds of evil, whereas Angulimala was aware of only one aspect of it. Knowledge is the maturity or total understanding that includes good as well as evil.

*Through the Gates of Gold* says that it takes a very exceptional nature to touch the very depths of evil and yet come up triumphant. Most of us lead a very secure life and learn slowly through our experiences. But there are a few with a strong will power, who can touch the depths of sin, and then come out of it, like a good swimmer touching the bottom of the swimming pool, and then rising to the surface. Our Higher Self is a tough taskmaster, and is not satisfied till we

have learnt hundred per cent patience, calmness, courage or kindness. Hence, we repeatedly pass through some experiences, till we have mastered the lesson. “When the lesson is learned the necessity ceases,” writes Mr. Crosbie.

It is true that each one has to go through what are called the *basic type* of experiences. Some of the major ones are: (1) experience of poverty, which gives a chance to learn endurance, patience and strength, (2) experience of loneliness, gives a chance to learn the importance of aloneness, by turning within, and (3) experience of parenthood—which teaches even a most self-centred person to do something for someone else, or self-sacrifice and self-transcendence.

In a sense, the nine *rasas* mentioned in Sanskrit literature—such as *Shringar rasa* pertaining to love, *Veer rasa* pertaining to courage, etc.—represent the basic types of experiences through which each one must pass. Our reading and responding to Kalidas’s play “Shakuntala” or Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet” is, in a way, experiencing *Shringar rasa*—the agonies and ecstasies of love.

These basic experiences are often termed “archetypal” experiences. In the article “Man Is the Inheritor of Cosmos” we read: “Theosophy can help men to hasten the rate of progress, can aid them to avoid creating unnecessary suffering, for its philosophy teaches what the archetypal experiences are, those which are necessary to human evolution. If to give way to vice—and each vice is self-created—is wrong, to fancy that man has to pass through every shade of lust, every degree of wrath, every kind of covetousness, is also wrong. *He only need pass through archetypal experiences.*” (*The Theosophical Movement*, June 1941)

The article goes on to state that the four castes and the four *ashramas* of the Hindus give us a good idea of the archetypal experiences necessary for every human soul. In the Vedic tradition, *ashrama* means a stage in the life of a human being. In the concept of caste is implicit the profession which a person should follow or the method by which he should earn his livelihood. Likewise, the *ashramas* provide the field for the acquisition of knowledge, which can improve the Soul’s status in a given life or in

a subsequent life. “By learning well, the Brahmin Soul ascends to a Yogi state; or the Warrior Soul rises from the status of a common soldier to that of a high administrator or statesman or ruler; the petty shopkeeper advances to be a merchant-prince, and so on.”

The four *ashramas* or the four stages of life are regarded as four stages of experiencing, learning and advancing. Each stage involves specific duties and specific requirements, providing a unique experience for the person passing through that stage. The *ashrama* system is integrated with the concept of four *Purusharthas*, or four pursuits or proper aims of life in Hindu philosophy, namely, *Dharma* (moral values), *Artha* (wealth, prosperity), *Kama* (pleasures and love) and *Moksha* (liberation and spiritual values). After passing through the *Brahmacharya* or bachelor stage of life, and the *Grihastha* or householder stage, one entered the *Vanaprastha* or retirement stage, when he handed over household responsibilities to the next generation, took advisory role, and gradually withdrew from the world. It was transition from a householder’s life with greater emphasis on *Artha* and *Kama* (wealth, pleasure and sexual pursuits) to one with greater emphasis on turning inward and seeking liberation, freedom from worldly entanglements and from the wheel of birth and death.

The *Grihastha Ashrama* or Householder stage is considered by the Vedas to be the highest *ashrama*. Explaining the importance of the householder stage, Shri B. P. Wadia writes that the alchemical process of transforming the animal man into human man, and then human man into divine man, takes place, to a great extent in the crucible called Home. “Every man and woman carries within the soul certain innate ideas, one of which is related to the rearing of the Family and the building of the home.” Experiences in family life teach us great lessons of co-operation, unselfishness, sacrificial love and temperance.

For each of us, the imaginative sympathy and experiences in our own life overlap—both are the means through which we learn. The more we live up to Master’s suggestion: “What hurts one ought to hurt the other—that which rejoices A must fill with pleasure B,” the greater is our chance to learn from other people’s experiences.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT THE TEACHER IS A SCULPTOR

A SCULPTOR wields the chisel and the stricken marble grows to Beauty... So runs an old poem. The art of sculpture is indeed fascinating: with his chiseled touch, the sculptor hews a living shape out of old, lifeless stone, shaping, moulding, carving, a thing of beauty out of cold marble.

The educationist and philosopher, Bertrand Russell, makes a very interesting observation about “individuals.” He says that an individual is rather like a billiard ball—which only knows how to collide with other billiard balls! The point he is trying to make is that too much of individualism only sets men on a collision course against each other. A man who believes in his own individuality will find it difficult to cooperate with others and work with them for a common goal. Therefore, our spiritual teachers believed that true growth comes from moulding personality rather than just individuality.

Sanskrit and Hindi use two modified forms for individuality and personality: *vyaktitva* stands for individuality, while *vikasita vyaktitva* stands for personality. When young people from diverse backgrounds come to your class, many of them are yet to develop a sense of individuality. Teachers first need to give them this sense of individual worth and dignity. But if we stop at this stage, our work will not be complete: an individual is likely to remain rigid, self-opinionated and self-centred for life—a billiard ball, ready to clash with other billiard balls.

May be this is what is happening in this so-called age of LPG—an age of materialism, sought to be achieved through Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation. We are ready to stress our rights and fight for what we feel is our due. But we lack social responsibility, civic awareness and emotional maturity. These qualities can only come from the development of personality—and therefore, I emphasise the teacher’s role as a sculptor who shapes and moulds the individual into a wholesome personality.

From *vyaktitva* to *vikasita vyaktitva*, the transformation is achieved through the shaping, moulding power of education. As an individual, a young man or woman is apt to imagine that he or she is at the centre of the Universe, and everything and everyone must dance to his or her tune. It is the teacher’s duty to humanise such youngsters, to make them realize that life is not just taking, receiving, grasping, gaining and ordering others. Growth is not just physical expansion or even intellectual expansion, but spiritual growth, through assimilation of values. This, no text book or degree can bring about—but only a true teacher. This is the difference that Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa pointed out between the “unripe ego” and “ripe ego,” which he called *kaccha ami* and *pakka ami*, [respectively].

How will you shape, sculpt, mould the individual into a wholesome, vibrant personality? We speak a lot about Human Resource [HR] Development and HR Management today. Can I put it to you—the entire future Human Resource of this country is seated in the classrooms of teachers like you, across the length and breadth of this country! And it is you, the teachers, who are a living role-model before them. You can shape them for their benefit and the nation’s benefit. You can inculcate virtues and graces in them through precept and example. You can enrich their lives by giving them values.

Education should not stop with promoting physical and intellectual growth; these must lead to character development—only then does the cold, lifeless marble, become alive, beautiful and striking! The “individual” learns to devote his excess strength, knowledge and power, to serve the nation, to serve other people, to serve the world at large; he ceases to be self-centred. He becomes service-centred!

Sri Ramakrishna narrated a parable to illustrate this distinction between *kaccha ami* and *pakka ami*. A father went to the market and brought two ripe, luscious fruits for his two children. On returning home, he gave one fruit to each child. The elder child took the fruit, went straight to his room, closed the door, ate the fruit, wiped his mouth and then came out to play with his friends in the courtyard. As for the second child, he took one look at the delicious fruit, went straight out to his

playmates in the courtyard and shared it with everyone present.

The elder child was very “clever” in the material sense, in the ways of this world. He was individualistic, self-centred; he was intelligent enough to look after his own interests. The second had a less selfish, more mature personality. He naturally thought of others, and his first impulse was to share, to give. This is the kind of attitude we must inculcate in our children! The aim of education, Gurudev Sadhu Vaswani said, is not gains in silver and gold. It is cultivation of character, compassion and spirituality in the student. He went one step further and said to us: “India does not need leaders and masters, for there are many willing to take up that role; India needs servants and *sipais* [soldiers]—and it is for this that we must train our students.”

I know that it will not make me very popular to say this to you: but the great ancient ideals of this nation are service and sacrifice—*seva* and *tyaga*. It is these ideals that we must kindle in ourselves, and thereby light up the flame in the hearts and minds of our youngsters. Our managers, authorities, administrators and leaders are already well-versed in the art and science of making money, of using, even exploiting people for their own benefit. What we need to teach the younger generation is the spirit of selfless service, the spirit of sacrifice. Please do not shrink from the words sacrifice and service; they are not qualities reserved for ascetics and renunciates. They represent the first virtues that a well-rounded human being can aspire to; they represent significant points in the spiritual growth of a person. They represent the higher levels of man’s evolution and the true progress of civilisation and culture.

This is the most important task before teachers today: sculpting, shaping, moulding our youth into socially responsible citizens; making them good human beings imbued with the virtues of sincerity, commitment, dedication, service and sacrifice.

A UNESCO Report of Education had the significant title: Learning to Be. Please take note—Learning to Be, not learning to do or learning to make—this constitutes the essence of true education: the art of living the science of true life; not just the art of living in peace with yourself, but the art of living with people; serving

people; helping people; and contributing one’s best to social and national growth. This is the essence of education as expressed by swami Vivekananda: “Be and Make!”

[Taken from the magazine, *East and West Series*, September 2016, written by Dada J. P. Vaswani, whose 100th birth anniversary will be celebrated in Pune this year.]

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This year *Guru Purnima* will be celebrated on July 27th. It is traditionally celebrated by the Hindus to pay their respects and express their gratitude to their academic and spiritual gurus. “From the earliest times...the teacher was given great reverence by the pupil, and the latter was taught from youth to look upon his preceptor as second only to his father and mother in dignity,” writes Mr. Judge. There is the *guruparampara* chain which extends from one’s highest spiritual guide, and ends with the teacher who might have taught us our alphabets. Each teacher must be regarded as an important link in the chain, and must be respected.

Theosophy teaches that all things, good and bad, are rooted in human, character, and therefore, the object of true education must be, as H. P. Blavatsky points out, to help the individuals to “cultivate and develop the mind in the right direction; to teach the disinherited and helpless people to carry with fortitude the burden (allotted them by Karma); to strengthen their will; to inculcate in them the love of one’s neighbour and the feeling of mutual interdependence and brotherhood; and thus to train and form the character for practical life.” A teacher who teaches children, “self-reliance, love for all men...to think and reason for themselves,” serves the purpose of education. A sculptor sees the statue already in the block of marble and chips off the non-essential portion. “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free,” said Michelangelo. True education draws out child’s latent skills and potentialities. “Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school,” said Albert Einstein.

## STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

### SONG OF LIFE—II

VERSES 7, 8 and 9 of this discourse are very important. Keeping to the literal translation of the Sanskrit, verse 7 reads thus: “Renunciation of necessary work is not right, such renunciation comes from delusion, and is of the quality of *tamas*.” It then becomes necessary for us to determine in our own lives what the necessary and unnecessary actions are. We need to attain full spiritual discrimination to be able to distinguish in all the many activities in which we are taking part, which we should continue when we begin to aspire to the life of the Soul, and which we should renounce. There are necessary duties and obligations, duties to ourselves, families and nations. To give up any of these necessary duties, may seem to us to be renunciation, but in reality it is simply a delusion, says Krishna, and it springs from the quality of *tamas*. If we remember that the quality of *tamas* really means indifference, then we can see how it is easy to be mistaken and to think that we have attained to renunciation when in reality we are only expressing indifference, from the *tamas* or the wrong point of view.

If we get, for example, absorbed in our own altruism and endeavours; very much absorbed and engrossed in our own Theosophical work, and that very effort seems to justify the neglect of certain necessary actions. For instance, we may begin to neglect the duty to our own body in connection with the meals, so that we begin to eat at irregular hours or hurriedly, or perhaps worse, begin to eat improper meals, because we do not take the time necessary to prepare those meals in the right combination. We may think that we are justified because we neglect that duty to fulfil what we think is a greater piece of work—our own Theosophical ethics, and yet it is simply a delusion. We are simply manifesting the quality of *tamas*.

Verse 8 speaks of *rajasic* renunciation. Thus: “The renunciation of work through bodily perversity, saying it is painful, is of the quality of *rajas*. Such a renouncer obtains not the fruit of renunciation.” There are also many things in our lives that we renounce very easily, because

we really do not like to perform some particular task in connection with our principle. For instance, very often it seems easier to remain silent and not give our honest opinion, because it is painful to hurt people’s feelings, and yet when we thus renounce such actions, we are not true renouncers. We are at the *rajasic* stage, following our own desires, and it is the stage of self-gratification.

Verse 9 speaks of true or *sattvic* renunciation. Thus: “The renunciation of the fruit of all obligatory actions performed without attachment, because they ought to be done, is of the quality of *sattva*.” This is true renunciation. The implication of this verse is that having distinguished between necessary and unnecessary things, between essential and non-essential things, one must perform the necessary duties, first renouncing the fruits of action, and then performing the duties without attachment. These are the three *tapas* (mortifications) and *tyagas* (renunciations) in reference to the three qualities. Verse 10 is also important, for it describes in detail, who the true renouncer really is. Krishna says that the true renouncer, full of the quality of goodness, wise and exempt from all doubt is averse neither to those works which fail, nor those which succeed.

The most essential quality for the true renunciation is goodness, which is the quality of virtue and purity, the *sattvic* quality. But that is not the only requirement. We must also have become wise. The exact word is “intelligent.” We are required to have cut all doubts. Thus, there are three requirements: To be full, to be soaked through and through with the quality of *sattva*, to be intelligent and wise, and to be free from all doubts, is necessary to tread the highest path above and beyond the three qualities. It is necessary to have gone through the stage of *sattva*, thereby purifying ourselves and obtaining virtues and goodness. But it is not enough that the student who has become pure, honest, sincere and virtuous, must possess knowledge, it is essential that he must be able to apply that knowledge intelligently. Furthermore, he must possess full confidence in the law of this universe, in the law of his own higher self, in the great Masters, who are the embodiments of the law, and then no suspicions of doubts arise from the personal man.

It is the wrong notion that we are separate “I”s, that our personalities are the real thing, which produce the sin, for it is a sin, of doubt and suspicion. The true spiritual renouncer has transcended his own personality, he knows himself as being one with Nature and Nature’s laws. Therefore, there is no room in his nature for any doubt or suspicion. Impersonality then becomes necessary because he is good, he is able to avoid evil type of actions which will injure himself and others. Because he is wise and has knowledge, he is able to discriminate between necessary and unnecessary actions, and to perform only necessary ones. Because he has become impersonal, he is able to perform these necessary duties without attachment to the fruits of these duties, or to the performance of the deeds themselves. There is such a thing as being attached to the performance of our own actions. We think “it is my duty” and we emphasise the “my,” so that although we may be honest in having renounced the results of this particular activity, that very idea that they belong to us as separate entities, is a wrong idea from the spiritual point of view.

True renunciation demands three specific qualities, and we must begin to try to aim at those qualities in our own lives. When this is done, we do not care about the particular duties being pleasant or unpleasant. This brings us to the next idea which is given in verse 12, and which is very important from the practical point of view. Thus: “The threefold results of action—unwished for, wished for, and mixed—accrue after death to those who do not practice this renunciation, but no results follow those who perfectly renounce.” All actions whether they are wished for, unwished for, or mixed—that is, when our desires are mixed, in reference to that particular activity—all of them sins of omission and commission, will bring us certain definite results after death, save and except the actions which have been performed in the true spirit of renunciation. Thereby, it becomes very important to see, how and why it is that actions performed with true renunciation do not bring results after the death of the physical body.

The incarnated soul, the ego in the body, after he separates himself from the physical body as well as from all the lower and grosser attributes

enters a condition of contemplation, or meditation which has been best compared to dreams. The soul in the body acts, feels, desires, thinks, aspires, meditates, and all of these activities whether on the physical, moral, or mental plane, bring certain definite results. But that soul, after the objective existence on earth is closed, carries with it only the good results in the after-death condition, in the heaven world. There the soul, however, still identifies itself with the temporary mask which it was during the last life on earth, *i.e.*, it still knows itself as the last personality, and however beautiful and noble that mask may have become, after the separation between the heavenly qualities and the terrestrial ones, the good on the one hand, and the evil on the other, still that mask is an illusion from the real point of view, and the student is asked to free himself from all illusions, thereby from the illusion of heaven world also.

All earnest students who are trying to serve humanity, who are trying to work now and here, that they may be able in time to overcome that great illusion of the heaven world, must realize that it implies and necessitates complete separation of the personality. In other words, the student must learn to know himself behind the veil of the personal man, to recognise his true nature behind that mask that he has to wear, and not to think of himself as the personality but to connect and recognize his own Higher and Divine Self. This necessitates not only the renunciation of the fruits of action, but also the detachment from the very activities. This will be explained, more fully, by means of an example, in the next part.

*(To be concluded)*

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TRY TO forget yourself in the service of others. For when we think too much of ourselves and our own interests, we easily become despondent. But when we work for others, our efforts return to bless us.

—SIDNEY POWELL

## VISION—AFTER DEATH AND BEFORE BIRTH

A PHYSICIAN declares a person dead when his body has become stiff, cold, breathless and pulseless. That, teaches Theosophy, is only the beginning of death. “When a man dies, the brain dies last. Life is still busy there after death has been announced,” writes Mr. Judge (*Echoes from the Orient*, p. 56). A Master of Wisdom says that no man dies insane or unconscious. Even when a person appears dead, “between the last throbbing of his heart and the moment when the last spark of animal heat leaves the body, the *brain thinks* and the *Ego* lives over in those few brief seconds—his whole life again.” In other words, at the moment of death, every person, without exception, sees his whole life, in its minutest details. This is called “review” or “retrospective vision.” Thus, although the person is dead for all those who are present near him, the Ego is busy in the brain, and departs only when its work is over. Therefore, it is suggested that those who are present near the dead person, should maintain silence and not disturb the ego, allowing the ego to complete its work. “Especially have you to keep quiet just after Death has laid her clammy hand upon the body. Speak in whispers, I say, lest you disturb the quiet ripple of thought, and hinder the busy work of the Past casting on its reflection upon the veil of the Future,” says a Master of Wisdom. The Teachers have said that the “body” should be left undisturbed for “at least” twelve hours, since the Ego is busy long after all the signs point to death.

Many questions arise: Who is it that reviews the life that has just ended? What is the purpose or function of the review? Does one experience again the innumerable books one has read, the films and plays one has seen, and the music one has heard? Does every person experience this review irrespective of the nature of death? Do saints as well as sinners go through this process of death vision? What are the benefits?

In the *Ocean of Theosophy*, Mr. Judge describes the process of review, thus: “When the frame is cold and eyes closed, all the forces of the body and mind rush through the brain, and by a series of

pictures the whole life just ended is imprinted indelibly on the inner man not just in general outline but *down to the smallest detail of even the most minute and fleeting impression* (italics ours).” We may understand this process by an analogy of something similar happening when we fall asleep. As we fall asleep, the brain begins to throw out, like sparks from dying embers, the impressions, which were gathered during the day or waking state. These are seen as ordinary dreams. Likewise, at the moment of death, the dying brain dislodges memory with a strong, supreme impulse. So long as there is a spark of animal heat in the body, the brain still thinks. Because one cannot go forward, he must go back, and so from the time of death or approaching death to the events of childhood, one reads the record of all thoughts, words, deeds and impressions, explains Mr. Crosbie.

At several places in the writings of H.P.B. and W.Q.J. it is made clear that the life that just ended is reviewed in its minutest details. In the article, “Memory in the Dying,” H.P.B. says that nothing is lost, not even the smallest impression, and these are recalled not only after the death of the body, but in some instances at the *dying moment*. H.P.B. recounts many instances of people recalling long-forgotten events at their dying moment. When a consumptive who was declared dead, was recalled to life by two successive injections of a gram of ether, he uttered something in Flemish, and when offered pencil and paper, he wrote in Flemish a few lines and then died. When translated, it was found that he had suddenly recollected having borrowed a sum of fifteen francs, some twenty years ago, from a certain person and he desired it to be paid. At the dying moment, he could not only recollect the trifling event of his borrowing fifteen francs, but also Flemish—the language which he had only heard in his childhood, but never spoken or learnt. Such memory cannot be the result of physical brain, but must be part of spiritual memory, that of the Higher Ego, the Reincarnating individuality. The Ego is almost omniscient in its immortal nature, explains H.P.B.

We are able to appreciate the purpose, function and benefits of the review, by understanding fully the process of review, which

H.P.B. describes thus:

For one short instant, the *personal* [lower mind] becomes one with the *individual* and all-knowing *Ego*. But this instant is enough to show to him the whole chain of causes which have been at work during his life. He sees and now understands himself as he is, un-adorned by flattery or self-deception. He reads his life, remaining as a spectator looking down into the arena he is quitting; he feels and knows the justice of all the suffering that has overtaken him. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 160)

It appears that the personal, lower man has a panoramic review of the life just ended in the company of his higher, divine self, on the plane of consciousness, “wherein there is neither past nor future, but all is one present.” This review is often compared to self-examination. Just like we are asked to examine the actions and behaviour of lower, personal self in the company of the Higher and Impersonal Self, at the end of each day, so also, Nature compels us to examine the whole of our life at the time of death. We become aware of what kind of a person we were, and the kind of life we lived. It is seeing oneself as one really was, without any self-deception. “The soul marshals up all past events, grasps the sum total, the average tendency stands out, the ruling hope is seen. Their final aroma forms the keynote of Devachanic existence,” writes Mr. Judge (*Echoes from the Orient*, p. 57). Thus, it appears that what emerges from such a review is also the *line of life’s meditation*, that on which the heart was set, and which determines one’s condition in *Devachan*. For, it is the last series of powerful and deeply imprinted thoughts, which give colour and trend to the whole life in *devachan*.

Moreover, the above words of H.P.B. from the *Key to Theosophy*, are in response to the question: “Then the personal man must always go on suffering *blindly* the Karmic penalties which the Ego has incurred?” In the answer given by her, she seems to suggest that the *post-mortem* review also reveals to the lower, personal man the chain of causes that were operating during the life just ended, bringing about joys and sorrows. It is true that every physical or mental suffering

in our lives is the direct result of some misdeed in our past lives, but since the personal man has no memory of it in the present life, he feels that he is unjustly punished, and suffers for no guilt of his own. Most of us complain, in the absence of the knowledge of the cause, “What did I do to deserve this? Why did this happen to me?” We consider our suffering to be unmerited. During review, we are shown the causes for the effects. The “seeing of causes,” is part of the spiritual death vision, so that the Ego knows the justice of all that has befallen him.

In *The Key to Theosophy*, H.P.B. says that this retrospective vision or review is for every person, without any exception, even when death is sudden. As explained in “Questions Answered at an Informal ‘Ocean’ Class,” (*The Theosophical Movement*, July 1953), when there is sudden and violent death, as in wars or accidents, only the body has been separated from the other principles, but the inner astral man is still alive. There is a suggestion that in case of violent death, the shock of death by violence must bring with it *some part* of the death vision or review, which does not seem to include the seeing of the causes in the events of their life. Since H.P.B. says every person without exception has a review at the moment of death, it stands to reason that when the natural life term has ended in the case of the violent death, the Ego must *complete its review* on the threshold of *Devachan*, *i.e.*, before entering the state of *Devachan* or *Swarga*. The seeing of causes is part of the spiritual death vision, since then the Ego knows the justice of all that has befallen him, and sees himself as he is in the whole chain of cause and effect. This is the kind of vision that means the real completion of one’s last life on earth. It is possible to complete the review because, though physical brain was blown to pieces, the memory has remained intact in the astral brain. “If this review were not completed where would be the material from his last life on earth to afford him his Devachanic bliss?...But the teachers have not dealt with these matters in any detail.” In case of natural death, the astral body separates itself from the physical body, only when review is completed.

This review is for all, saints as well as sinners. In case of spiritually advanced beings, something more is revealed during review. H.P.B.

puts it thus:

Very good and holy men see, we are taught, not only the life they are leaving, but even several preceding lives in which were produced the causes that made them what they were in the life just closing. They recognise the law of Karma in all its majesty and justice. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 160)

Just as at the moment of death, the dying man has a retrospective insight into the life just ended, so also, before rebirth, the Ego has a pre-view or prospective vision of the life that awaits him. As the *Gita* points out, when the stock of merit has exhausted, the Ego is forced to take birth once again on earth. When the Ego comes out of the state of *Devachan*, the illusion of personality is dropped, and the Ego resumes its own true, spiritual, divine nature. What happens during pre-view?

The Self wakes from the dream, it is borne swiftly off to a new body, and then, just before birth, it sees for a moment all the causes that led it to *devachan* and back to the life it is about to begin, and knowing it to be all just, to be the result of its own past life, it repines not but takes up the cross again—and another soul has come back to earth. (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 124)

The death of the physical body marks the “first death,” but the process of death continues in an astral region called *kama loka*, wherein there is separation of the astral body, desire nature and lower mind, from the higher trinity of *Atma-Buddhi-Manas* or the Real Man, which goes to *devachan*, *swarga* or paradise, after the separation. This is termed as “second death.” What takes place during the passage of the Ego from *Kama Loka* to *Devachan*?

As explained in “Questions Answered at an Informal ‘Ocean’ Class,” (*The Theosophical Movement*, October 1953), on this question very few statements can be found in our philosophy. But we can try to understand by means of an analogy. When we go to bed at night, we have a backward vision of things done during the day. After these few quiet moments we experience a moment of complete unconsciousness, when the waking life is completely blotted out, and

then we begin to dream. Thus, this state of unconsciousness is a barrier between the state of waking and dreaming. In the same way, when we die, we have a backward or retrospective vision, then comes complete unconsciousness, followed by “waking” in *Kama Loka*, comparable to dream state. But just as during life the dream state is followed by a state of total unconsciousness, which we call deep sleep state, so also, when *Kama Lokic* life comes to an end there must be a retrospective glance in *Kama Loka*, followed once again by unconsciousness, and then waking into the *Devachanic* state. Once again, after the period of *Devachanic* activity there must come at its close a retrospective glance over the *Devachanic* life, followed by a moment’s unconsciousness. Then the Ego wakes up on this plane and sees both forwards and backwards: we see what led up to this birth, and what is involved in it. That is, we see the unlearned lessons and the undone things, which we are once more to struggle with. Thus, just before birth, and at the moment of death, we have a perfect consciousness of the past and of the future, as well as of the present—we see their unbroken continuity.

We are also told that the *skandhas*, *vasanas* or attributes of the previous life remain inseparably connected, magnetically, with the being or the Ego that evolved them. Hence, as the Ego comes out of the *devachanic* state, these *skandhas* are drawn to the Ego, “who from them as germ of basis builds up a new set of *skandhas* for new life.” (*The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 109)

When time comes for the Ego to take birth, from among the storehouse of *skandhas* generated in past lives, are chosen a few which determine, the kind of physical body, emotional and mental nature, etc., for the next birth. Also, at that point, from all the affinities formed by that Ego in the previous lives, from among the strongest affinities, are chosen the parents. The Ego chooses also the surroundings, *i.e.*, the nation, condition of poverty or riches, etc. We cannot possibly have a preview of every event that will take place, because our life is not predetermined, though we may see the major events that are likely to take place in an outline, because some of the karma with which the Ego is born, are so powerful that their precipitation cannot be averted.

## THE IDEA OF HUMAN PERFECTIBILITY

PERFECTION, in the common parlance, means consummate skill one achieves in one or another area of human activity, such as, gymnastics, various arts, academic learning, etc. Perfection of this sort pertains to the transitory part of man, which is limited to one life time. The idea of human perfection under consideration, however, is infinitely greater in scope than the ordinary sense attached to the word. It means complete realization of potentiality of perfection of man as a whole, in his spiritual, intellectual, psychic and physical aspects, which is possible of attainment in one great period of universal evolutionary scheme. It means that every human being has the potentiality of complete development and perfection in every aspect of his whole being, which makes him more than human.

The idea of human perfectibility, therefore, has reference not merely to man of one lifetime as a physical being, but to the Real Man, the Divine Ego, who compasses Eternity, who broods over every mortal man. We are accustomed to look upon ourselves as physical creatures on earth of one lifetime because of the natural ignorance of things spiritual arising out of limitation of the mind of embodied self, and wrong religious and secular education. We must try to overcome ignorance and heed the words of the great Teachers of mankind that man is not his physical body, nor his earthly personality with name and form, nor his mind, intellect, desires and passions, but the Divine Ego, an integral portion of the Supreme Soul of the world; that in the scheme of universal evolution he acquires body and mind in order to come in touch with and experience whole of Nature, and also the nature and power of Self; and thus, through accumulation and assimilation of experiences in a series of rebirths produced by his own Karma, gradually unfolds, and consciously realizes, the universal divine perfection which inheres potentially in him.

If man were not inherently perfect there is absolutely no possibility of his ever becoming perfect, and existence would then be a purposeless and meaningless jumble. Recent and ancient history is

replete with examples of such perfected beings, who took birth on earth and taught humanity more or less of the universal Wisdom-Religion. They were all ordinary human beings in past ages, like we are now, but who evolved by self-effort and sacrifice to become perfect. They constantly hold out to mankind the ideal of human perfectibility. That is their message to mankind. They exemplify the ideal of human perfection in their life and works, which inspire us to follow their teachings and their ideal example.

Common question inquirers generally ask is that if man is inherently perfect as a spiritual being why then does he have to fall into matter, become entangled in it to suffer endless pain and sorrow—why exchange “the bliss of sidereal existence for the curse of terrestrial life” (*S.D.*, II, 246). This is a profound question which goes to the very root of the deepest mystery of existence, to explain which involves a metaphysical disquisition which is not easy to attempt in a short article. However, a brief outline of the fundamental teachings of Theosophy may perhaps be attempted on the nature of the divine Ego, the Real Man, and the purpose of his involvement in matter as terrestrial personality. Theosophy teaches:

In its very essence it is THOUGHT, and is, therefore, called in its plurality *Manasa Putra*, “the Sons of the (Universal) mind.” This *individualised* “Thought” is what we Theosophists call the *real* human EGO, the thinking Entity imprisoned in a case of flesh and bones. This is surely a Spiritual Entity, not *Matter*, and such Entities are the incarnating EGOS that inform the bundle of animal matter called mankind, whose names are *Manasa* or “Minds.” (*The Key to Theosophy*, pp.181-2)

We have to learn to make clear distinction between the temporary *personality*, the earthly mind-brain complex encased in flesh and bones, on the one hand, and the immortal divine *Individuality*, on the other, the former being the instrument of the latter in every one of the long cycle of its reincarnations. The Real Man, the Eternal Thinker, whose consciousness belongs to quite another plane and planes of ideation, can only act on earth indirectly to accomplish his divine mission through his earthly reflections—personalities—whom

he overshadows. It is the personal self, endowed as he is with discrimination and free-will, who has to make the choice at every moment of his earthly life, whether he will heed the voice of the god within, the divine conscience, assimilate his consciousness to the divine Individuality and become immortal, or follow the dictates of his desires, passions of the lower self and selfish interests, to revolve in endless cycles of rebirth under Karmic law.

Every time we take the latter course we frustrate and delay the fulfilment of the mission of the former; and that mission is twofold : to so purify and spiritualize the lower nature of the earthly man as to make of it a perfect instrument for use to assimilate all knowledge and experiences of the whole of the universe, both in its phenomenal and noumenal aspects, thereby realizing his Oneness with ALL, and thus become perfect; and, at the same time, and through that very process, becoming a co-worker with Nature, to raise up the souls of the lower kingdoms, which aid in building and sustaining the tabernacle for the human soul to dwell-in for his experience, progress and emancipation. All forms of life below the human stage in the progressive order of Nature look up to man for their evolution to higher life, as man himself looks up, for his higher evolution, to the supra-human stage of consciousness of the Heavenly Man.

Our duty as human beings consists in consciously and intelligently participating in Nature's continuous progressive work of evolutionary perfection, with the archetypal image of the Heavenly Man in mind, and through devotion to the highest good of humanity at heart.

Teachers show that while that is our plainly evident duty as human beings, yet man being a free agent has the power of choosing, to think and act in ways which may run counter to the supreme purpose of human life and retard his progress to the "heart of the Sun." We are shown how some, neglecting duty, lose all chance of reaching divine perfection in the great cycle of planetary evolution—having to come back at the commencement of the next great cycle to complete the unfinished work—while others, after a more or less period of neglect, retrace their steps and resume their arduous journey; and a few wise

ones, realizing the evanescent and deceptive allurements of life, strive with all their might to become perfect. Those who achieve complete assimilation of their Being with the Supreme Spirit—"merge the Ocean in the drop, the drop within the Ocean"—become all-knowing and perfect performers of all actions. *Srimad Bhagavatam*, speaking of the highest devotion (*Bhaktiyoga atyantika*) of such Holy Renunciates, says that they spurn the supreme prize of Absolute bliss of *Moksha* or *Nirvana*, and, instead, choose to remain active in the service of the Supreme which is the All and in All (3rd *Skanda*, Chapter 29, verses 13 and 14). Having merged in the Supreme, and yet retaining their Individuality, they "are not born again even at the new evolution, nor are they disturbed at the time of general destruction" (*Gita*, XIV), but take part in the governance of worlds, and periodically take up human form to teach and help mankind in its progress. We get a glimpse of the nature and stature of such perfected beings in the description of Sri Krishna, he himself being one such:

There is nothing, O son of Pritha, in the three regions of the universe which it is necessary for me to perform, nor anything possible to obtain which I have not obtained: and yet I am constantly in action. If I were not indefatigable in action, all men would presently follow my example, O son of Pritha. If I did not perform actions these creatures would perish; I should be the cause of confusion of castes and should have slain all these creatures. (*Gita*, III)

Thus, by his own example, Sri Krishna implores Arjuna to strive towards the Supreme end through performance of obligatory duties of life, with heart joined to renunciation of lower self and its interests, as sacrifice, for the good of Humanity. "Miserable and unhappy are those whose impulse to action is found in its reward." Life's experiences constantly teach us this lesson. There can be no individual happiness unless the whole of humanity has reached happiness. Striving towards that end is the only road to true happiness and true progress.

We will not be able to succeed at once in the practice of the highest Yoga, which is Duty, but, as Teachers say, we must study

this sublime Science of Self, and try to put it into practice, as much as we can, in our daily lives, and get over the illusion of separateness of personal self. We are encouraged that every effort to live the higher life counts and every sincere attempt brings its reward in time. Such study and practice, over a time, brings on changes in our nature, giving rise to intuitive perception of the true Self and a deepening conviction of the Universal Brotherhood. When complete reliance is placed on the Higher Self and absolute Justice or Karma—the two being one—rapid will be the progress of the Soul towards perfection. A succinct and comprehensive guideline to the ideal of human perfection is found in the following immortal words of the Master of Devotion:

If a man maketh offering to the Supreme Being who is the source of the works of all and by whom this universe was spread abroad, he thus obtaineth perfection. The performance of the duties of a man's own particular calling, although devoid of excellence, is better than doing the duty of another, however well performed; and he who fulfills the duties obligated by nature, does not incur sin. A man's own natural duty, even though stained with faults, ought not to be abandoned. For all human acts are involved in faults, as the fire is wrapped in smoke. The highest perfection of freedom from action is attained through renunciation by him who in all works has an unfettered mind and subdued heart. (*Gita, XVIII*)

I HAVE never met a person, I do not care what his condition, in whom I could not see possibilities. I do not care how much a man may consider himself a failure, I believe in him, for he can change the thing that is wrong in his life anytime he is prepared and ready to do it. Whenever he develops the desire, he can take away from his life the thing that is defeating it. The capacity for reformation and change lies within.

—PRESTON BRADLEY

## SAINT KABIR—LIFE AND TEACHINGS

### II

SAINT KABIR has inspired generations of people with his “*dohas*,” or two line poems in Hindi. There is power in Kabir's choice of words, but their impact is somewhat weakened when these couplets are translated into the English language. Saint Kabir was a weaver by profession and acted as a teacher and a social reformer by the medium of his writing. His couplets are full of spiritual insight, teaching the value of hard work, equality of all beings, and the importance of good speech and conduct. It appears that he never had any formal education, and was thus an illiterate. Yet, he seems to have attained highest possible level of informal education. He has written many couplets distinguishing “head-learning” or bookish knowledge from soul wisdom and applied knowledge. He says, “*Pothi Padh Padh Jag Mua, Pandit Bhayo na Koye, Dhai Aakshar Prem Ke, Jo Padhe so Pandit Hoye.*” In other words, “Reading book after book, the whole world died, but no one became learned, but whoever reads two and a half words of love, he becomes learned.”

Here, Kabir does not attach any importance to erudition. He seems to exalt the pure feeling of love as a great liberating force. Learning pertains chiefly to intellectual development. Any learning that does not promote moral improvement in people and fails to instill in the hearts of people, a love of truth and devotion to the principle of justice, is really worthless. Learning without application leads to misplaced pride and selfishness, rather than building of one's character. *The Voice of the Silence* goes to the extent of saying that “Even ignorance is better than Head-learning with no Soul-wisdom to illuminate and guide it.” But to acquire wisdom, we also need to develop heart qualities such as love, goodness and altruism, for “Self-Knowledge is of loving deeds the child.”

The human mind is capable of acquiring two kinds of knowledge, Rational or relative knowledge that belongs to the realm of intellect, and Absolute Knowledge or Wisdom, which reveals the very essence of things and is all-inclusive. It is direct perception. Kabir is also of

the same view, saying that Truth is not something to be learned from books but to be *experienced* personally. He scoffed at bookish learning and traditional thinking, relying on his own spiritual insight obtained through first-hand experience. He seems to tell the learned people: “*Tu kahata hai kagad lekhi, mein kahata akhan dekhi,*” i.e., “You tell me all the things you have read in your books, but I am telling you what I know within myself, that I have seen with my divine vision.” Kabir seems to have attacked the blind believers, who had not realised the truth, but were simply repeating the words written in the scriptures.

Kabir designates the true Guru as *Sadguru*. He has written many couplets and poems describing the nature and function of a true Guru. He says that the Guru only exists to show us the aspect of God within us all. In one of his poems he describes the characteristics of a true Guru, saying, “Regard such a guru to be a true one, who makes the eyes see the transcendental [Reality], whose teaching stays steady, in speech and action...one who does not prescribe mortification or any physical discomfort, neither asks you to renounce the world, but wherever the mind wanders, he makes you see the *Paramatma*...and one who grants a non-dual perception, such a *sadguru* can deliver one from the cycle of rebirth.”

The function of a true Guru is to inspire and awaken human Souls to the recognition of their own dignity and their own divinity. This is achieved by keeping the Light of Wisdom ever burning in the world. The bond between guru and chela of the true secret science or *Gupta Vidya* is a purely spiritual one. A true guru who makes spiritual rebirth possible, who brings about inner, spiritual transformation is not to be found in psychic and material world, but beyond them, in the Spiritual world. The Guru plays the same important role in the Spiritual Rebirth of the disciple that the mother plays in giving birth to the body of her child. Our Holy scriptures and sages have given equal status to Guru and God. But, Kabir seems to assign such an exalted position to a true Guru, as to place him even above God. Thus:

*Guru Govind Dou Khade, Kake Lagun Paye.  
Balihari Guru Aapno, Jin Govind Diyo Milay.*

He asks, if Guru and God are both in front of me, who will I greet first? Then he says that it is only because of Guru’s teachings and guidance that he has succeeded in seeing or experiencing God. A true Guru has the power to make his disciple like him, but how long it will take will depend upon disciple’s eagerness, efforts and total dedication, as also his attitude towards his Guru. In a couplet, Kabir says, “...*Keet na jane Bhiring ko, Guru kar le aap saman.*” Here we are given an analogy. Bhiringa (Bhramar or wasp) is the type of insect related to bee family. It catches larva of another insect and puts in its habitat made of mud. The wasp is said to sting the larva which it brings to its hive, and it also constantly makes a humming sound. Every now and then it enters the hive and stings the larva. Some say that it stings at least one lakh times. As a result, so to speak, the larva’s attention is focused on the wasp, as to when it will receive the next sting. The larva, so to say, meditates on the presence of the wasp, at all times, and in turn becomes a wasp itself. So, just as the larva of an insect becomes himself a wasp out of fear of a sting, so also, a disciple can become like Guru by focusing on the knowledge given by him.

Kabir gives out simple ethical precepts in his couplets. Thus:

*Bura jo Dekhan mein Chala, Bura na Milya Koye  
Jo Mann Khoja Apna, to Mujhse Bura na Koye*

In other words, “I went in the search of a bad person, but could not find a bad person. But when I searched my mind, I found that no one was as bad as me.” It is another way of saying, “Man, Know thyself.” As Lord Buddha says, “Not the unworthy actions of others, nor their sins of omission and commission, but his own acts of omission and commission should one regard” (*The Dhammapada*, verse 50). There is a general tendency to criticize others for their shortcomings. The best course is to be vigilant about our own faults. Kabir, like Jesus, advises us to look at the beam in our own eyes instead of looking at the mote in our brother’s eye. Amazingly, an honest introspection will reveal that all fault lies with “me,” and “my” own perceptions and attitudes.

But on the other hand, like Saint Tukaram, Kabir asks us to respond to persecution and slander with tolerance. He called

slanderer a friend, expressed gratefulness for the slander, for it brought him close to his god. He says, “Keep the slanderer near you, build him a hut in your courtyard; for, without soap or water, he will scrub your character clean.”

In another couplet Kabir teaches patience, which is the most essential quality to be developed by both, an ordinary person, as well as a spiritual aspirant. He says,

Dheere Dheere Re Mana, Dheere Sub Kucch Hoye  
Mali Seenche So Ghara, Ritu Aaye Phal Hoye

In other words, “Slowly slowly O mind, everything in its own pace happens. A gardener may water with a hundred pots, but fruit arrives only in its season.” Kabir teaches patience, through the analogy of a seed growing into a tree, by stages, and bears fruits when the season for it arrives. A gardener cannot hasten the arrival of the fruits, by pouring even a hundred pots of water.

We are always in a hurry to achieve and acquire things. We are anxious, because we expect instant results. Some of us get anxious as to our progress in spiritual life. A good gardener does not dig out the plant by the roots to see how it is growing. We cannot force the growth of the soul-plant. It may not be large or strong enough to bear fruit when we wish it to, but some day it will, if only we are not anxious, and nurture it well. “What is to learn, is to be content, or, rather, resigned to ourselves and our limitations even while striving to get above them....We cannot all at once live up to these high ideals as some others live up to theirs,” writes Mr. Judge.

In some of his couplets Kabir conveys the message that spiritual life is possible only for the one who has cultivated a detached-attachment: To be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. Thus:

*Kabira Khada Bazaar me, Liye Lukati Hath*  
*Jo Ghar Bare Apna, Chale Hamare Sath*

In other words, “With burning torch in his hands, Kabir stands in the market place; Come along with me only if you are ready to burn your home.” In another couplet he says that Kabir is standing in the market place, wishing welfare of all; with neither friendship

nor enmity with anyone at all. From the spiritual and mystical point of view, “bazaar” represents this world, where human relationships are based on give and take, with strong feelings of attachment and aversion. Kabir suggests the attitude to be cultivated, which is also conveyed in *Light on the Path*: “No man is your enemy: no man is your friend. All alike are your teachers.” Moreover, Kabir, like many other Teachers, suggests that complete detachment is a *sine qua non* condition for developing one-pointed and true devotion. “The sacred feeling of *Bhakti* is broken and diffused into *rajasic* and *tamasic* devotion. ‘He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,’ and also that seemingly terrible exclamation of Jesus to his mother, ‘Woman, what have I to do with thee?’ carry a profound truth in one-pointedness, in concentration,” writes Shri B. P. Wadia.

Some of Kabir’s poems are profoundly metaphysical and mystical. Kabir was a weaver. He says God is a Master Weaver. No one could understand the secret of this weaver. In one of his very famous devotional songs Kabir compares human body with a shawl or a finely woven garment. Kabir is full of praise for the Master Weaver, who weaves all, from the magical skin and body we wear to the fabric of the sky, finely and expertly. Our body is the clothing of the soul, and is dropped by the soul, when it gets old and worn out at the end of every life. There are various versions of this song, which translated in English reads:

Delicate and Delicate is the weave of this cloth!  
dipped in the divine essence,  
What is the warp? What is the weft?  
What thread did the master put to use in its making?  
What a complex interlacing and tapestry in the weave?  
And Subtle are the threads in its weave.  
Eight-petalled Lotus was used as the Charkha (Spinning  
Wheel)  
(weaving) five elements and Three traits (*gunas*) together in  
this cloth.  
My master took ten months to finish its weaving  
And he kept compressing the cloth for this taut weave.  
Sages, Men and Saints draped this fabric around them.

Alas! Some soiled and defiled it.  
 Kabir wore it with care and concern  
 And is returning it to You, O Lord, unblemished and pure!

He says that my Lord weaved this great cloth (human body) in ten months, the gestation period for human beings. He seems to refer to both the gross and the subtle body or *sukshma sarira*, because he says that *Ingala* and *Pingala* (Ida and Pingala *nadis*, or astro-nerves) are *tana* and *bana* (linings of weaver's tool on which he weaves cloths) while Sushumna nerve is the thread that is used to weave it. The physical body is built over the astral, model body. Mr. Judge says that each one of us is a weaver, who weaves the chequered warp and woof of each earthly existence with the stained and discoloured threads of past actions. By our thoughts, words, feelings, desires and actions, we either purify or defile the subtle and gross bodies, giving either psychic or spiritual impulse to the atoms of these bodies. Theosophy teaches that for an ordinary person, in every new birth, there is a new astral body or *sukshma sarira*, governed by Karma to be expended in that life. Hence, working in accordance with Karma, each one of us is striving to weave a glorious and pure fabric, a permanent astral body. "The permanent astral is the astral, permeated, changed, refined by the fire of consciousness and thus made permanent," explains Mr. Crosbie.

It is believed that Kabir had chosen his own place of death as Magahar, and not Kashi, to remove the superstition from people's mind that only the person who died in Kashi went to heaven. Kabir had already questioned this belief in one of his couplets, saying, "If there is a simple way to go to heaven just by dying in Kashi, then what is the necessity of worshipping God?" It is considered that after his death both Hindus and Muslims had claimed for getting his dead body, as both wanted to perform the funeral rites according to their own customs. But to their amazement, when they removed the cloth from the dead body they found only some flowers at the place, as if to say that he was neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, but as he always said, he was "at once the child of both Allah and Ram."

(Concluded)

## IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

The Arabian Nights' tale of *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp*, the tale about a young lad Aladdin and his exciting adventures with the magic lamp, offers many interesting metaphors for certain spiritual events relating to the journey of the soul in the human world. The story goes that Aladdin was a poor boy who comes to possess a magic lamp, which when rubbed, a genie would come out and fulfil any wish that was made. Soon Aladdin and his mother became wealthy. All was well until one day, when Aladdin was away, the wicked magician appeared and tricked Aladdin's wife to exchange the old magic lamp for a new fake one. After a series of adventures, Aladdin conquered the magician and got back the magic lamp and thereafter lived happily forever.

The word Aladdin signifies *Allah's Din*, which means God's religion. The Lamp has always been a symbol of wisdom and enlightenment. The magic lamp in this spiritual allegory represents the enlightened soul, one who follows the true religion of God, attains wonderful powers and becomes equivalent to the magic lamp, whose genie could fulfil any wish. God's religion is the true, divine religion, or true wisdom that brings total peace, prosperity and happiness to the people who follow it and become divine. The magic lamp symbolizes an empowered and divine soul that has attained total control over nature or matter, which includes the physical body and its senses. The genie represents nature that obeys the command of the enlightened soul. In the Golden Age, nature is at the beck and call of divine souls.

All is well with the world till the wicked magician, which is *Maya*, or the symbol of five vices, comes and steals the magic lamp, *i.e.*, deceives the souls and makes them weak, impure and miserable. Just as the magician exchanged the old magic lamp with a fake new one, the Devil or *Maya*, lures the souls to give up their age-old spiritual and moral values for fake physical or material pleasures. The most interesting part of this spiritual allegory is that Allah Din's magical wonders are happening right now! The old souls are being enlightened again by

imparting of true wisdom, so that they can regain their magic power, which will enable them to establish the divine world where all matter and nature will say, “What is your order, my master?” just as the genie enquired of Aladdin. (*Purity*, June 2018)

“Popular folk-lore and traditions, however fanciful at times, when sifted may lead to the discovery of long-lost but important secrets of nature,” writes H.P.B. Theosophy points out that there is “history” in most of the allegories and “myths,” and real actual events are concealed under them. Some of the Arabian Nights’ tales pertain to magic, bringing to life good and evil spirits, genies, snake queens, witches and wizards. Mr. Judge writes that the Arabian Nights stories, admirable and amusing tales, are not *all* pure fiction, but they are the faint reverberations of the happenings from the times of Lemuria and Atlantis, the lands of Third and Fourth Race Giants. The Atlanteans or the Fourth Race humanity dabbled in both Black and White Magic. The Atlanteans of the later period are renowned for their magic powers and wickedness, as also for their ambition and defiance of gods. It is from the Fourth Race that the early Aryans got their knowledge of wonderful things.

There are four major elements—earth, water, air and fire, which are made up of tiny “lives” or elementals. These elementals are called “nature spirits.” The elementals are the souls of the elements, and are centres of force. Thus, we have *Gnomes* or earth-elementals, *Undines* or water-elementals, *Sylphs* or air-elementals, and *Salamanders* or fire-elementals. To this class belong Fairies, Djins, Elves, Dwarfs, Satyrs, Goblins, and so on. An ordinary magician has power over the elementals. These elementals can be communicated with, through colour and sound. It should be possible for anyone who might stumble upon the secret of communicating with them to command and use these elementals, as can be seen in the story of Aladdin and his magic lamp. An Adept is the true magician who has complete control over the elementals as well as knowledge of the occult laws, which govern certain occult processes in nature.

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Are birds modern-day Dinosaurs? There are 247 families and 10,731 species of birds, which is more than any vertebrate group, except fish.

“There is no doubt that birds are dinosaurs,” says Luis Chiappe, director of Dinosaur Institute at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, adding that the evidence is overwhelming. Paleontologists believe that the dinosaurs have ruled our planet for nearly 135 million years. They claim that during Cretaceous period, some 66 million years ago, an asteroid, the size of a mountain slammed into what is now Yucatan coast, gouging the earth and setting off a series of catastrophic events. It is believed that the impact and its aftermath ended the reign of the dinosaurs, but some dinosaurs survived the mass extinction. “That is because today’s birds are the last remaining twigs on an otherwise demolished dinosaur family tree, grown from fierce predators and sculpted by evolution into an array of flapping feathery fowl,” writes Victoria Jaggard, a senior science editor with *National Geographic*.

The raven-size, 150-million-year-old animal, *Archaeopteryx*, with mix of attributes, is the oldest known root on the bird family tree. While today’s birds are toothless, *Archaeopteryx* had jaws with sharp teeth, claws on its front limbs and a long, bony tail. All these features show its close ties to reptiles. But the fossils of *Archaeopteryx* show prominent wings covered in aerodynamic feathers, and a wishbone, which are characteristics of modern birds. “Not long after its discovery in the 1860s, the species was hailed as a clear transitional step between dinosaurs and birds,” but after that for decades very few new fossils were discovered to fill in the evolutionary gaps, with no clue to its ancestors and descendants. But that situation changed finally when in 1996, scientists unveiled the first known fossil of a feathered dinosaur unrelated to birds, and dating back nearly 130 million years, known as, *Sinosauropteryx prima*, which was among the dozens of other species that were mined from early Cretaceous rock formations in China. Many of these animals appeared to be a mix between our notion of a modern bird and predatory dinosaurs.

“The latest genetic clues and fossil finds suggest that at least three lineages of modern birds arose during the Cretaceous period and survived a mass extinction 66 million years ago. In the wake of that disaster the survivors saw a boom in diversity with the family tree

branching rapidly. These discoveries are helping us better understand how birds evolved and how they are related to each other, from the tiny humming bird to the towering ostrich,” writes Victoria Jaggard.

Evolutionary biologist Gavin Thomas and his team have studied 3-D scans of thousands of beaks, and have added to the evidence that birds seem to have diversified rapidly after the rest of the dinosaurs died. “Evolution took tens of millions of years to produce a small dinosaur with wings that could fly by flapping its arms. And then that body plan proved really successful when asteroid hit,” says Brusatte, a paleontologist at the University of Edinburgh. “Solving the mystery, as to why some birds made it through and survived, will almost certainly require exhaustive hunts for animals that lived even closer in time to the impact,” writes, Victoria Jaggard. (*National Geographic*, May 2018)

H.P.B. explains that the Secondary age—which comprises Triassic, Jurassic and Chalk or Cretaceous periods—“is the age of Reptiles, of the gigantic Megalosauri, Ichthyosauri, Plesiosauri, etc., etc.” (*S.D.*, II, 713). H.P.B. observes that the stories of various Rishis like Pulatsya, Kasyapa, etc. are not fairy-tales. For instance, the fable of Kasyapa with his twelve wives, giving birth to numerous and diversified progeny of *nagas* (serpents), reptiles, birds and all kinds of living things, is a veiled record of the order of evolution in *this* round. Thus:

He [Kasyapa] was...also the father of *Garuda*, the bird, the “King of the feathered tribe,” who descends *from*, and is of one stock *with the reptiles*, the *nagas*; and who becomes their mortal enemy *subsequently*—as *he is also a cycle, a period of time, when in the course of evolution the birds which developed from reptiles in their “struggle for life,”—“survival of the fittest,” etc., etc., turned in preference on those they issued from, to devour them*—perhaps prompted by natural law, in order to make room for other and more perfect species. (*S.D.*, II, 253-54)

Birds developed from reptiles, as is further corroborated by one of the Stanzas of Dzyan, explaining the evolution of animals: “Animals

with bones, Dragons of the deep and flying saraps (serpents) were added to the creeping things. They that creep on the ground got wings.” H.P.B. explains:

This is a point on which the [Theosophical] teachings and modern biological speculation are in perfect accord. The missing links representing this transition process between reptile and bird are apparent to the veriest bigot, especially in the *ornithoscelidæ*, *hesperornis*, and the archæopteryx of Vogt. (*S.D.*, II, 183)

Constraints of the environmental conditions is only one of the factors on which the existence—or disappearance—of species depends. There is more to it than mere physical causes. Theosophically speaking, one could say that the same law of Evolution that brings species into existence also causes their extinction.

It is unpardonable to be a mute spectator in a crisis. Often, the attitude of indifference and unwillingness to help at a crucial moment is responsible for a tragedy. We cannot afford the cruelty of being undecided, and must counter such thought pollution by the magnanimity of a “thought revolution.” Thought revolution demands courage to face every emergency in life. For instance, if a friend, who is depressed and has threatened suicide, needs urgent help before the worst happens, then we must act without delay. But in non-emergency situation, self-reliance is the essence of thought revolution. “No attempt should be made to exploit another or take the easy way out. External help will run out of fuel without your unstinted assistance. It may answer an emergency in full measure. But beyond that, you have to be present in your own life to have the dignity to self-support....At the heart of thought revolution is a commitment to self-help.” We should be ready to fall back on our own inner resources and be ready to face challenges of life. We should not shirk our responsibilities so as to burden another, or blame others for our own misfortunes. When we start taking advantage of another’s largess, time and again, sooner or later we elicit disgust,

and help from generous sources will dry up. “When each one shows his true mettle in the face of adversity, one witnesses a triumph of thought revolution,” writes Sriram Sharma Acharya. (*The Speaking Tree, Sunday Times of India*, June 24, 2018)

“Inaction in a deed of mercy becomes an action in a deadly sin,” says *The Voice of the Silence*. We seem to go through life wearing blinkers, oblivious of the sufferings of people around us. At the base of all help and service lie the principles of brotherhood and interdependence. However, the art of service is most difficult. Not only is it important to understand *why* we should help others, but also *how* we should help. In our civilisation, wrong forms of charity and service retard and even injure the soul-growth of many people. By misplaced charity and help we stifle in others the spirit of self-reliance. On the one hand, Mr. Judge advises to extend help without delay, saying, “If you feel as if something urged you to visit some sick or afflicted neighbour or friend, obey the suggestion without delay. If some pathetic story of suffering has moved you, act on the emotion while your cheeks are still wet with tears.” Such actions take us a step closer to the divine. But on the other hand, H.P.B. writes, “It takes a very wise man to do good works without danger of doing incalculable harm.” It takes wisdom and insight to help another in the right manner, at the right time and in the right degree. “Kindness and gentle treatment sometimes bring out the worst qualities of a man or a woman,” says H.P.B. At times, our help makes the other person dependent on us, killing self-reliance. A Chinese proverb says, “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.”

It is also the duty of the one who receives help to be awake and discriminating, learning to bear one’s own cross, and to turn within for finding answers, courage, solace, guidance and help. “At the very base of your nature you will find faith, hope and love,” says *Light on the Path*.”