

सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ।

“There is no Religion higher than Truth”

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ON SELF-EXAMINATION

IF WE wish to be better human beings then we must introduce into our lives the exercise of self-examination. We all desire happiness and aspire to do the right but we do not examine ourselves, our ideas, thoughts, motives and habits. We never face ourselves squarely, but rely mostly on the evaluation and opinion of others around us, and feel that we are rather nice people. But as Professor Lewis puts it, from being “nice” people, we have to become “new” human beings. In bringing about this change self-examination is very essential. “Whether vicious or virtuous, those who do not examine themselves, their motives and ideas, their methods and habits, are like animals. They may live like angry tigers or happy sparrows, but they do not grow, they do not progress.” (*The Theosophical Movement*, April 1932)

What is self-examination? It is examination of the lower, personal self by the Higher and Impersonal Self. Nature compels us to examine the whole of our life at the time of death. We then see, in full detail, the pictures of our whole life-process. Likewise, we must undertake self-examination at the end of the day, and review not only the events of every day, but also our thoughts, feelings, words and actions, without trying to explain away our mistakes and blunders. We must note our good points and weak points, and resolve to strengthen the good and eliminate the weaknesses. Some people begin with the first hour in the morning and proceed till they

reach the last hour. Others reverse the process. They begin with the last act and go backwards.

While we do undertake self-examination at the end of the day, we need to practice awareness throughout the day, otherwise, when we sit down for self-examination, we may not remember much. There has to be withdrawal from time to time to reflect on major incidents, and our own reaction, emotion and attitude. At one level, mindfulness enables us to become aware of our mental processes: What makes us angry and why, and how best we can overcome anger by preparing ourselves for a similar situation in the future.

Each one of us passes through many experiences in life. Often we hear people say, "How do I know what I had to learn from this experience?" In order to learn our lessons in life self-introspection or self-examination is very essential. We go through life like we go through books. There are voracious readers who read many books, but superficially, indiscriminately accepting and rejecting the thoughts therein presented. So also, most of us pass through experiences presented by life, without reflecting on them and using them as opportunities to learn the lessons.

However, there might be instances in which we are not quite sure whether we did right or wrong. Or, it may also happen that we might feel very sure that we were right, but later on find that we were wrong. Hence, it is very important that there should be a basis for justifying or criticizing ourselves. Instead of pleading on behalf of our lower self, justifying its every misdeed, we must be our own impartial judges. To be a good judge, who judges impartially and correctly, we must have knowledge.

It is important therefore to study and understand the laws of life, ethics and morals, as also to cultivate discrimination and detachment. We are asked to do self-examination in the light of the *Paramitas* or Transcendental Virtues, and in the light of the Higher Self, as otherwise we would not have any yardstick for judging good and bad. Often there is a terrible sense of guilt for wrong action. In such a case we can take the position of an observer and allow our Higher

Self to be the judge, jury, witness and executioner. We must take Universal Ethics as our basis of judgement and not social morality or what may have worked for a few individuals. For instance, some people will not spoil their relationship with the others on the premise that "you never know when you may need the help of another." Such a basis is limited and selfish, as against maintaining of human relations on the basis of UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD.

As we progress, the evil in us assumes subtle forms, difficult to detect. We may not hate or be obviously envious or jealous. But if we feel irritated because someone speaks in a certain way or dresses or looks the way they do, it indicates hatred at a subtle level. *Light on the Path* points out that the vices of the ordinary man pass through a subtle transformation and reappear with changed aspect in the heart of the disciple. They would go unnoticed, if we are not vigilant. As Gandhiji writes, we may not steal, but if we possess that which we are not in need of, we are like a thief.

Moreover, it is not just our vices that we need to be aware of, but also the genuineness of our virtues and feelings, and our motive behind the actions. One of China's great teachers, Mencius, says:

If a man love others and that love is not returned, let him examine himself as to his love for others. If he rules others, but his government is not successful, let him examine himself as to his wisdom. If he is polite to others but they impolite to him, let him examine himself as to his real respect for them. When by what we do, we do not achieve our aim, we must examine ourselves at every point.

As the exercise of self-examination is continued day after day, it becomes important also to examine if we are making any genuine effort to deal with our weaknesses and faults. As Seneca puts it,

We should every night call ourselves to an account: What infirmity have I mastered today? What passion opposed? What temptation resisted? Our vices will abate of themselves if they be brought every day to the shrift.

It is not easy to accept calmly our many faults and weaknesses.

Unless a certain amount of detachment is cultivated, and the position of *drashta* or witness is assumed, the exercise of self-examination can result in fear and even depression because it brings to our attention bad tendencies and objectionable habits. We need not be depressed, but in fact feel happy that we have now become aware of the kind of individual we are. Also, it is essential to study other human hearts to become aware of the evil and good in a human heart in its wider range, so that we are not thrown off balance or thrown into despair at discovering evil in us. As *Light on the Path* says, “It is something of a staff to lean on to know that others have gone on that road.” Thus, if it becomes obvious during self-examination of many days that we are greedy or that we pretend most of the time, then let us take heart that that weakness or fault is not the whole of me. “I” am greater and more powerful than that fault and can rise above it.

It is always recommended that no self-examination should end with the noting of the foibles and frailties of the lower self. The last step in the ritual of self-introspection should be to remain in the position of the witness, in union with our divine nature, and be gentle to one’s lower nature, like a mother, who after chiding the child who has done wrong, speaks soothing words and encourages him to do better. Our lower mind is the child of the Higher Mind, and is also a pupil and a learner, who *can* learn by discipline to do better.

Persistent self-examination and recognition of our blemishes may give rise to a morbid tendency—rooted in egotism—to fancy that we have more faults than others and that ours are very terrible faults. In the name of humility, we indulge in morbidity. As they say, if we cannot be especially “good” someone, we want to be especially “bad” someone. In *Letters That Have Helped Me*, Mr. Judge speaks of the un-wisdom of “always analysing our faults and failures.” He also gives an important piece of advice that “to regret is a waste of energy.”

Most people dislike being shown or seeing for themselves their own weaknesses, and therefore, the practice of self-examination

takes time, in fact, *a long time*, before one can come face to face with one’s faults and blemishes. Only when real sincerity of heart and honesty of mind are sufficiently developed are we able to evaluate our weaknesses. The first step is to become aware, even before we can start the work of transformation. We must ponder over these words of Robert Crosbie:

No one who sees his mistakes can be a hopeless case. The moment we see that we are deluded, that moment we are no longer deluded, although we may be surrounded by the consequences of delusion and have to work through them. Any trouble and hindrance comes from self-identification with delusion and mistakes; this is the delusion of delusions.

No doubt we can become aware of our defects by comparing ourselves with other co-students. Also, older and more experienced students can point out the blemishes and errors in the younger and less experienced students. But the best way is to become aware of the defects ourselves. Having noticed the defects one has to work steadily without losing time, but also taking care so as not to rush in over-enthusiasm to achieve too much, too soon. Planning out hours of work, sleep, recreation, etc., is the outer requirement while clean motives, right thought-feelings, assiduity in Theosophical application are the inner needs. Unless this dual requirement is fulfilled self-examination has no meaning.

Self-examination is a road to self-knowledge. Every student is in part “Theosophist in name,” who sincerely understands and adheres to eye-doctrine, and is in part “Theosophist by nature,” who not only preaches but practices theosophical doctrines, and who has transmuted himself to become a devotee, a “different” person, who lives but to serve Theosophy and through it, humanity. Self-examination leads us more and more to become “Theosophists by nature.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT “JUNGLE FEVER”

THERE COMES a time in the life of every Disciple—and all students are Disciples once they have recognized within themselves that there is a Higher Life—when a sort of disillusionment pervades the nature. Instead of pressing eagerly on, or waiting with equanimity for the moment to proceed with their journey on the small, old Path, they hesitate and falter. Looking about for the old and familiar landmarks, they discover that these are no longer comfortingly at hand. A species of panic supervenes. They look back down the years of their journey of life—for that is what the Path *is*: the journey of life as the Pilgrim searches out Himself—and see far behind the old, well-loved monuments and milestones, the old lures and attachments and environments—physical and metaphysical—of other days. And they discover that an abyss, deep and impassable, has opened up behind them, so there is no retreat—no going back. It is then that panic comes—a sort of an inward running in circles—as with a man lost in the forest; or with the lost desert traveller who strikes out at his would-be rescuers, mistaking them for foes.

This condition is the common lot. Its manifestations vary with the mental and psychic idiosyncrasies of the Disciple. Those who do not know it by experience have not travelled far on the Path. But there are many students who are presently suffering in this area of disillusionment without being fully aware of it. They are there but do not know it, because they have not worked out their latitude and longitude for themselves—have not rationalized their condition. Once this is done, the Disciple is on his way out and on; and though many a time as he proceeds on his journey he will feel for the moment the old sense of panic—the “lostness” in the jungle of passions, desires, doubts and fears—the assurance born out of the travail which preceded his first self-readjustment and consequent orientation reasserts itself. He cannot un-know what he knows, nor lose the spiritual strength he has gained by his successful wrestling with the

personality. His stamina is such that it will not permit him to remain “off-balance” for long; so he laughs at and with himself, effecting a speedy readjustment—and listens to the song of life. He knows that he will never turn back, whatever wanderings, stumbles and falls may temporarily engage him.

But what of those who are in the “jungle” and unaware of it? The whole of a life’s experience is a series of pictures. Even words, however plain, are but symbols; and the ideas which their groupings are intended to convey are so many allegories. Knowledge does not consist in perceiving them, but in their *understanding*. “Metaphysical writings” are an effort to express inner experience in terms of *form*. It is only because we are all somewhat alike that this can be done at all; and the fact that no two are quite alike accounts for the difficulty we experience in our communications. Is it any wonder that the highest development of knowledge consists of being able to enter into another and see what he sees as he sees it—feel what he feels as he feels it? All this talk of “Discipleship,” the “Path,” “Initiation,” and the like, is obscure, esoteric, provocative, unsatisfactory—how could it be otherwise? Things metaphysical cannot be described in terms of things physical; that is why correspondence and analogy have been prescribed by the Teachers as the sole process by which comprehension may be had.

So to those students now in the “jungle” the usual cryptograms are fairly maddening—often worse than meaningless. Even the exact words, spoken in a significant way, often fail. “Just what do you mean?” they ask in puzzled irritation....

Can the symptoms characteristic of the period of disillusionment be outlined; and would some consideration of their nature tend to awaken some students now wandering in the “jungle” to their condition? Each reader must make his own applications for himself and to himself. The judgment-seat is in each one’s own nature—*is* that imperishable nature in fact. No one is wise enough to judge another; but actions may be examined. Here are some symptoms. All active students have, or will have, some of them.

Characteristics of “jungle fever,” together with some prescriptive suggestions:

Indignant and seemingly sincere repudiation of the suggestion that anything is the matter with him—this is the common and primary symptom. Patient displays unerring precision in pointing out defects in fellow-students, things, institutions, men and methods. *Prescriptive suggestion:* Since everybody has something wrong with him, that must be a common attribute of humanity. Can it be that I have arrived at such an eminence? If so, how does it happen in a lawful universe that I remain in this mundane universe?

Dissatisfaction with environment, physical and metaphysical. Others are so “free” and favoured, have had better early advantages. “If only circumstances were different—.” *Prescriptive suggestion:* Careful examination of the true situations of most of the “others” would disclose inhibiting circumstances as great as those which surround the patient.

“Nobody understands me.” *Prescriptive suggestion:* This is the well-known “superiority complex.” Is it not curious that although the patient can understand everybody else, nobody can understand him? *Intelligent* action can be universally understood. Can it be...?

“I was so happy before I came into Theosophy.” Longing for the old irresponsibility, old pleasures, ...old points-of-view. *Prescriptive suggestion:* Was I happy? If so, why was I searching—and why did I “come in”? Were those old days, when I was living through them, lovely and care-free? A child has to grow up, and who would be a child again? No sorrows and griefs are so poignant, even if evanescent, as those of a child. I can still enjoy pleasures—more intelligent ones. The very essence of progress is *change*.

“Theosophists are so cold and unsocial.” *Prescriptive suggestion:* Outward gush and inner warmth do not manifest similarly. If your lodge atmosphere is cold, the one who feels it is thereby elected to inject a little warmth—it will spread. But the study and application of high philosophy is not conducive to the accentuation of ordinary social amenities—they are purely personal. There is fire in

Theosophy itself.

“I am not getting anywhere; I guess I will drop it.” *Prescriptive suggestion:* Try it!

“My wife (or husband) is so unspiritual; it makes things so difficult for me.” *Prescriptive suggestion:* What *is* spirituality? Try to define it. Are any of us wise enough to judge the spiritual condition of another?

The foregoing represent but a few of the characteristics of “jungle fever.” Their number actually is legion. Into whatever weird maze of thought, will and feeling the personality can twist itself in the battle with the Warrior, there it will enter and abide.

How can one “stand aside in the coming battle,” or while the battle is on? Who is the warrior? The Warrior is the MAN HIMSELF, the higher nature. One stands aside by mentally taking the position of that ONE and from this eminence watching the gyrations of “that thing”—the personality—evaluating them, and then as *Warrior* seizing in his metaphysical grasp the fluctuating and amazingly resourceful personal idea and bringing it into line with things as they are. One Teacher wrote, “It would be a contest of smiles, if we knew our business.” It is easy to see that this must be so, for if there is anything ridiculous and absurd, it is the personal basis. Once we see that, we can well laugh within ourselves at the imp-like mask and its performances. Deliverance from the thralldom of this obsessing “dweller” is well advanced, when we reach that place where we can laugh at it!

Happiness—abiding happiness—follows. We hear the song of life. We know the Path is real, and no metaphorical journey. We know the Teaching is true, and can be learned. We busy ourselves at study and application finding a full, rich, interesting life that fairly dazzles us at times with its possibilities. Our conviction and radiating influence stimulates others to persist on their journey. We have become constructive forces in Nature.

[Abridged and taken from *Theosophy*, Vol. XII, October 1924.]

STUDIES IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

SONG OF LIFE—I

[Adapted from the Lectures on the *Bhagavad-Gita*, delivered at One West Sixty Seventh Street, New York City, 1927-28.]

IN THIS last discourse of the *Gita*, we find the very essence of the whole philosophy expounded by Krishna throughout the whole poem. It gives, as it were the main idea, the central current of all the previous discourses, for in it the teacher, Krishna, reiterates once more, explaining and expounding all the various propositions that He has already represented to Arjuna. However, he also gives additional advice, he clears for us by final words, the problem of action and inaction, and how to renounce action. The very dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna arises out of the problem of action. When Arjuna found himself on the battlefield and saw that the fight, the struggle, was beginning, he refused to stand up and fight. Throughout the *Gita*, Krishna has endeavoured, step by step, to show Arjuna how all spiritual, philosophical teachings, all sound ethics, as well as the very principles of Arjuna's own constitution, demand that he should cut aside all doubts and overcome fear and sorrow, and begin to take an active part in the fight which was going on already, and has gone on through the whole book between the two camps. Without an understanding of the problem of action, we cannot attempt to practise spiritual philosophy or to apply any true and sound ethics.

The Eighteenth discourse corresponds to the Twelfth discourse, reiterating the teachings of the Twelfth discourse on a higher spiral. In the Twelfth discourse Krishna tried to show what the highest path was for man. He told us of certain ways and means, whereby we could unite ourselves with our own higher and divine Self, thereby becoming a part and parcel of the Living Teachers, who embody all Wisdom and Compassion. He showed that exclusive devotion to the ideal of Krishna as the representative of all Living Teachers would enable us to attain the highest path, and the highest

of all aims, union with the Teachers. But he said that if you cannot all at once apply yourselves to that particular devotion, then there is another way, whereby you can prepare yourselves for that devotion, and that is the performance of certain specific works, which he called "My works," and as already seen, these specific actions advocated by Krishna were of three kinds, namely, *Dana* or charity, *Tapas* or mortification and *Yajna* or sacrifice.

One thing then is positive and very definite, that Krishna does advocate initiating of certain specific actions, but at the same time it has also been made very clear that there are certain kinds of actions that Krishna condemns. All actions rooted in the energies arising from the senses and from the lower desires, as well as all actions pertaining to two stages of *tamas* and *rajas*, must be abandoned. Furthermore, Krishna has explained that if there are actions to be initiated and actions to be abandoned, there are also actions that we must continue to perform, and those, he has called necessary and obligatory actions—our own duties, the duties with which we were born and which we can, therefore, call our own congenital obligations. Three propositions in connection with action have been laid down. Still Arjuna finds himself confused, so in the opening question of this discourse, he asks, what is really the last word on this necessary problem?

Arjuna says to Krishna that he has explained that there are two systems of philosophy, one advocating renunciation of all actions, and the other one advocating the renunciation of the fruits or the results that accrue from the performance of deeds. Which of the two is better, and which of the two would Krishna recommend? In the answer given by Krishna we get the key to the whole problem. In that answer, Krishna explains that neither of the two systems is all correct or all wrong, both are partly right and partly wrong. Krishna says that if we consider the first system of philosophy, that of renunciation of all actions, we can see that it is an absurd and illogical proposition, for there are works which must be performed for His sake; deeds of mortification, of charity and of sacrifice are

not to be abandoned for they are the purifiers of the wise. No doubt, there is some basic idea in that philosophy which is correct, for there are those actions, evil and unnecessary actions, which must be entirely abandoned. On the other hand, the other school says that we must renounce the fruits of all actions, which also is unsatisfactory, for it does not give a complete philosophy of action, because under that idea people might be led to believe that it is possible for them to continue the performance of evil type of actions, and justify themselves and their evil doings with the idea that as long as they have renounced the fruits and results of those actions, everything is all right, but that is an abomination from the spiritual point of view.

Then there is another proposition. A person may conscientiously and sincerely renounce the fruits of his own actions and still be attached to the very performance of those actions. In the understanding of the idea that we must not only give up the fruits of all our actions, but also detach ourselves while performing the actions, lies the real understanding of the inner, mental and spiritual attitude which becomes necessary in the life of discipleship. It is necessary to understand this point clearly. We may consider, for instance, a businessman who is not attached to the fruits of his own business activities, *i.e.*, he really does not care as to how much money he is going to make or what he will do with the money or even what is going to happen to the money that is being gained. He is then disinterested in the results of his business, but his own business capacity, his own faculties for his business and the business life might be such that he may be still attached in the very carrying out of his particular business. That man is not a true renouncer. He is absolutely bound down by the very faculties and energies of his own stage in life as a businessman. He needs to go one step further. He needs, though he continues to fulfil his obligations in the business world, not to identify himself with this particular duty, but to detach himself from the very actions that he has to encounter and perform.

We might also think in our theosophical life, of a student, for

example, who would have a particular work to perform. Let us say, he has to deliver a series of lectures on any specific topic. He may, honestly, not be thinking about the results of his own work. He may have forgotten himself and thereby there is no idea in his own mind as to his own glorification or growth. Thus, he has renounced the fruits of his action, yet we may imagine that he has such vital interest in the subject that he is discussing that he takes joy in the study and preparation necessary to fulfil his obligation, so that he will be bound down to his own piece of work through that very quality of *sattva*. Then again, we may think of a student and worker who has built up a strong theosophical centre of activities. The time may come for that worker to leave that very place and start a new centre. That worker may have been truly disinterested in his work, *i.e.*, he is not thinking of reward or of results, but he may be attached to his own activities, to his own work, through his vital interest, and through his very purity of motive, and thereby when the time comes for such a worker to leave his work, he may feel disappointed or sorrowful at the idea. It is because he has not attained true and complete renunciation.

The true renunciator would be able to leave his work at a moment's notice, and never feel any regret or pain, and what is still more important, once he has left his present work, he would be able to entirely detach himself from it both in thought and in feeling. That, then is the renunciation necessary in the life of discipleship or chelaship, necessary to be acquired by all students who are aspiring to tread the spiritual path, or the path of the Masters, and their complete philosophy. And that is expounded by Krishna in this discourse. He takes it up very carefully and defines true renunciation by study of the three types of renunciation in connection with the three qualities.

(To be continued)

THE MYSTIC POLES

EVERY PLANET has geographical poles. If, like the earth, a body generates a magnetic field, it will also possess magnetic poles. The two geographical poles of our earth are the North Pole and South Pole. The North Pole, also known as *Geographical* or *Terrestrial* North Pole, is defined as the point in the Northern Hemisphere of the earth, where the earth's axis of rotation meets its surface. It is lying diametrically opposite to the South Pole. It lies 90 degrees north from the earth's equator. The geographical north pole is also known as the "true north." This is a spot in the Arctic Ocean where all lines of longitude converge.

Likewise, the Geographical South Pole of our earth is the southernmost point where the earth's axis of rotation meets its surface, being 90 degrees south from the earth's equator. The North Pole is located in the middle of the Arctic Ocean, amid waters that are almost permanently covered with constantly shifting sea ice. The South Pole lies on a continental land mass. Thus, the Geographical North and South poles are places on the earth's surface through which the earth's imaginary spin axis passes.

Sunrise at the North Pole is just before the March 21st or the time of Vernal Equinox, after which the sun takes three months to reach its highest point of elevation at the summer solstice or on June 21st. After that the sun begins to sink, so that there is sunset, when the sun sinks below the horizon after the autumnal equinox or on September 23rd. Thus, at the North Pole the sun is continuously above the horizon during the summer, and continuously below the horizon during the winter. Likewise, during the period, March to September, the South Pole receives no sunlight. Although between September to March the sun is continuously above the horizon, much of the sunlight that reaches its surface is reflected by the white snow. This lack of warmth from the sun, combined with high altitude means that the South Pole has one of the coldest climates on earth. Thus, the region of the South Pole has been described as being cold

and dark. It has six months of complete daylight and six months of total darkness each year.

According to the Hindu tradition, Meru, the sacred mountain is placed in the centre of *seven* continents. *The Theosophical Glossary* says that Meru is the name of the mountain that is supposed to be in the centre of the earth, which is the abode of the gods, *swarga* or heaven. The occult teachings place it in the very centre of the North Pole. The nether region or *Patala* was supposed to lie in the South. Thus, the North and the South Pole were regarded as "Mountain" and "Pit" or Heaven and Hell respectively. The Polar Regions surrounding the North and South Poles are respectively, the Arctic and the Antarctic regions. H.P.B. explains that since the ancients knew too well the topography and geography of these two regions, they named one of the poles as "*Mountain*" and the other as "*Pit*." One of the reasons why the North Pole is called the abode of the gods is that it was the site of the first continent on our earth, after the solidification of the globe.

The first continent on our earth is called the "Imperishable Sacred Land." As the name suggests the first continent or island, which is "the cap of the North Pole," has never perished; nor will it perish to the end of the Seven Races (*S.D.*, II, 372). It is stated that "it is the only one whose destiny it is to last from the beginning to the end of the *Manvantara* throughout each Round. It is the cradle of the first man and the dwelling of the last *divine mortal*, chosen as *Sishta* for the future seed of humanity." Of this mysterious and sacred land very little can be said, except that the "pole-star has its watchful eye upon it, from the dawn to the close of the twilight of 'a day' of the GREAT BREATH" (*S.D.*, II, 6). The "Day" refers to the *Day of Brahma*, which equals fourteen *manvantaras*. Thus, it appears that this continent, which is at the North Pole, will last till the evolution on the earth chain of globes is completed, and will be the dwelling of the *divine mortals*, the Buddhas and Christs, of the seventh Round and the Seventh Race.

In the article, "Where is the North Pole?" that appeared in

Theosophy magazine (April 1926), we read that H. P. Blavatsky meant something else by the “North Pole” than the present geographic pole. It is indicated that the unknown land was the polar continent at the time of the *first* race humanity of the *Fourth* Round. However, as per the Theosophical doctrines, since the poles of the earth are continually perambulating it is not possible that the polar land of that day should be at the *present* pole.

On page 400 (*S.D.*, II) we read that in the first beginnings of human life, the only dry land was on the Right end of the sphere. The footnote explains that the two poles are called the right and left ends of our earth—the right being the North Pole or the head, and the left being the South Pole or the feet of the earth. “Every beneficent (astral and cosmic) action comes from the North; every lethal influence from the South Pole. They are much connected with and influence ‘right’ and ‘left’ hand magic.” Further, Occultism teaches that the land or island which crowns the North Pole like a skull-cap, is the only one which prevails during the *Manavantara* of our “Round.” Other continents and lands will emerge from the sea bottom many times, but this land will never change. Thus, “this first continent which came into existence capped over the whole of North Pole like one unbroken crust, and remains so to this day, beyond that inland sea which seemed like an unreachable *mirage to the few* arctic travelers who perceived it” (*S.D.*, II, 401). In the *Commentaries* quoted on page 401 there is a hint that with the appearance of the Fourth or Atlantean Race and the Atlantis, “the eternal land was now hid, for the waters became solid (frozen)...”

The *Commentaries* state that “She [earth] broke towards the setting sun from her neck downward (to the south west), into lands and islands, but the eternal land (the cap) broke not asunder.” Here, our earth, or “mother earth” is compared to the body of a woman. We are told that when the Second Race of humanity came into existence, “more land emerged from under the waters as a continuation of the ‘head’ from the neck.” Here, “neck downwards” refers to the south-west, or from inland sea which is now beyond

the impassable barrier of ice.

It seems to refer to the second continent, described as the Hyperborean Continent, the site of the Second Race of humanity. On page 7 (*S.D.*, II) it is described as the land which stretched out its promontories southward and westward from the North Pole to receive the Second Race, and comprised the whole of what is now known as Northern Asia. H.P.B. points out that this shows that Northern Asia is as old as the Second Race. (*S.D.*, II, 401)

Besides geographical poles our earth has magnetic poles because according to science, our earth has a magnetic field produced by the swirling motion of molten metal in the earth’s outer core. It is also due to electric currents flowing in the earth’s crust and atmosphere. Since these motions are changing all the time, the magnetic field is also changing, causing the movement of the magnetic poles. The movement is also ascribed to electric currents flowing in the ionosphere, and the earth’s magnetosphere.

The movement of geographical north and south poles is ascribed to changes in the inclination of the axis of the earth. We have several statements in the *Secret Doctrine* indicating the shifting of the poles. Thus: “The Egyptian priests assured Herodotus that the Pole of the Earth and the Pole of the Ecliptic had formerly coincided” (*S.D.*, II, 332). “That even since their first Zodiacal records were commenced, the Poles have been three times within the plane of the Ecliptic, as the Initiates taught” (*S.D.*, II, 368). “Occult data show that even since the time of the regular establishment of the Zodiacal calculations in Egypt, *the poles have been thrice inverted*” (*S.D.*, II, 353). Further, due to axial inversion and the shifting of the poles, at certain periods of time the tropical climate and vegetation was found at the poles.

In *Isis Unveiled* (I, 30-31), we are told that at the close of each “great year” which consists of six *sars* or *saros*, our planet is subjected to a thorough physical revolution. In the article, “Ancient Doctrines Vindicated by Modern Prophecy” (*H.P.B. Series No. 1*, p. 46) we read that the “great year” consists of 21,000 odd years

(the latter varying) or six Chaldean *saros* consisting of 3,500 years each. During these 21,000 years, the polar and equatorial climates gradually exchange places, with polar region moving slowly toward the equatorial line with exuberant vegetation and animal life replacing the icy poles. This change of climate is necessarily attended by cataclysms and earthquakes. This year was called the *Heliacal* by the Greeks. Regarding complete change of climates at the tropics and poles H.P.B. points out that during the Miocene Age, Greenland and even Spitzbergen, the remnants of the Second or Hyperborean Continent had *almost a tropical climate*, with abundance of trees such as the Redwood, the Sequoia, Oaks, Poplars, Walnuts etc.; the Southern plants unknown to Northern regions. (*S.D.*, II, p. 11)

H.P.B. writes that the old Hindus divided the face of the globe geographically into seven zones, *dwipas*, and into seven hells and seven heavens, allegorically. The North Pole, or country of “Meru” is the seventh division and represents the region of *Atma*, of pure soul and Spirituality (*S.D.*, II, 403). There is a statement in the *Secret Doctrine* which seems to refer to the magnetic North and South Poles. Thus: “The abodes of Fohat are many....He places his four fiery (electro-positive) Sons in the ‘Four circles’; these Circles are the Equator, the Ecliptic, and the two parallels of declination, or the tropics....” Then again, “Other seven (sons) are commissioned to preside over the seven hot, and seven cold *lokas* (the hells of the orthodox Brahmins) at the two ends of the Egg of Matter (our Earth and its poles). The seven *lokas* are also called the ‘Rings,’ elsewhere, and the ‘Circles.’ The ancients made the polar circles *seven* instead of two...for Mount Meru, which is the North Pole, is said to have seven gold and seven silver steps leading to it.” (*S.D.*, I, 204)

On page 145 (*S.D.*, I) we are told that the seven Sons of Fohat are also his brothers, and that these seven “Sons-brothers” are seven forms of Cosmic magnetism, and they are called “Seven Radicals” in *practical Occultism*. It is these seven radicals which produce seven energies, namely, Electricity, Magnetism, Sound, Heat, Light, Cohesion, etc. and they are called progeny of the Sons of Fohat.

H.P.B. explains that Fohat is the symbol of universal, unpolarized electricity, whereas his sons are 7 radicals of electro-magnetism, which are polarized forces.

There are five major circles of latitude. The Equator; then in the northern hemisphere at 23 ½ degree latitude is the tropic of Capricorn; then at 66 ½ degree latitude is the polar circle of Arctic. Likewise, in the southern hemisphere, at 23 ½ degree latitude from the equator, there is the tropic of Cancer, and at 66 ½ degree latitude is the polar circle of Antarctic. H.P.B. refers to four circles: the Equator, which is a circle passing through the middle of the earth, and divides the earth into northern and southern hemispheres. The second circle is the ecliptic. The last two circles are the tropics of Capricorn and Cancer. Ecliptic is the imaginary line which marks the path of the sun, and along which lie 27 constellations divided into 12 zodiac signs. The four Sons of Fohat are placed in these four circles. They are being described as electro-positive. These four circles must be covering regions with strong electro-magnetic currents and therefore they are presided over by Sons of Fohat which represent cosmic magnetism. Magnetism being a force with polarity, we are told about electro-positive sons presiding over these regions. These are intelligent forces and therefore, probably, represented as mystical entities, and are shown to regulate and preside over the climates.

What are the seven hot and seven cold *lokas*? We are told that the other seven Sons of Fohat preside over seven hot and seven cold *lokas* and these are seven heavens and hells of the Hindus, and they are taken to be situated at the two ends of the Egg of Matter, *i.e.*, at the two poles of the earth. These refer to polar circles referred to above. While the westerners speak of only two polar circles, namely, Arctic and Antarctic; the Hindus speak of seven circles at each pole, being referred to as seven hot and seven cold *lokas*. These are also referred to as seven silver and seven golden steps leading to Mount Meru which is the North Pole. In the *Secret Doctrine Commentaries* we read that the region between the Arctic Circle

and the North Pole consists of 28 degrees which they divided into seven circles that are four degrees apart from each other. These are seven hot *lokas* or golden steps to Meru. Likewise, the region between the Antarctic Circle and the South Pole consists of 28 degrees and is divided into seven circles that are four degrees apart from each other. These are seven cold *lokas* and seven silver steps.

The North and South magnetic poles are said to be the storehouses, receptacles and liberators at the same time, of Cosmic and terrestrial electricity. The Northern and Southern lights *Aurora Borealis* and *Australis* are owing to these magnetic and electric forces. The two poles are called storehouses and also natural “safety valves.” In the *Secret Doctrine* (II, 400-404), we are told that mount Meru is not “the fabulous mountain in the navel or centre of the earth,” but its roots and foundations are in that navel, though it is in the far north itself. The North Pole is called the country of “Meru.” “Occult teaching corroborates the popular tradition which asserts the existence of a fountain of life in the bowels of the earth and in the North Pole. It is the blood of the earth, the electro-magnetic current, which circulates through all the arteries; and which is said to be found stored in the ‘navel’ of the earth.” Thus, it appears that the centre of the earth and the North Pole are both regarded as the fountains of electrical and magnetic currents.

Particles discharged from the sun travel towards the earth and are drawn irresistibly towards the magnetic North and South Poles. As these particles pass through the Earth’s magnetic field they mingle with atoms and molecules of oxygen, nitrogen and other elements and that results in the display of lights of various colours in the sky. The lights at the North Pole are called *Aurora Borealis* and at the South Pole are called *Aurora Australis*. The two poles may be said to receive and store the cosmic and terrestrial Vitality both from the centre of the earth as also from the Sun. When there is surplus of vitality, it remains stored in these poles and if these were not there our earth would be destroyed, and hence they are called *safety valves*.

INDIVIDUAL HAPPINESS AND SOCIAL HARMONY

IT IS natural for human beings to seek their own individual happiness. Who does not cherish for oneself fortune, pleasure, contentment, joy, satisfaction? Popular perception is that happiness results from possession or attainment of what one considers good. We greet our friends and loved ones on special occasions and wish them happiness and prosperity, and wish a young married couple felicity. It is after all an eminently human quality to wish, and to even facilitate in whatever manner, happiness of others. Generally, the happiness and well-being that people seek is individual and personal, which extends also, generally, to one’s immediate family.

To the eye of the keen observer of life, however, it is evident that the happiness we seek in our lives is not unmixed; that close on the heels of our pursuit of individual happiness follow unbidden despair, disappointment, anxiety and fear, in one form or another, of more or less intensity and duration, preventing us from securing for ourselves uninterrupted lasting possession of the object of our happiness. That permanent satisfaction ever eludes man in life is an undeniable universal experience of mankind. Yet, relatively few among the masses give a serious thought to this profound fact of human experience, and still fewer embark on a search for the spiritual and moral cause of human suffering, and seek the source of true human happiness.

The real reason why we fail to secure lasting happiness in life is because, like the proverbial prodigal son, we have estranged ourselves from our true Self whose essential nature is absolute bliss, and are seeking what we have lost sight of in things external which are subject to time and change. How can permanent satisfaction be secured in things impermanent? Permanent satisfaction can only be obtained in that which is eternal, beyond the ever fluctuating duality of nature in time and space. So long as we remain identified with the terrestrial self, so long do we have to wander in the desert of life through interminable cycles of rebirths. We must look within and

seek higher immortal Self, “The spirit in the body.”

“The spirit in the body is called *Maheswara*, the Great Lord, the spectator, the admonisher, the sustainer, the enjoyer, and also the *Paramatma*, the highest soul.” (*Gita*, XIII)

“That Thou Art” is the constant recurrent theme of the Upanishads. The self is both Individual and universal, the Real Man; and, as such, has gathered the fruitage of varied experiences, knowledge and powers from an immense past, and is destined, through assimilation of quintessential experiences from many births into Supreme Self, to merge at last into it and become it—the true Self, the Self of All Beings. The truth is, “we” have been, are, and ever will be that Supreme Spirit itself, but that awareness of it is obscured in the lower self in which the sense of separateness reigns, thus deluding the Ego in the body. As *Light on the Path* teaches, that Individuality, immortal thread of unbroken self-consciousness that runs unchanged through many of the earthly personalities, is not the true Self either, “but that thing which he has with pain created for his own use, and by means of which he purposes, as his growth slowly develops his intelligence, to reach to *the life beyond individuality*” (p. 6, *italics ours*). That is the purpose of individualization of Cosmic Consciousness following the law of Cosmic Evolution. It is of great importance that we must acquire a clear knowledge of the truth of the Supreme Self, which is Absolute Consciousness, reflecting itself in its own manifesting differentiated substance as countless Individualities, like the innumerable rays emanating from a single Sun, or innumerable drops of water arising in the waters of a lake. We must also acquire knowledge of this Ego in man—the Eternal Pilgrim—gathering to itself innumerable experiences through countless reincarnations upon earth over aeons upon aeons of time, checked and led on by the Law of its own Being, Karma, thus gradually unfolding its latent potencies through plane after plane of matter.

So strong is the feeling of separateness which arises to the

perception of the embodied Ego, man on earth, thinking himself separate from others, and his tendency to look outward, seeking satisfaction in objects of the senses, that he thinks and acts selfishly, and thus becomes bound, and suffers from retributive Karma which follows through ceaseless cycles of rebirths on earth. He thus creates for himself the “world of illusion,” or *Maya*, which proceeds from his own limited earthly faculties of mind and desire, and delusion caused by the great duality of nature, as pleasure and pain, light and darkness, good and evil, etc. The sooner he shrugs off the illusion of separate self—“that pregnant cause of anguish and illimitable pain”—by means of acquisition of the knowledge of the great Science of Self (*Atma Vidya*), the happier will be his life here and hereafter, and nobler will grow the world by his example and sacrifice. Hence Mr. Judge teaches, “The ‘eternal pilgrim’ must therefore mount higher, and flee from the plane of self-consciousness it has struggled so hard to reach.” (*U.L.T. Pamphlet No. 3*, p. 15)

“Miserable and unhappy are those whose impulse to action is found in its reward” (*Gita*, II). He who works for himself, unmindful of the interests and needs of others, works for disappointment. Life’s experiences, bulk of which consists in pain and suffering, are constantly teaching us this lesson.

It is not an uncommon sight that many a large-hearted man and woman, who intuitively perceive this truth, feel a sense of obligation and duty to give back to society, through sacrifice of their personal time, money and labour, at least a part of what they have taken from it. Such altruistic impulse in people—though they may not have studied Esoteric Philosophy—comes from the perception that individual happiness is bound up with over-all social good. Though the business world moves by the motive of profit-making, examples of philanthropic industrialists spending their fortune for social welfare, and for education, especially, are not wanting. Milton Friedman, an American economist, argues that though altruistic “Corporate Social Responsibility” is not the legitimate role of business, ethical CSR, grounded in the concept of ethical duties

and responsibilities is mandatory, and that it is good for business and society.

It is through spread of the Theosophical education that the natural philanthropic impulse in the human heart is enlightened, energized and made to spontaneously grow to embrace the whole of humanity. Realization of the true nature of Self and growing conviction of the Universal Brotherhood loosens the hold of the personal-self idea, and strengthens and energizes the altruistic motive to labour for collective progress of humanity as a whole. It leads to the recognition by individuals of their deep obligation and duty to their fellowmen and fellow creatures, and impels them from within to perform them without personal interest, and as a sacrifice to the highest good of Humanity, which is the Supreme Soul itself. Thus:

It follows, therefore, that no spiritual progress at all is possible except by and through the bulk of Humanity. It is only when the whole of Humanity has attained happiness that the individual can hope to become permanently happy—for the individual is an inseparable part of the whole.

IF AN ARAB in the desert were suddenly to discover a spring in his tent, and so would always be able to have water in abundance, how fortunate he would consider himself; so too, when a man who...is always turned toward the outside, thinking that his happiness lies outside him, finally turns inward and discovers that the source is within him.

—SOREN KIERKEGAARD

MOST true happiness comes from one's inner life, from the disposition of the mind and soul. Admittedly, a good inner life is difficult to achieve, especially in these trying times. It takes reflection and contemplation and self-discipline.

—W. L. SHIRER

SAINT KABIR—LIFE AND TEACHINGS

I

KABIR WAS a fifteenth century Indian mystical saint-poet, whose writings influenced Hinduism's *Bhakti* (devotional) movement and his verses are found in Sikhism's scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib*. He is considered to have been born on a full moon day, in the lunar month of *Jyestha* (May or June), in the year 1440. The birth of Kabir remains shrouded in mystery and legend. Many legends exist about his birth and early life that emanate from both Hindu and Islamic sources, claiming him by turns as a Sufi and a Hindu saint. Some believe him to be the actual or adopted child of a Muslim weaver of Varanasi. According to one version, Kabir was born to a Brahmin unwed mother in Varanasi, by a seedless conception and delivered through the palm of her hand, who then abandoned him in a basket floating in a pond, and baby Kabir was picked up and then raised by a Muslim family.

According to another version, Kabir is an *avatar* of Shuka deva. It seems Uddhava and Shuka were asked by Narayana (Vishnu) to go to the world of mortals as *avatars*. They wished not to be born in a natural way. So it is said that Narayana turned them into infants and put them in shells, and dropped them down from raining clouds. One fell in Bhagirathi river and the other fell in Bhimarathi river. As they flowed along with the stream they repeated the names of God. The one in the shell that fell in the Bhagirathi River repeated the name "Ram, Ram." This shell, floating down the river Ganges landed at the Manikarnika *ghat* at Benaras (Varanasi). As the shell floated down the river, continually the sound of "Ram, Ram," emanated. Just then Kamal, Mohammedan weaver, came down to wash his thread. He heard the sound, spotted the shell and waded in the water. When he opened the shell, he found a baby inside. His heart was full of joy. It was as if a man without making any efforts finds a hidden store of wealth, or as when picking up shells, one should find there a jewel. So, while merely carrying on his daily

business, Kamal found this baby, which was the *avatar* of Shri Shuka. He wrapped the baby up in his garment, and hastened home and handed over this baby of perfect beauty, with thirty two qualities, to his wife. Thus, a great *Vaishnava* was born in to a Mohammedan family, and he was given the name Kabir. (*Stories of India Saints*, Translation of Mahipati's Marathi *Bhaktivijay*, pp. 58 and 78-79)

The name Kabir, in Arabic, means “magnificent,” or “Great.” Kabir, thus, was like a rare pearl found inside a shell. Saint Kabir is said to be an *avatar* of Shuka deva, which can be understood in two ways. Shuka deva was the son of sage Vyasa, who is credited to be the organizer of the Vedas and *Puranas*. Shuka deva is said to have been born with ascetic powers and the knowledge of the Vedas. He is depicted as *Sannyasin*, who renounced the world and succeeded in achieving *moksha* or liberation. An *Avatar* is Divine Incarnation, the descent of a god or some exalted Being, who has progressed beyond the necessity of rebirths, into the body of a simple mortal. However, *Avatar purushas* may choose to take birth, several times, according to the requirements of cyclic laws and for the welfare of humanity, but they are not born of flesh, *i.e.*, of a mother's womb, and that might explain the “unnatural” birth of beings like Kabir. At times, however, human nature being conscious of its weakness and imperfection is prone to deify the person who exemplifies its higher aspirations, and that is how a personage is considered to be an *avatar* or an incarnation of a deity. There are those who believe that such accounts of Kabir's birth were purported to hide the ignominy of his low birth in a Muslim weaver family.

The book, *Stories of India Saints*, mentions an incident in the life of Kabir, which shows his natural indifference to the worldly riches and worldly affairs. He was more interested in contemplating on Rama than weaving a cloth that his mother had asked him to weave. Every now and then he would close both his eyes, bringing the image of Rama to his imagination. When his mother tried to awaken him, being aware that his mother would whip him, he would weave a little. The story goes that Lord Rama, knowing that Kabir

was contemplating him, and that if the work was not done his mother would beat him, he himself sat down to weave a gold scarf. When the scarf was woven, Kabir was asked by his mother to go and sell the same in the market place. But no one could afford to buy it. Kabir did not want to go home and face his mother's wrath. He decided to sit in an empty hut and contemplate. Krishna entered the hut, in the guise of a poor Brahmin and asked him for a piece of cloth as he was feeling cold. Kabir tore the gold scarf and gave half of it to him. Next, Krishna visited him in the guise of a Mohammedan *fakir* and asked him for a piece of cloth. Kabir gave away the remaining half of the gold scarf to him.

Lord Rama visited Kabir's mother, in the guise of a Brahmin, and told her that her son did not sell the scarf but gave away pieces of it to a Brahmin and a *fakir*. She was then taken to the hut where Kabir was sitting. When Kabir's mother demanded that he show her the scarf, he was quiet. Lord Rama, who was standing there in the guise of a Brahmin, produced a cane, gave it to the angry mother, and asked her to punish her son. Growing angry she struck Kabir on his back, but he had no bodily consciousness, being lost in the worship of Rama. Such was his devotion that he was completely identified with the Lord. What followed next was unbelievable. It is said that as the mother continued to strike Kabir on his back, Lord Rama, standing outside in the guise of a Brahmin, trembled with pain—just as when a child is troubled by some bad person, its mother suffers the pain. Lord Rama in disguise said to the mother, “You are beating your child, but the welt appears on my back. Now that beating is quite sufficient.” Obviously, he, the devotee was being tested. It is said that Lord Rama appeared before him and said, “You have stood my test. I shall never forget you, just as a mother never forgets her child.”

Kabir believed that if one does not have a *guru*, he should be called a man without life. Just as it is useless to have domestic life without a wife; or if one should cook a meal without the use of salt, as then that food would be tasteless; or if a tree grows but yields no

fruit, so also, it is useless for a human being to be born again and again, if he had not had a good *guru*. So Kabir decided to become a disciple of a Hindu saint, Swami Ramananda. It is believed that Swami Ramananda had refused to accept him, a Muslim, as his disciple. Kabir covered himself in a rag, and lied down on the steps that led to the river Ganges, knowing well that Ramananda was bound to go for a holy dip in the river before dawn. As Ramananda was rapidly walking, his foot touched Kabir, and he exclaimed, “Rama, Rama! Whom has my foot touched?” Kabir declared that he had received the *mantra* of initiation from Swami Ramananda’s lips, which admitted him to discipleship. However, some scholars believe that Kabir obtained his knowledge after a considerable search and research at the feet, and in the company of *Bairagis*, *Sufis* and *Yogis*.

Kabir and his followers named his verbally composed poems of wisdom as “*banis*” or utterances. These include songs and couplets, called variously *dohe*, *saloka* or *sloka* and *sakhi* or *sakshi*. The term “*sakshi*” means witness. A witness is one who has seen the truth by his very eyes. These songs and verses are composed in simple Hindi language, because he wanted to reach out to ordinary people. These verses are mainly concerned with devotion, mysticism and discipline. Shri Rabindranath Tagore had translated 100 “Songs of Kabir” into English, but only 18 are considered to be unquestionably Kabir’s. Some of his 4,000 *slokas* were found in the Hindi *Kabir Bijak* and others in Sikhs’ *Adi Granth*.

Kabir’s mystical experience enabled him to recognize the transcendental aspect of God. He had found the middle way between the cold intellectuality of the Impersonal Deity of the Vedantins and the anthropomorphism of the masses. In many of his songs he emphasizes the fact that God does not live at a holy shrine or a temple, but in the heart of every person. Thus:

O Servant, where dost thou seek Me? Lo! I am beside thee, I am neither in the temple nor in the mosque: I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash: Neither am I in rites and

ceremonies, nor in Yoga and renunciation. If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see Me: thou shalt meet Me in a moment of time. Kabir says, “O Sahdu! God is the breath of all breath.”

The God-essence is both within and without, and yet we go searching for Him. We are like the fish in the water. Thus:

I laugh when I hear that the fish in the water is thirsty. You do not see that the Real is in and all around you, and you wander....listlessly, seeking him! Here is the truth! Kabir says if you do not find God within, You will not find him outside either.

We are unable to find God within because we identify ourselves with the ever-changing perishable body, and with its conditions and relations, which are also ever-changing. As Mr. Crosbie points out, through all these conditions and forms, which are changing continually, there is that in us, the “we,” which has remained unchanged. Simultaneously with the purifying of the instruments we need to overcome *self-identifying attachment* with these instruments. *The Voice of the Silence* says, “The Self of Matter and the SELF of Spirit can never meet. One of the twain must disappear; there is no place for both.” Saint Kabir has sung: “*Jab mein tha tab hari nahi, ab hari hai, mein nahi; Sab andhiyara mit gaya, jab Deepak dekhyaa maahi,*” i.e., “When ‘I’ (lower, personal) was, then Hari (God) was not; but now God is, and ‘I’ am not; All darkness (illusions) dissolved, when I saw the light (illumination) within.”

To know It, is to become It. So, Kabir says, “A drop melting into the sea, everyone can see. But the sea absorbed in a drop, a rare one can follow.” *The Voice of the Silence* also asks the disciple to “merge the Ocean in the drop, the drop within the Ocean.” We all understand “a drop merging into the ocean.” Our personalities are often described as drops or waves in the ocean. There is a gradual realization that “I” am not the body, mind, feelings, and much less the possessions. When we are able to transcend the self-identifying

attachment, 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 the *Brahman*,” it is described as *Samadhi* state, in which the ascetic loses consciousness of every individuality, including his own. He becomes—the ALL.

Merging the “Ocean in the drop” is a way of saying that each part of the universe, in some way, reflects the whole. A human being is not merely a drop that merges with the ocean, but a drop that contains the Ocean. Every power, attribute and knowledge which is in the Divinity is present within man, but these are latent. When they are actualized or manifested then we can say that the *Ocean has become the drop*.

To understand the real nature of God, Kabir seems to inculcate a keen sense of enquiry. He seems to tell his followers to examine their beliefs. God is not utterly separated and detached from the world. Rather, He or It has such extraordinary sensitivity as to be aware of every subtle movement. It is an Omniscient and an Omnipresent Deity. He questions both the Hindu and Muslim worshippers, saying:

I wonder who your Lord is! Mullah [Muslim priest] in the mosque calls out so loud. Is your Lord deaf? The Lord hears the tinkling anklets on the feet of an ant. What of wearing tilak, growing matted locks, or telling your beads? You cannot meet Lord till you carry within the dagger of disbelief.

Probably, the “dagger of disbelief” implies honest enquiry, as against blindly following of the teachings or religious practices. As Alfred Tennyson puts it, “There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds.”

(To be concluded)

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

In an essay in *Aeon*, Daniel DeNicola, a professor and chair of philosophy at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania, asks the question: do we have a right to believe in anything? The answer is no. You cannot believe whatever you like, because beliefs shape people’s attitudes and guide their actions. If they are built on a morally repugnant foundation, the consequences can be dangerous. For instance, we have no right to believe that people of a certain colour are not human beings or what Adolf Hitler did was good. What we do have is a right to know, says DeNicola. We have a right to information. But knowing is not the same as believing. Thus, for instance, we all learn at school that our Earth is round and revolves around the Sun. Yet, some people choose not to believe it for religious or other reasons. Unlike facts, which are universal, a belief may be true only for those who believe in it. And yet, there are people who try to superimpose their beliefs on facts, refusing to accept facts. They are like the man who says, “It is raining, but I do not believe it is.”

Beliefs can be false, unwarranted by evidence or reasoned consideration, says DeNicola. Our beliefs are not always our own. Often they are acquired from one’s family or from the influence of peers or persons of authority. Thus, a person born in a family that believes that our earth is flat, cannot help acquiring it from the family, but the problem arises when he persists in holding this belief even after getting a masters in planetary science. When our beliefs are challenged, we ask, “Who are you to tell me what to believe?” Such a question shows that one’s belief is not answerable to reason. It also shows that there are people, such as, parents, elders, teachers or priests, who have the authority to tell you what to believe. Thus, today, with many people, their right to believe is a “negative right” meant only to “foreclose dialogue, to deflect all challenges; to enjoin others from interfering with one’s belief commitment.... We have seen what Al Qaeda’s and Hitler’s believers did. Therefore, the idea

that you can believe whatever you want to is irresponsible and undesirable,” says DeNicola. (*Sunday Times of India*, May 27, 2018)

“Believe nothing unless it conforms with reason and common sense,” is one of the most important teachings ever given. It throws the whole responsibility on the person who holds the belief, and the very fact that one needs to verify every belief shows that one’s beliefs could be wrong also. When a person applies the light of mind to his own beliefs he finds out which of his beliefs are false and which can be justified. Normally, we move from blind belief to reasoned knowledge till we come to enlightened or intuitive faith. Unenlightened faith is similar to blind belief. But faith itself is often defined as belief in something one does not know, so that one can come to know what one believes in. Enlightened faith arises in the mind freed from passions and prejudices, in the mind that is eager to consider true and ennobling ideas. Blind belief passing through the fire of reason emerges as enlightened faith, and in the process there is discarding of exclusiveness, fanaticism and bigotry.

It is our mental laziness which prevents us from questioning our beliefs. Mr. Crosbie says that there is very little *original* thought anywhere. Our belief system consists of ideas that are suggested as true, by those surrounding us. “Whatever system of thought is presented to us, that we adopt. We follow the suggestions given, with no attempt to reach the basis of that which is suggested.” False perception could arise due to our biases. A Hindu is biased towards Muslim and *vice versa*. A white-skinned person is biased towards a dark-skinned person and so on. But a bias is also a mental leaning. Each person sees life, man and Deity, from his own viewpoint. These biases are often rooted in the false ideas or belief system. Each one of us carries with himself the background of his culture, education, religion, and tends to look at the world and the people through bits of these coloured glasses. Our judgments, more often than not, are biased.

After the disappearance of psychedelic substances from both culture as well as science, a new group of scientists is endeavouring

to recommence the research that had come to a halt by the mid-1970s. In his new book, *How to Change Your Mind*, the best-selling author Michael Pollan explores psychedelics and the mind to understand the science of altering consciousness. He writes about the impressive research that shows the power of these substances to help sufferers of depression and addiction, or to comfort patients with terminal cancer to face death. In an interview with *Mind Matters* editor Gareth Cook, Pollan says that he was always fascinated by the human drive to change consciousness, either routinely with plant drugs such as caffeine, or more dramatically with psychoactive mushrooms. He wanted to find out: Why do we want to do this potentially risky thing? What do these experiences do for us, as individuals or as society? Moreover, having heard that the researchers had found that psilocybin, the psychoactive compound in magic mushrooms, could produce a “mystical experience,” in people, and that such experience had changed them in lasting ways, Pollan wished to explore the same and find out if he could have a spiritual experience. Was it really possible to change one’s mind as an adult?

He says that psychedelic experiences help reveal secrets of the normal ego-centred consciousness. During psychedelic experience, the “Default Mode Network,” which is the critical hub in the brain, involved in “meta-cognitive” functions such as self-reflection, mental time travel, etc., is taken offline, and as a result one experiences a loss of the sense of having a self, and as many new connections among other brain regions and networks spring up, one may experience hallucinations and synaesthesia.

In a guided experiment with the psychedelic psilocybin, Pollan says that he experienced the complete dissolution of his ego. “I could see the entity formerly understood as me ‘out there’ ...and yet there was still some recording ‘I’ taking in the scene, a sort of disembodied, dispassionate awareness. Though temporary, that perspective was transformative. It suggested to me that I was not necessarily identical to my ego, that there was potentially another ground on which to plant my feet....Sometimes when I am reacting to an event or

comment I can catch myself before the usual defences leap into action, because I can see what he is up to and why. This is the sort of perspective you can occasionally develop with years of meditation or psychoanalysis; psilocybin gave it to me in an afternoon.”

He emphasises that a long time ago these drugs were the subject of serious research and there was careful and regulated use of some of them in rituals. These drugs have the potential to relieve the pain of those suffering from depression, anxiety, obsession, addiction and the fear of death. In proper hands, they can heal and illuminate the mind. (*Scientific American*, May 2018)

Are psychedelics the key to consciousness? Some researchers believe that psychedelics can lead us to a new understanding of the human mind and the mysteries of consciousness. Theosophy teaches that by taking drugs and narcotics, it is often possible to get knowledge not known in normal state, but under their influence one’s consciousness is put into an artificial state. Alcohol and drugs hinder the development of spiritual insight. The use of wine and spirits is hindrance to the moral and spiritual growth of a person. H.P.B. writes: “Alcohol in all its forms has a direct, marked, and very deleterious influence on man’s psychic condition. Wine and spirit drinking is only less destructive to the development of inner powers, than the habitual use of hashish, opium and similar drugs.” (*The Key to Theosophy*, pp. 259-60)

Moreover, could psychoactive substances provide insight into mystical and spiritual experiences? Drug-induced states could, at best, provide information about lower, psychic states of consciousness, but tell us nothing about higher spiritual states. H.P.B. writes: “Occultism teaches that physical man is one, but the thinking man is septenary, thinking, acting, feeling, and living on seven different states of being or planes of consciousness, and that for all these states and planes the permanent Ego has a distinct set of senses.” (*Transactions*, p. 73)

All growth, for it to be permanent, must be from within, and must be the result of one’s own effort. It is argued that even if these drugs

could increase feelings, such as of kindness or altruism, they might make us only “artificially moral,” and our ability to choose might gradually atrophy. Likewise, the conquering of the personal self must happen as a result of self-discipline and self-purification. Some of these drugs spur creativity. But could we compare creativity achieved under the influence of drugs with that resulting from genuine inspiration from within? The higher impulse or inspiration which enables an artist to create a masterpiece or a scientist to make a discovery comes when our every-day mind temporarily disconnects itself from *kama*.

The ancient Japanese philosophy of wabi-sabi teaches us not to look for perfection in *anything* on a daily basis, but learn to embrace life’s imperfections and its transient nature. This concept is an exact anti-thesis of the Western notion of beauty as something perfect, enduring and monumental. It seems people today are increasingly turning to wabi-sabi way of life, because set notions of perfection have mostly led them to psychic disorders. Life coach Farzana Suri says, “No one and nothing is perfect, and the faster we leave the notion of perfection behind, the lighter our minds and hearts would be. Instead embrace your flaws—be it broken tea-cup or cracked friendship.” There are those who believe that seeking perfection in everything limits our brain’s capacity to expand its horizon because perfection simply does not exist. Your definition of perfection may be different from another person’s understanding of it. Also, the problem with chasing perfection is that it leads to a permanent feeling of inadequacy.

In today’s world everything is made to *appear* perfect through technology. For instance, a perfect dress on the computer turns out in reality to be less than ordinary. People keep saying, “we are fine,” and project themselves as being perfectly happy, when things are actually falling apart. In today’s fast-paced, mass-produced, neon-lighted world, wabi-sabi reminds us to slow down and take comfort

in the simple natural beauty around us. “Imperfect is the perfect way to be,” says Nona Walia. (*Times Life, Sunday Times of India*, May 27, 2018)

Perfection means to be “exact, without flaw, or fault.” It also comes from the Latin word, *perfectus*, which means “complete.” Since there are levels and levels of perfection, there is an ever-growing perfectibility. In that sense, then, there is nothing like perfect beauty, perfect happiness, perfect understanding or perfect friendship. Empedocles was of the view that perfection depends on incompleteness, since the latter contains the potential for development. Therefore, to strive for perfection, which we all do, in our respective fields of activity, is to change, or to be better. We soon discover that the quest for perfection is an on-going quest.

The word “wabi” connotes rustic simplicity, freshness, quietness, as applied to both natural and man-made objects, while “sabi” means beauty or serenity that comes with age. Hence, Wabi Sabi means “sad beauty.” It is the understanding that beauty is fleeting. It is the inner perception that takes us beyond the obvious and enables us to see the beauty and perfection beneath the apparent imperfection and ugliness. It is important that we pursue perfection only for our own selves, and not try to impose it on others and smother them by pointing out how imperfect they are! In fact, it should be our constant endeavour to find and highlight something praiseworthy even in the most simple, ordinary and imperfect person. Perfection arises out of imperfection when we are willing to learn from experiences which our imperfections bring.

“In fact, isn’t life itself wabi sabi in its core? There is space for mistakes. Our greatest learning arises out of experiences gone wrong, from the ‘imperfect’ moments of our life. Life too will follow its own rule of aging, will bloom and wither away with time. But there will be beauty in it too. A child can never boast of the experiences an old person can,” writes Megha Bajaj, in an article in *Life Positive* magazine.